

Army Reveals Secret Plans to Keep Order

By Ronald J. Ostrow
Los Angeles Times

Washington

The Army, under pressure from news media and several private groups, is quietly releasing evidence of contingency planning for federal intervention in civil disturbances during the late 1960s.

After the riots in Watts, Newark and Detroit and after the anti-war movement gathered strength, the Johnson administration ordered a contingency plan to handle civil disorders under the Defense Department code name of Garden Plot.

The Los Angeles Times began an investigation of Garden Plot after hearing persistent rumors from left-wing sources that the Department of the Army had contingency plans for imposing martial law in the United States.

The implication by those passing along these rumors implied that another scandal of Watergate magnitude awaited exposure, this time with the military as the heavies.

However, no evidence of a scandal or of plans for martial law appears in the hundreds of pages of Garden Plot documents declassified by the Army, with full backing of the Defense Department, after the Times and others filed requests for them under the Freedom of Information Act.

The documents detail extensive planning, including the holding of command post exercises, to improve coordination between local, state and federal authorities in dealing with civil disorder.

But some of the declassified documents have been censored and the Army has not made public all of the pertinent material. For example, a 1967 study, known as the Hennessey Report, that helped nurture Garden Plot, has not been fully declassified. And the Army declines to state how many men are on 12-hour standby alert, ready for transport to a riot scene, though it is known that until 1971 there were two brigades up 4800 troops, on such status.

While Pentagon officials deny

that Garden Plot contains any provision for martial law or for rounding up dissident civilians, one officer said that it would be unlikely such plans would have been committed to writing. Aside from this difficulty in assessing Garden Plot, it is not known what

other documents remain to be declassified.

Some of the documents which have been declassified show that in California Garden Plot exercises went under the code name Cable Splicer with the knowledge and participation of then Governor Ronald Reagan, the California National Guard, the California Highway Patrol, Sixth Army headquarters in San Francisco and high ranking utility executives.

Reagan, in addressing 500 military men, police officials and corporate executives at a Feb. 10, 1969, Cable Splicer planning meeting, jocularly said that if his political enemies saw him there they would see it as proof he "was planning a military takeover."

On another occasion Reagan made a joke of being involved in a "criminal conspiracy."

The secrecy in which the contingency planning was done, with secondary code names like Quiet Town II and Gram Metric, also heightened the suspicion of those looking for a sinister conspiracy.

Sample detail from Garden Plot on using fire hoses to move small groups or to defend a barricade: "Water may be employed as a flat trajectory weapon utilizing pressure or as a high trajectory weapon employing water as rainfall. The latter is highly effective during cold weather."

There were six Cable Splicer operations in California, designated by Roman numerals as illustrated on Sixth Army documents with a drawing of a hand splicer closing on a length of wire.