

Levi Asked to Probe FBI Act

By Laurence Stern

Washington Post Staff Writer

The House intelligence committee has asked Attorney General Edward H. Levi to investigate charges that the FBI sought to "squench" a central witness in its investigation of possible improprieties in the bureau's purchase of wiretap equipment.

The witness, manufacturer Martin L. Kaiser of Timonium, Md., gave a sworn deposition Tuesday to the committee staff that he was visited by FBI agents on two occasions in December and was pressured into signing a statement recanting portions of his public testimony on the wiretap equipment purchases.

In that testimony, given at a hearing Oct. 9, Kaiser said he was required by the FBI to sell equipment to it through an intermediary, U.S. Recording Co. of Washington, D.C., which marked up his prices by an average of 30 per cent in reselling the products to the bureau. Committee auditors found that the markups on Kaiser's equipment ranged from 12 to 80 per cent.

Bureau spokesmen have explained that the purpose of the middleman arrangement with U.S. Recording was to protect the confidentiality of equipment bought from Kaiser and other manufac-

turers so that foreign governments would not be able to take electronic countermeasures. In most of these transactions, Kaiser delivered his wares directly to the bureau, although invoices were routed through U.S. Recording.

Yesterday's letter to Levi was prompted by a Dec. 23 visit to Kaiser by FBI agents Robert P. Keehan and Dewey L. Rinaca during which they obtained from Kaiser a four-page, handwritten statement on his testimony to the House committee, headed by Rep. Otis G. Pike (D-N.Y.). The statement to the agents did not substantially modify Kaiser's Oct. 9 testimony.

In his deposition to committee investigators and in a telephone interview with The Washington Post, Kaiser insisted that he was standing by his Oct. 9 testimony, which was critical of U.S. Recording's role in wiretap equipment purchases, and asserted that the handwritten statement was obtained by the agents under "very intensive pressure."

He told three committee staff investigators of the visit by the agents in the following words:

"We had spent six hours going over petty issues . . . sentence by sentence, and I was anxious to get them (the agents) out of there."

During the last hour of the six-hour session, Kaiser said, one of the agents "was standing over my left shoulder and one over the right and both had arms pointing" at the statement.

"It was obvious to me," Kaiser said in the telephone interview, "that they were under heavy pressure to get a statement from me."

When asked about the committee's letter, addressed to Levi by staff director A. Searle Field, an FBI spokesman said last night that "we have looked into this matter thoroughly and we categorically deny in every respect trying to influence or coerce anyone."

In the letter to Levi, Field said that as a result of Kaiser's testimony and the committee's investigation,

"We . . . determined that U.S. Recording added a substantial markup to the price of this equipment, often without providing any service aside from the paperwork. We have also established a close relationship between the president of U.S. Recording and the FBI official in charge of purchasing until 1972."

The president of U.S. Recording is Joseph Tait, who conducts his distributing business from 1347 S. Capitol St. The FBI official in charge of purchasing and other administrative matters when Kaiser began selling to the FBI was John P. Mohr.

Tait and Mohr have been close, poker-playing friends for years and frequent visitors, along with other FBI personnel, at a Shenandoah Valley private lodge, the Blue Ridge Club, in which Tait held membership.

The retreat was gutted by fire in early December, one day before House intelligence committee staff investigators planned to conduct a surprise visit to review its logs and records.

30 DEC
75