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CIA Probe Was Blocked From Seeing Nixon Papers

Washington

Both the Rockefeller commission and the White House gave up without a fight after Richard M. Nixon refused investigators permission to examine the former President's tapes and other documents that could show the Central Intelligence Agency's role in the Watergate coverup.

Even though Rockefeller commission officials argued they were legally entitled to examine the Nixon papers, it was learned, President Ford's lawyers refused to support the commission's claims to look at the documents now in government custody.

Mr. Nixon's role in blocking the commission investigation was revealed in a footnote in the Rockefeller commission's 299-page report on "CIA Activities Within the United States" made public Tuesday.

A Rockefeller spokesman said lack of time and manpower prohibited a court challenge of Mr. Nixon's refusal. The spokesman denied that the Nixon papers were necessary to the com-

mission investigation but conceded under questioning there could be "some evidence" about the CIA in the files now being held by the General Services Administration.

The denial of access to the Nixon documents raises questions about the Rockefeller commission's conclusions that "it has found no evidence that the CIA participated in the Watergate break-in or in the post-Watergate coverup by the White House."

Besides revealing that Mr. Nixon had refused to open his files, the commission disclosed details of Richard Helms' destruction of tape recordings from the time of the 1972 Watergate break-in and the subsequent White House coverup.

Without access to either Mr. Nixon's or Helms' documents, the commission did little to resolve questions about how far the CIA went in complying with efforts by Nixon aides to use the spy agency in limiting the FBI investigation of the burglary of the Democratic national headquarters.

The commission accused Helms of "poor judgment" in destroying material that he was requested to preserve only a week earlier as part of a formal congressional investigation in early 1973.

"No comfort can be destroyed, since what was derived from Helms' assurances that no Watergate-related material was destroyed had not been reviewed for relevance in light of later disclosures," the commission report said.

Helms destroyed the recording from his "bugged" office in January, 1973, seven months after the Watergate break-in. Destroyed were a decade of telephone and office conversations recorded by a voice-actuated system similar to the one in Mr. Nixon's oval office.

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