

First It Was 'The FBI' on TV, And Next It May Be the CIA

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The Central Intelligence Agency, whose long-held passion for anonymity already has been steadily eroding of late, may now be poised for a full break into the media spotlight with a weekly television series on its undercover exploits backed by a wealthy Texas conservative.

A spokesman for the agency acknowledged yesterday that CIA Director Stansfield Turner was approached with the idea earlier this month by Dallas millionaire Gordon McLendon and David Phillips, head of the 2,200-member Association of Former Intelligence Officers.

"Our response has been totally non-committal but we haven't discouraged them," said the spokesman. "With our new policy of openness we wouldn't foreclose working with them or suggesting story lines."

McLendon, whose Texas corporate empire once included a chain of a dozen radio and television stations, said in an interview yesterday he is now involved in real estate and a large chain of drive-in movie theaters in the Southwest. His McLendon Co. also still owns a Dallas radio station.

McLendon's past includes a few intriguing footnotes which could provide material of their own for a television series. In 1963, after he shot Lee Harvey Oswald, Dallas nightclub owner Jack Ruby told an FBI investigator McLendon was "one of my closest friends." McLendon, a former naval intelligence officer, denied any close personal relationship to Ruby.

A year later a woman fired a shot at a Dallas man in the city's airport and told police she thought she was firing at McLendon, then a candidate for the Democratic senatorial nomination in Texas. The woman reportedly told police she believed McLendon was the leader of a crime syndicate.

McLendon says he got the idea for the CIA series from the once popular television serial "The FBI" which bu-

nished the bureau's image weekly from 1969 to 1974. Former FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover reportedly never missed an episode of the series and the FBI kept one agent on duty as a full-time script reviewer for the production.

"The FBI series was very successful and I think the time is right for a darned interesting series on the CIA," said McLendon.

About five other entrepreneurs have suggested similar ventures in the last year, the CIA spokesman said. Each was turned away by the agency after it became clear they were seeking total or partial funding for the projects by the government.

"McLendon has a reputable Hollywood producer with good credits and plenty of his own financial backing," said the spokesman. Another plus that got McLendon and Phillips in to discuss the proposed series with Turner was its "positive approach," he said.

"They obviously didn't come in saying they were going to do a series on MK-Ultra," the spokesman said, referring to the CIA's much publicized domestic mind control experiments over the last three decades.