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D.C. Cops' Illegal Actions

Washington

Police here illegally used truncheons, tear gas, stampede tactics and violated the civil rights of participants in every major demonstration since 1969, a federal judge ruled Tuesday.

The judge concluded that police routinely and repeatedly violated their own rules of conduct, resorted to violence without need and then failed to discipline officers known to have broken regulations.

U.S. District Judge Joseph C. Waddy's civil ruling amounts to a scathing indictment of the city's highly regarded civil disturbance units. Waddy said many of his conclusions were drawn from the police department's own films of various protests since 1969.

The judge found that the police "consistently overreacted and overstepped the bounds of their constitutional powers." He said that the police denied the demonstrators their rights under the Constitution's First Amendment to lawfully assemble and speak their views.

Demonstrations ranged from such divisive national issues as the Vietnam war to the local question of whether the three Sisters Bridge should be built across the Potomac river.

The judge's indictment of the police handling of these protests included virtually every facet of the police role in the law enforcement process. He found illegality everywhere — from the initial arrests, to unlawfully long jailings, and illegal denial of medical attention to demonstrators the police had illegally beaten up.

Waddy said the violations were so pervasive and the evidence so conclusive that the arrest records of any person apprehended by the police during most of the demonstrations here in the past six years must be expunged if the individual requests it.

Waddy gave the police department 90 days to prepare a comprehensive written plan concerning the handling of future protests or disorder by the civil disturbance unit.

The ruling, unparalleled in its review of police policies in handling protests, came in an American Civil Liberties Union suit filed on behalf of the Washington Mobilization Committee. The organization brought hundreds of thousands of persons to Washington in the late 1960s and early 1970s to

register their protest against the war in Southeast Asia and in connection with other causes.

Then-D.C. Police Chief Jerry V. Wilson took pride in directing police operations during large protests, and has defended the force's handling of those demon-

strations as restrained and proper.

Wilson could not be reached for comment Tuesday. Police department lawyers said they would have no comment until they had an opportunity to read the opinion.

Associated Press