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Operation CHAOS

CIA's illegal spying bared

Rocky report urges curbs

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WASHINGTON — The CIA created a secret operation called CHAOS to collect a mass of information on United States dissidents, put newsmen under surveillance, conducted legal wiretaps and break-ins, and carried on a drug testing program that led to an Army official's LSD suicide, a special Presidential commission reported Tuesday.

These and other domestic activities—including the opening of thousands of letters and reaching local policemen how to pick locks and to take secret photographs—were branded as illegal or improper by the Rockefeller Commission. It recommended more than 30 steps to curb abuses.

The eight-member commission said it found "no credible evidence" that the CIA was involved in the assassination of President Kennedy.

THE COMMISSION found that many of the CIA's domestic "special coverage" investigations—meaning wiretapping, surveillance, and break-ins—

involved present or former employes that defectors had fingered as double agents.

In summary, the commission said it found most of the CIA's domestic operations were lawful and reported no evidence to the charge of "massive" domestic spying. It also concluded, "There is no evidence indicating the CIA either had advance knowledge or participated in the break-ins at Dr. Lewis Fielding's [Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist] office or the Democratic National Committee at the Watergate."

BUT THE commission, in its fascinating account of the CIA's domestic cloak and computer activities, noted with gentlemanly tartness that despite its generally clean record the agency had in its 23 years "engaged in some activities that should be criticized and not permitted to happen again." Among them:

Operation Chaos—Responding to President Johnson's demands for better intelligence in the face of domestic violence and demonstrations, the CIA established a special operations group—later to bear the

cryptonym CHAOS—"to collect, coordinate, evaluate, and report on the extent of foreign influence on domestic dissidence." Most of the information was collected from the FBI and CIA field stations. The report noted:

"During six years, the operation compiled some 13,000 different files, including files on 7,200 American citizens. The documents in these files and related materials included the names of more than 300,000 persons and organizations which were entered into a computerized index."

IN RESPONSE to repeated Presidential requests for intelligence the CHAOS staff was steadily enlarged until it reached a maximum of 52 in 1972. Some of the agents used to collect information abroad were recruited from dissident groups and others were ordered to infiltrate such groups.

The commission found evidence that the CIA's CHAOS agents made use of mail covers and checked records of overseas phone calls, and sought the help of foreign intelligence and police agencies in investigating American dissidents' foreign connections.

An intelligence source explained that these foreign police agencies may have used break-ins and wiretaps, as well as surveillance in aiding the CIA.

Altho during the first two

years CHAOS gathered most of its information from its own field offices' or other agencies' reports, it had begun under pressure from the Nixon White House to recruit and run its own agents.

The commission noted, however, that "No evidence was found that any Operation CHAOS agent was used or was directed by the agency to use electronic surveillance, wiretaps, or break-ins in the United States against any dissident individual or group."

DRUG TESTING—Interested in reports that the Soviet Union was experimenting with behavior-influencing drugs [such as LSD], the CIA began its own experiments beginning in the late 1940s and continuing them into the 1960s.

Altho records concerning the program were ordered destroyed in 1973, including a total of 152 separate files, the commission found part of the testing program was conducted on "unsuspecting subjects" in normal social situations.

Because of the destruction of the records, the commission noted the difficulties of investigating the drug program but it did learn of this case in 1953, early in the program:

"... LSD was administered to an employe of the department of the army without his knowledge while he was attending a meeting with CIA personnel working on the drug project.