

CIA Saving Face In Files Probe?

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — CIA officials who investigated why an officer rifled House Assassinations Committee files last summer were interested primarily in getting their agency off the hook, informed sources say.

"They investigated it to get out of it themselves, not to find out whether somebody else was involved," one source said.

The Washington Post reported Monday that Regis Blahut, a CIA liaison officer assigned to help the committee, rummaged through a safe containing photos of President John Kennedy's autopsy.

CIA spokesman Herbert Hetu responded by saying Blahut had been dismissed for an error in judgment. Hetu said the agency was satisfied Blahut had gone through the files simply to satisfy his own curiosity.

Sources close to the committee disputed Hetu's assertions, saying someone outside the agency may have asked Blahut to look at the files.

One said there was overwhelming circumstantial evidence that more than curiosity was involved.

This source said Blahut wasn't authorized to be in the room containing the safe unless he was accompanied by a committee staffer.

The source said Blahut opened the safe, took a loose-leaf notebook out of a drawer, ripped a plastic case out of the notebook and took a picture out of the plastic case.

"He fled when he heard a noise, and then he lied about it," the source said.

"If it were just curiosity, why should you have to take photos out of an unused book in order to see them? Why not just look at them?"

The source said chief committee counsel Robert Blakey bluntly told CIA Director Stansfield Turner and Deputy Director Frank Carlucci the agency's investigation of the incident didn't go far enough.

Hetu denied this. He also denied the CIA had conducted an investigation aimed only at protecting itself.

One source, discussing the CIA investigation, said, "all they investigated was whether he had any connection with the agency" in rifling the files.

"They asked him on a polygraph (lie-detector test) whether he had any connection with the agency in doing what he did," the source said. "And he passed when he said he didn't have any connection."

"But they didn't ask whether someone else had authorized him to do it."

House

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The House Intelligence Committee started an investigation of a CIA officer's snooping last year in the offices of another congressional committee.

Members of the Intelligence Committee, which has oversight authority over the CIA, were informed of the inquiry last week by Chairman Edward Boland (D-Mass.). Committee staffers had already interviewed the CIA's director of security, Robert Ambino, about the incident following a report in The Washington Post. The Post, quoting informed sources,

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reported that the most sensitive files of the House Assassinations Committee had been rifled last summer and fingerprints on them traced to a CIA liaison officer assigned to the committee.

The assignment, it has since been learned, was made under a CIA program code-named "MH/Child," which sources described as encompassing a variety of so-called "babysitting" chores.

The agency dismissed the liaison officer in question, Regis T. Blahut, last August and then dropped the matter. In a memo to all CIA employees last week, CIA Director Stansfield Turner