

Secrecy ruled for deposition on Panther raid

By Thomas J. Dolan

U.S. District Court Judge Joseph Sam Perry Thursday clamped a total secrecy order on the upcoming deposition of an FBI informant who has been named a defendant in the 1969 Panther raid case.

The order forbids attorneys in the case to speak about the date, time, place or whether a deposition has been taken from the informant, William M. O'Neal.

Asked if he would explain the secrecy to a reporter, Perry concluded an interview in his chambers by saying, "I have to go back on the bench."

Perry had stated that he gave the order "to protect O'Neal's life." He said it did not matter that the informant, described as a key figure in the trial due to start in November, voluntarily gave up federal protection more than a year ago. "I'm going to see that he's protected," Perry said angrily.

In a sworn deposition taken more than a year ago, O'Neal described how he infiltrated the Black Panther Party in Chicago under the guise of a "bodyguard" on behalf of the FBI. O'Neal also testified that he gave detailed information to the FBI regarding weapons and the Panther Party apartment layout, which was later turned over to Chicago police.

Killed in the raid by state's

attorney's police who were seeking weapons were Panther leaders Fred Hampton and Mark Clark. The families of Clark and Hampton have filed a civil damage suit charging police, federal agents, O'Neal and state's attorneys with improper conduct in the raid.

Asst. U.S. Atty. Arnold Kanter, who is defending federal agents in the case, said he asked Perry for the secrecy order "in the best interests of all concerned."

The order also states: "That said deposition be sealed and not made part of the record in the clerk's office of the District Court for the northern district of Illinois."

Kanter commented, "We don't want to try the case in the newspapers."