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House Papers Allege CIA Drug Role

Secret House documents accuse the Central Intelligence Agency of helping an Asian opium ring smuggle drugs into the United States and then lying to Congress about it.

An intelligence report, quoted in the sensitive House documents, charges unequivocally: "The CIA was, in fact, facilitating the movement of opiates to the U.S. They steadfastly hid behind the shield of secrecy."

The strange case had its beginning in 1973 at New York's-Kennedy airport. Drug-sniffing dogs led authorities to 25 film canisters loaded with millions of dollars worth of opium.

The guilty finger was pointed at a dapper Asian named Puttaporn Khrankhruan who, it turned out, was not only a narcotics smuggler but a valuable CIA agent in Thailand as well.

The Justice Department proceeded to lock him up, but the CIA protested that "national security" was at stake and refused to turn its documents over to prosecutors. The CIA brought enough pressure that the case was quietly dropped, and Khrankhruan slipped back into Thailand.

But in 1975, a House Government Operations subcommittee learned about the case and demanded hundreds of pages of CIA documents. Then-CIA chief William Colby insisted to the subcommittee that the agency had "fully cooperated" with the prosecutors. And the CIA's associate general counsel, John Greaney, even testified under oath that

"we did not recommend that he not be prosecuted."

These statements are flatly contradicted, however, by the CIA's own documents. The censored CIA material that was turned over to the subcommittee shows clearly that Greaney and the agency tried to kill the case.

The plan to save Khrankhruan, according to the documents, was supposed to go like this: "John Greaney will attempt to plea bargain [to] have him plead guilty to some lesser charge." The narcotics smuggler would then be "given a suspended sentence and deported."

Another CIA memo describes how a CIA lawyer would "attempt to negotiate with the prosecutors to drop the charges." Greaney himself recommended in writing that "this case be discussed with . . . Department of Justice on the grounds that they ask the U.S. attorney to drop the prosecution."

After detailing the contacts between Greaney and the prosecutors, another CIA memo announced triumphantly that it was "through exhaustive efforts by [CIA] Office of General Counsel over extended period that case did not come to trial."

Another document added that Khrankhruan "is bright enough to realize that the CIA was instrumental in causing dismissal of charges against him."

The House subcommittee also believes Greaney intentionally withheld the name of Khrankhruan's CIA contact. Greaney had told the

subcommittee that he didn't know the name of the smuggler's CIA case officer. But the subcommittee report says there were "numerous references" to the case officer in the CIA documents adding: "It appears inconceivable Mr. Greaney did not have access to these documents in unsanitized form."

Other CIA officials allegedly also tried to mislead Congress about the case. Acting CIA Director Carl Duckett wrote an "apparently incomplete, inaccurate and misleading" letter to Sen. Charles Percy (R-Ill.), according to the subcommittee. Duckett wrote that Khrankhruan did not work for the CIA until 1972. But CIA documents quote Khrankhruan as saying in 1973 that he had worked for the agency for "several years."

States the secret House report: "It was ironic that the CIA should be given the responsibility of narcotics intelligence, particularly since they were supporting the prime movers."

"Even though the CIA was, in fact, facilitating the movement of opiates in the U.S., they steadfastly hid behind the shield of secrecy and said that all was done 'in the interest of national security.'"

The CIA gave "inaccurate" information to Congress, the report declares, "to acquire time to disengage from various groups who were involved in the [narcotics] traffic."

Footnote: Greaney did not return our calls. We were unable to reach Duckett.