

Criticism by Watergate Probers

Washington

For many months, two high Justice Department officials withheld information from FBI agents that would have led the agents much earlier to the White House group set up to scrutinize government leaks to newsmen, according to sources close to the FBI Watergate investigation.

In early July of last year, less than a month after the Watergate break-in at the Democratic National Headquarters on June 17, the Central Intelligence Agency furnished the former acting director of the FBI, L. Patrick Gray III, with documentation of the aid provided by the CIA to the cadre of White House operatives known as the "plumbers," the sources said.

The three federal prosecutors and FBI field agents assigned to the Watergate case and related matters did not know that Gray had this material until it was discovered in his office safe after he resigned as head of the bureau on April 27, 1973.

MONTHS

Last October Henry E. Petersen, an assistant attorney general obtained this information from the CIA and, at the same time, learned that Gray had been in possession of the material for more than three months, according to the sources.

Petersen, then in charge of the Watergate investigation, did not pass on the material to the FBI agents working on the case, nor did he make it known that Gray had concealed the material, even when President Nixon nominated Gray in February, 1973, to be permanent director of the bureau.

The full scope of CIA support of the "plumbers" was not known to the FBI agents in the case until early May, when it came to light, independently of them, during

the late stages of the trial of Daniel Ellsberg on charges growing out of his role in publicizing the Pentagon paper.

The agents are known to be angry that Gray and Petersen did not share the CIA material with them, and contend that if they had had the information much of what is now known about the "plumbers," including the plumbers' burglary of Ellsberg's former psychiatrist's office, would possibly have emerged sooner.

ELEMENT

A key element in the rancor of the agents is that part of the material that Petersen and Gray had, they believe, might have led them to knowledge of the burglary months before it was learned by Federal prosecutors in interviewing John W. Dean III, former counsel to the President, in April.

Included in the material turned over to Petersen by the CIA on October 24 was a photograph of G. Gordon Liddy, convicted Watergate conspirator, standing in front of the building in Beverly Hills, that houses the office of the psychiatrist, Dr. Lewis J. Fielding.

Both Petersen and Gray had information that E. Howard Hunt Jr., one of the Watergate conspirators who pleaded guilty, had requested that the CIA have someone meet him upon his return to from California on the morning of Aug. 27, 1971, to receive some film from him that he wanted processed and returned.

Gray was not available for comment. When Petersen was contacted through a public information officer at the Justice Department, he said he had "no comment."

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