

MEMORANDUM

October 5, 1995

To: The File
cc: T. Jeremy Gunn Phil Golrick

From: Tammi Long

Subject: Postal Inspection Service--Mail Opening Programs

I have read the Final Report of the Senate Select Committee To Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities as well as the Hearings before the House Subcommittee on Postal Facilities, Mail and Labor Management of the Committee on Post Office and Civil Service. As improbable as it may sound, both documents suggest that the FBI and CIA were able to carry on mail opening operations without the knowledge of ranking Postal Service officials.

The FBI and CIA conducted mail cover programs with the knowledge and permission of the Postal Service. The mail cover operations allowed the agencies to copy the information on the outside of envelopes. However, during the more than twenty years that these programs were conducted, the agencies' actual activities, opening letters and testing them for chemicals or reproducing their contents, were carried on without the knowledge of the Postal Inspector's office or the Office of the Postmaster General.

Several programs were initiated and completed from 1953 until 1973. The only Postal Service official who admitted having knowledge of the mail opening was William Cotter who served as Chief Postal Inspector from 1969 until 1975. Mr. Cotter was aware of the mail opening operations because he had formerly been employed in the CIA and the FBI. Since the CIA and FBI purposefully obscured the true nature of their activities, it is unlikely that information garnered from mail opening operations has been retained by the Postal Service. Any substantive information may be found in the FBI and CIA's records.