

Sex-Bugging Scandal Involves CIA

By Jack Anderson

The Central Intelligence Agency apparently has violated the law in an attempt to cover up an explosive sex-bugging scandal involving two CIA officials.

Now, under the prodding of the National Wiretap Commission, the Justice Department is finally digging into the case.

It was a bizarre affair from the beginning. A suspicious wife feared her CIA husband might be having a homosexual affair with a CIA superior. She hired private detective Donald Uffinger, an ex-police detective, to investigate.

Tape recordings contain dramatic evidence that the detective and his chief assistant, Robert Peters, provided a tiny microtransmitter for the wife to conceal in her home. Thereafter the two private eyes, with the wife listening in, monitored the bug from a neighbor's house and from a parked car, the tapes disclose.

One night, as Uffinger, Peters and the wife were huddled around the radio-monitor in the car, they heard the two CIA officials engaging what sounded like a compromising act. The eavesdroppers, according to the taped evidence, immediately barged into the house with a camera.

There was a scramble as one of the CIA men lunged at Peters' camera. Uffinger floored the fellow with a punch to the face, and the wife and two private eyes departed triumphantly

with the film.

The episode got back to the CIA whose security chief at the time, Howard Osborn, began a secret investigation. The two accused CIA officials, whose names we have agreed to withhold for professional and medical reasons, told us they informed the CIA about the bug.

Under federal law, bugging is a crime, and failure to report the crime is a prison offense. Yet the CIA made no such report, according to the FBI, the Justice Department and the U.S. attorney, David Hopkins, who has jurisdiction over the case.

The wife, meanwhile, sued for divorce, and the two CIA officials were eased out of their jobs, one through retirement, the other through forced resignation.

For a time it appeared that the CIA cover-up had been successful. Even court records of the divorce were mysteriously suppressed, not necessarily by the CIA.

But then detective Uffinger fired his assistant, Peters, and the veil of secrecy began to slip. The disgruntled Peters talked about the case to businessman Richard Bast, formerly Washington's most celebrated private detective, who beat Peters at his own game by bugging the conversation. Because Bast was present at the bugging, it should be pointed out, this was not a violation of the law.

Peters told all about the sex-bugging episode. The CIA official's "wife put (the bug) in for us . . ." said Peters. "It was my

suggestion. He (Uffinger) said okay . . . I told her how to set it up and where to place the equipment."

Bast reported the incident at once to U.S. Attorney Hopkins. This normally would have triggered an in-depth FBI investigation, with massive interviews and affidavits. But FBI agent Charles Anderson satisfied himself with little more than a statement from Peters who, despite the evidence on the tapes, denied he knew anything about the bugging offense. Hopkins and the FBI then dropped the case for lack of evidence.

It may be merely a coincidence, but a key figure in the bugging incident was an FBI informant. We have learned that Uffinger, the private eye, not only had been slipping information to the FBI but had called his FBI contact man, Washington FBI agent Charles Harvey, for advice on the situation.

The case would have been killed if Bast, troubled over the cover-up, hadn't taken it to the new federal wiretap commission. This is presided over by former Army Adjutant General Ken Hodson, a man of ramrod integrity, who forwarded the case to the Justice Department.

Assistant Attorney General Henry Petersen, who wanted no more cover-up criticism after the Watergate investigation, has reopened the case. He has ordered Hopkins to conduct a "four-square" investigation into every aspect of the bugging and the CIA cover-up.

Footnote: Uffinger, one of the East Coast's best-known private detectives, told us emphatically there was "no truth" in what Peters told Bast on the tape recordings. Peters was "trying to sell himself, blowing smoke," he said.

He insisted that he and Peters had engaged in no illegal activity. The detectives hadn't used a bug but had peeked in the windows to determine the best time to catch the two CIA officials in a compromising situation, said Uffinger. The wife agreed this was how it had happened. Peters didn't return our calls.

An FBI spokesman conceded that the FBI had taken a look at the case earlier and had dropped it. At the time, he said, the FBI had no knowledge of the CIA involvement. Now the FBI is digging in, he said.

FBI agent Anderson didn't return our calls. Agent Harvey conceded only that he knew Uffinger. The CIA declined to make any comment whatsoever.

Die-Hard Nixonists: Richard Nixon has at least one die-hard supporter who remains unimpressed by the evidence that forced the former President to resign to avoid impeachment and conviction.

The loyalist is Rep. Otto Passman (D-La.), who wrote to Leon Fassler of Scarsdale, N.Y., "How justified you would be if you got on your knees and thanked Him that is on high for giving us that great man, Richard Nixon."

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