

SEChronicle
CIA Admits Its
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Watergate Delay

Williamsburg, Va.

CIA Director William E. Colby says agency officials could have given Watergate information to the prosecutors earlier than they did, but they delayed out of fear that the CIA role in the scandal would be sensationalized.

Colby said the concern among CIA officials after the Watergate break-in June, 17, 1972, was that the agency's tangential involvement in the affair might be blown out of proportion.

His statements were made in reply to an allegation by Seymour M. Hersh, the New York Times reporter who wrote about the CIA's illegal domestic spy operations.

Hersh, taking ¹⁵⁻⁰²⁷ part with Colby in a panel discussion Wednesday at the Associated Press Managing Editors Association's 42nd annual meeting, said the CIA "could have blown the whistle at any time" on Watergate.

"I think Sy is right," Colby said. "In fact, we didn't fall all over ourselves rushing to the policemen."

Hersh noted that two days after the break-in at the Democratic National Committee's headquarters, top CIA officials discussed the fact that former White House aide John D. Ehrlichman had asked the agency to give covert aid to E. Howard Hunt Jr.

The assistance, in the form of a wig and other material, was used by Hunt in connection with the break-in at the office of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist. Hersh said CIA officials were aware on June 19 that Hunt also was linked to the Watergate burglary. Hunt was indicted September 15, 1972, in connection with the break-in.

Hersh noted that CIA officials were ordered at a White House meeting June 23, 1972, to tell the FBI to limit its Watergate investigation, but it wasn't until late October or November that Colby finally told what he knew to the prosecutors.

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