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FBI man admits meeting with Panther informer

By Rob Warden

An FBI agent denied four times under oath that he had met in recent months with a man who served as an FBI informant-provocateur in the Black Panther Party here in 1968 and 1969.

But then, after consulting over lunch with an assistant U.S. attorney, Special Agent Roy Martin Mitchell abruptly changed his story.

Mitchell admitted he and Asst. U.S. Atty. Arnold Kanter had flown from Chicago to an undisclosed city exactly a month ago — Feb. 12 — to meet with the informant-provocateur, William O'Neal.

MITCHELL AND O'NEAL are among 28 defendants in a \$47.7 million damage suit brought in U.S. District Court here by survivors of a 1968 police raid in which Black Panther leaders Fred Hampton and Mark Clark were killed.

The suit charges that Mitchell and O'Neal were part of a conspiracy with police under control of then-State's Atty. Edward V. Hanrahan to violate the Panthers' civil rights in the violent raid.

Mitchell was on the stand Friday as an adverse witness when Panther lawyer James D. Montgomery asked: "When were you last in contact with him (O'Neal), personal contact with him?"

Mitchell replied: "I believe it was the last time that he gave a deposition in preparation for this litigation."

AFTER SEVERAL QUESTIONS about that meeting, this exchange occurred:

Montgomery: Have you met with him since that deposition was given at all, or seen him?

Mitchell: I don't believe so.

Montgomery: You have not met with him at all, to the best of your recollection?

Mitchell: Not to the best of my recollection.

Just before Judge Joseph Sam Perry adjourned the trial for lunch, Montgomery asked Mitchell specifically whether he had "flown to a city where O'Neal was" to meet with him recently.

Mitchell denied that he had.

It turns out, however, that Panther lawyer Herbert Reid had seen Mitchell and Kanter at O'Hare Airport Feb. 12 and surmised they might be headed for a meeting with O'Neal.

WHEN MITCHELL TOOK the stand after lunch Friday he told Judge Perry he would like to change his testimony.

He said his answers before lunch had been "technically correct but possibly misleading."

He had not flown to "a city where O'Neal was," Mitchell said, but had flown to an unidentified city and O'Neal had flown into the same unidentified city for a meeting.

When the other three denials were read back to him, O'Neal said he understood Montgomery's questions referred to "personal contact."

The meeting, Mitchell said, was for business rather than personal purposes.

O'Neal, who has been given a new identity by the government, is scheduled to be brought to Chicago to testify in the case.