

New questions in Panther raid

By Dennis D. Fisher
and Thomas J. Dolan

Federal agents were aware that Chicago Black Panthers were hiding large gun caches a year before police raided the West Side apartment of Fred Hampton, The Sun-Times learned Saturday.

FBI knowledge of the gun caches — not reported by a 1970 federal grand jury that investigated the ill-fated 1969 police raid — was uncovered in a federal court deposition taken last Jan. 12 from an FBI informant who infiltrated Panthers here in 1968.

The disclosure, by informant William M. O'Neal Jr., 24, calls into question two elements of the Panther raid case that were assumed to be settled:

(1) The FBI role in gathering the original tip that guns were being held by Panthers, which information was used by Chicago police to obtain search warrants.

(2) The timing of the raid by Chicago policemen assigned to the office of State's Atty. Edward V. Hanrahan.

Official explanations of the FBI role in the raid have indicated that on Nov. 21, 1969, an unidentified FBI agent in Chicago first received information that guns were being stockpiled in the Hampton apartment, at 2337 W. Monroe.

The grand jury report on the raid goes on to say that the tip was turned over routinely to both Chicago police and to the state's attorney's office. Subsequently, the state's attorney's police planned a raid for the last week of November, 1969, which was later scheduled for Dec. 4, 1969.

However, the 185-page court document, covering five hours of questions and answers taken Jan. 12 in the federal building in Detroit, reveals that O'Neal began giving gun information to FBI agent Roy M. Mitchell as early as late 1968, a year before the officially reported tip.

O'Neal's statement makes no explanation for the delay in official decisions by FBI or the Chicago police to conduct a raid and recover the weapons. But at one point he told attorneys:

"Well, from March, 1969, on, guns weren't too much of an issue because he (Mitchell) knew basically what their (the Panthers') position was as far as arms were concerned.

"He knew they had a lot of guns. It wasn't that important unless a trainload of guns or something came in and that never hap-

pened," O'Neal said.

Under further questioning, O'Neal described being in the Hampton apartment months before the raid and said he saw guns "standing up in the corner, laying on floors, hanging on the walls, pockets, hips, pants."

O'Neal's statement covers his role as security chief for the Chicago Black Panthers and sometimes bodyguard for both Hampton and his successor, Bobby Rush, from late 1968 until mid-1970, when he was removed in a party

purge of militants.

He was questioned by Chicago attorney/s Jeffrey Haas, Dennis Cunningham and Filbat Taylor, representing the family of Hampton and survivors of the raid. The family has sued Hanrahan and 13 others in U.S. District Court asking for \$3.75 million in damages.

Also attending the deposition was Asst. U.S. Atty. Sheldon R. Waxman, representing the government.

O'Neal, who was the key government witness in the 1973 civil rights murder trial of former Chicago Police Sgt. Stanley B. Robinson, said he infiltrated the Panthers for pay after being requested to do so by Mitchell.

Shortly, O'Neal said, he gained the confidence of Hampton and Rush, under whom he worked as chief of security for Panther headquarters at 2350 W. Madison, a block from the raided apartment.

O'Neal's job was to maintain the Panthers' arsenal and give instructions to party members who were to use weapons to defend the headquarters.

The informant said that following several police and FBI raids in the summer and fall of 1969, Rush declared Panther headquarters "indefensible" and guns were removed from the building.

O'Neal said he was told by Mitchell that it was not his information that was used on Dec. 4, 1969, by the raiding police.

Killed in the raid besides Hampton was Mark Clark, 21, a party leader from Peoria. Seven others survived the raid and have filed the U.S. suit charging police with excessive force.

2126174