

Bugging Susp

FBI Hindered at First

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FBI officials say they encountered substantial resistance from middle- and lower-level White House officials in the early days of investigating the Watergate bugging affair.

"Trying to interview these people was like trying to interview members of the Black Panther Party," FBI sources close to the inquiry have told The Washington Post.

So exasperated were the investigators at one point that they suggested to Acting FBI Director L. Patrick Gray III that he ask President Nixon to issue a directive requiring all employees in the White House to cooperate.

But Gray, anxious to keep the President out of the matter unless absolutely necessary, vetoed that idea and urged his investigators to persevere through normal channels instead.

Eventually, the FBI agents working on the case managed to interview all of the White House personnel and to obtain most of the documents they sought, the Post's sources said. But in some instances, the information initially provided was incomplete and repeat interviews were necessary.

Another problem that bedeviled the FBI during the Watergate investigation was that several persons outside government initially gave agents incomplete or incorrect version of events — which

See FBI, A13, Col. 1

FBI, From A1

they later corrected during appearances before a federal grand jury, the sources added.

They cited Kenneth H. Dahlberg, chief Midwestern fundraiser for President Nixon's re-election effort, as one example.

Dahlberg initially told the FBI and a Washington Post staff reporter that a \$25,000 cashier's check deposited in the Miami bank account of one of the five men arrested in the Watergate break-in represented Nixon campaign contributions from "two or more" persons.

Later, however, he testified under oath that the full amount came from Minneapolis millionaire Dwayne Andreas, a long-time supporter of Sen. Hubert H. Humphrey (D-Minn.). That version has since been corroborated by investigators.

Both the White House and the FBI, citing Chief U.S. District Court Judge John J. Sirica's order restricting out-of-court comment on the Watergate case, have recently refused to discuss the investigation.

Gray, in Dallas on a tour of FBI field offices, told reporters there yesterday that he felt he was covered by Sirica's order.

But the acting FBI director did say that "there is no arm of government we would fail

to investigate — including the presidency" if necessary.

President Nixon, for his own part, said during a press conference at the Western White House on Aug. 29 that the Administration would be sure that no details of the Watergate affair would be covered up.

Although the FBI sources said they were confident there was no overt or concerted coverup, they said they repeatedly had problems setting up appointments and obtaining information from White House employees.

One item on which there was considerable resistance, they said, was the employment record of E. Howard Hunt, a former White House consultant who is one of seven men now under indictment in connection with the bugging of Democratic national headquarters in the Watergate.

Officials in a position to answer the FBI's questions about Hunt would repeatedly say "I think . . ." or "I'll have to check. . .", the sources recalled.

Rather than permitting the FBI to come in and collect the materials Hunt had left in his White House office—the usual procedure—White House aides packed them up in boxes themselves, the FBI sources said.

According to one FBI official, "If this had been any other government agency or a private organization," rather than the White House, "someone would have called up the director or the president and said, 'look, we need this information. Tell your people to cooperate.'"

"But we didn't exactly have the same access to the boss in this instance," he added with a laugh.

Instead, whenever an FBI agent had trouble setting up an appointment with someone in the White House, the bureau would call and complain to John W. Dean III, counsel to the President. "Before long, he would call back and say that it was all lined up," the sources said.

On some occasions, the FBI also had trouble obtaining appointments with officials at the Democratic National Committee, they added. Like the White House aides, the Democrats would generally cite travel plans and busy schedules. But, the sources said, the Democrats backed down more readily.

Dahlberg, reached by telephone in Minneapolis yesterday, declined to explain the conflict between what he told the FBI and the grand jury. Pressed, however, he said,

"Well, there is Mrs. Andreas. That makes it two people."

"What I have done is perfectly legal," Dahlberg said, adding that "if we lose freedom of the press in this country, history might say that The Washington Post had something to do with it."

Another person cited by the FBI sources as having given an incomplete version of his activities to investigators was Donald H. Segretti, who reportedly sought to recruit former Army colleagues to help sabotage the campaigns of Democratic presidential hopefuls.

Segretti later gave more complete information to the grand jury, the sources said. But because the FBI does not have access to confidential grand jury minutes, the bureau is still in the dark on some of his actions and those of others who would not cooperate with investigators.