

Who Aimed the Blunderbuss?

By TOM WICKER

WASHINGTON, March 1—The Army is going before Senator Ervin to try to explain its outrageous domestic surveillance operations, which are supposed to be a thing of the past. The Army has a lot to explain, all right, but its officials are not the only ones.

Now available are some almost unbelievable documents couched in Pentagon jargon, which show the kind of thinking that went into the surveillance program—if thinking is the word. The documents are replete with expressions of fear of “external subversive forces” and of “foreign elements which are detrimental to the USA” and of the development of “a supra-control agency” to direct civil disturbances.

Yet, in 1968, when these turgid pages were creaking out of Pentagon copying machines, there seems to have been a dim awareness by their authors that all was not well in paradise, that the big-city riots of 1966 and 1967 were not entirely the work of “outside militant agitators.” For instance, Department of the Army Civil Disturbance Information Collection Plan (ACDP) (U), Appendix C, Table of Collection Priorities, 1(c), gathers, under the heading “Indicators of Potential Violence,” a comprehensive list of reasons for center-city unrest, including:

High unemployment and crime rates for “discontented minority groups,” income gaps between black and white, poor relations between the law and minorities, migrations of minorities into a city, “lack of means to redress grievances,” minority protests about community conditions, inequitable law

IN THE NATION

enforcement, public apathy to civil rights issues, and minority efforts “to upset balance of power and political system.”

But when all these “indicators” are checked against the ACDP Priority Assignment Base (PAB), it turns out that they are rated only 2b or 2c, which means that they warrant “moderate increased effort” in information-collecting; while getting the goods on “friends and sympathizers of participants, including newspapers, radio, television stations, and prominent leaders” rates a priority of 1c, which demands “maximum increased effort.”

The Army, of course, is not a social agency and shouldn’t be expected to be; but its excellent list of center-city problems might have raised the question in someone’s military mind whether there were not deeper causes at work than “foreign elements” and “prominent leaders” who sympathized with minorities.

But when such an idea did rear its unwelcome head, it was quickly beaten back, as in this instance: “While most civil rights leaders and moderates and the majority of the Negro population abhors violence, a sufficient number of individuals seem susceptible to the violent rallying cries of the militants to make these individuals dangerous to society.”

Or, again: “Although it cannot be substantiated that the anti-war and the anti-draft movements are acting in response to foreign direction, it must be pointed out that by their

activities they are supporting the stated objectives of foreign elements which are detrimental to the USA.” And there is an emphasis on “potential and probable trouble areas and trouble makers” that adds to the air of paranoia that suffuses this panicky enterprise.

But these documents also make it reasonably clear that the Army was only doing what it was told to do, and in precisely the elephantine way anyone who ever served in uniform might have expected. For after one and a half mind-boggling pages of the distribution list to Army units (USAINTC, USARADCOM, USAJFKCENSPWAR, and the like), it also appears that the Chief of Chaplains, and the like), it also appears that these detailed documents were distributed to (among others):

The President’s Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, the National Security Council, the C.I.A., the Treasury (five copies), the Justice Department (ten copies), and even the General Services Administration (one copy).

The documents that went to this distribution list were drawn up by the Army to detail its plans for carrying out an over-all information-collecting program. It has been previously disclosed that this program was sought by the White House and devised in 1968 by a group that included an Army Under Secretary and a Deputy Attorney General.

Thus it is clear that Senator Ervin ought really to be looking into the highest levels of the Johnson Administration; for it was there that the Army got what authority it had, and there that the Army’s blundering, blunderbuss plans got their approval.