

FBI's Troubles in Watergate Probe

Washington

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, eager to keep the President out of the matter unless absolutely necessary, vetoed that idea and urged his investigators to preserve 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.

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

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

Medal for Bob Hope

Washington

Entertainer Bob Hope received the Association of U.S. Army's highest award last night.

Hope was awarded the George C. Marshall Medal for his "selfless and outstanding service to the United States."

Associated Press

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 August 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.

RESISTANCE

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 Hotel here.

Officials in a position to answer the FBI's question 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.

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