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FBI Official Asserts RFK Approved Wiretapping of Dr. King's Telephone

A top aide to J. Edgar Hoover said yesterday the FBI's wiretap on the telephone of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. had been authorized in writing by Robert F. Kennedy when he was Attorney General.

Clyde A. Tolson, Associate FBI Director, made the assertion in disputing a charge that the wiretap violated legal and presidential restrictions which limited FBI wiretaps to persons approved by the Attorney General and involving only "national security" investigations.

Tolson said the King wiretap met both requirements.

His statement was made in a letter to newspaper columnist Carl T. Rowan, who in a column published Sunday in the

Washington Star cited the wiretapping of King's phone in contending that Hoover should be removed from office.

"For your information," Tolson wrote, "the wiretap on Martin Luther King Jr. was specifically approved in advance in writing by the late Attorney General of the United States, Mr. Robert F. Kennedy. This device was strictly in the field of internal security and, therefore, was within the provisions laid down by the then President of the United States."

The disclosure that the FBI had tapped Mr. King's phone came this month in Houston at a court hearing into the charge by former heavyweight

boxing champion Cassius Clay that his conviction for refusing to be drafted was obtained on evidence illegally gained by wiretapping.

FBI agent Robert Nichols testified that he had supervised the installation of a tap on Mr. King's home phone in Atlanta.

Kennedy served as Attorney General from 1961 to September, 1964, when Nicholas De B. Katzenbach succeeded him. Katzenbach was succeeded in 1967 by Ramsey Clark.

Katzenbach, contacted yesterday in New York, where he is general counsel and vice president of International Business Machines Corp., said about King's phone: "I had knowledge (about) whether it was or was not tapped."