

Pentagon Pursues Wrong Informant

By Jack Anderson

Government gumshoes have hounded Gene Smith, a mild, bespectacled, \$13,500-a-year Pentagon employee, until his health has broken.

His alleged crime: taping a Pentagon meeting and delivering the tapes to us.

Military investigators badgered Smith, cursing in language laced with obscenities, and threatened to have him fired.

"Do you know Jack Anderson?" they demanded. There are few worse crimes, apparently, in the Pentagon.

"Anderson must be stopped!" was their constant theme.

To help stop us, they called in the FBI. J. Edgar Hoover, who is annoyed at us for starting the clamor for his retirement, happily rushed in a couple of G-men for the Pentagon.

The federal gumshoes visited Smith's neighborhood where they upset his wife and frightened his children. They asked his neighbors and co-workers nasty questions about his drinking habits, his loyalty, his relatives and associates.

Next, the Justice Department invoked a law which prohibits the "aural acquisition" of conversations. This would seem to

ban all eavesdropping, at least without a court order.

To accuse an employee of eavesdropping on the Pentagon must have been intended originally as a joke. For the Pentagon has indulged in "aural acquisition" on a grand scale.

Wrong Man

But for Gene Smith, it was no joke. He was subpoenaed to appear before a federal grand jury in Norfolk, Va. U.S. Attorney Brian Gettings lit into him with a vengeance, warning he would get Smith either for the tapes or for perjury.

Finally it began to dawn on Gettings that he had the wrong man. Smith denied under oath that he knew the terrible Jack Anderson or had anything to do with the controversial taping. The Pentagon, the Justice Department and vaunted FBI had fingered the wrong man.

The chastened prosecutor admitted to us that a "federal agency" had suggested he go after Smith. "We probably do have the wrong man," Gettings said ruefully.

But the admission comes too late to help Smith. The government harassment has already driven him to a doctor who has treated him for inflamed ulcers and high blood pressure. Smith has also been

fired from his job in a phony reduction of force.

What was this horrible crime that Smith was wrongfully accused of committing?

Last December, we reported that Pentagon aides had laughed, sang and told smutty stories while they decided who should be fired at Christmas time. The Defense Department, characteristically, denied the whole thing.

To prove our story, we offered to play tapes that had been furnished to us of the close-door meeting. The Defense Department, having been caught in another lie, then began an investigation to find out who had taped the jubilant firing session.

They pounced on poor Gene Smith, who was unknown to us.

Suggested Action

Now that the prosecutor has discovered his mistake, it would be a shame to waste a grand jury that has been impaneled to indict someone for "aural acquisition."

We will be happy to submit evidence to the grand jury against a host of government officials who have engaged in "aural acquisition."

For instance, Smith's own boss, Col. Frank Huray, has admitted to us that he listened in on a Pentagon extension while Smith called an acquaintance. The colonel says he

picked up the telephone extension accidentally, but this seems to us to be "aural acquisition."

Huray's superior, Col. Earl Browning, is responsible for recording the remarks of his employees at a 1969 "loyalty meeting." He claims he gave them advance warning, but employees dispute this. They say the tapes, if they haven't been altered, will prove no advance warning was given.

Of course, Pentagon sleuths have used eavesdropping equipment indiscriminately in their snooping activities. These law violations by the people who are supposed to uphold the law would make a worthwhile investigation for the Norfolk grand jury.

Footnote: Some Pentagon sources suggest that Assistant Defense Secretary Roger Kelley, who ordered the investigation into the secret taping, is trying to use this as a means of breaking up the union. Gene Smith, who was singled out, happened to be a union shop steward. Another strong unionist, Bob Cody, has also been purged, and other union men have been demoted, fired and harassed. Kelley denies he is a union buster, but his anti-unionism is documented in the records of the Federal Labor Relations Council.

© 1971, Bell-McClure Syndicate, Inc.