

Jack Anderson's Washington Merry-go-round

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With Les Whitten

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WASHINGTON—The Treasury Dept. is secretly investigating charges that the host of a Las Vegas casino presented an illegal gun to the official in charge of enforcing the federal firearms laws.

Rex Davis, director of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, allegedly accepted the gun in violation of the laws that his agency is supposed to uphold. Under these laws, firearms can't be presented as gifts to residents of another state.

Davis categorically denied the allegation. He told us that he had visited Las Vegas only once, had stayed long enough to make a speech and had never accepted an illegal firearm from anyone.

The allegation against Davis filtered out of a Justice Dept. investigation of Charles Baron, the "greeter" at the fashionable Riviera Hotel on Las Vegas' strip.

Baron is a retired brigadier general, who has lived in Las Vegas for 20 years. He is known to be an avid gun collector. Reports reached Washington that he was passing out weapons to visiting celebrities.

One of Davis' own agents overheard a conversation indicating that a high A.T.F. official, possibly Davis himself, had accepted a gun from Baron. The investigation eventually focused on Davis. Treasury officials told us that internal investigations usually are made

into any charges of impropriety against Treasury officials. A spokesman said the preliminary investigation has produced no evidence that Davis took the illegal gift.

Footnote: Baron did not return our repeated calls.

SECRET SURVEILLANCE — In a memo intended for the eyes only of Deputy Attorney General Harold Tyler, a Justice Dept. official has charged that the department conducted "improper and perhaps illegal" surveillance at the Republican convention last August.

The official, Lee Henson, reported that an 11-man team was assembled in Kansas City to keep close watch on "yippies, gays and other persons and groups." The "spies" were drawn from the Justice Dept.'s Community Relations Service, which is supposed to resolve civil rights disputes.

In Henson's opinion, the spying was "improper and unlawful" because it was "unrelated to discriminatory practices." He contended that the Community Relations Service has "no surveillance or intelligence-gathering authority."

Nevertheless, the 11 civil rights officials were ordered into action, with all the drama of an undercover mission. They carried "walkie-talkie radio equipment and were required to make hourly radio reports."

The language was straight out of military operations. They were issued "orders," they were "dispatched," "detained" and "briefed." After a full day's spying, they were "debriefed" and "secured" for the night.

It was a strange assignment for civil rights specialists.

Footnote: A Justice Dept. spokesman told us Henson's protest is being reviewed at the request of Tyler. Community Relations director Ben Holman, who overruled Henson's objections to the Kansas City mission, denied that it was illegal. Henson declined comment.

CARTER DONNYBROOK — At the height of the presidential campaign, Jimmy Carter inadvertently stirred up a tempest in Great Britain — an old-fashioned Irish donnybrook which was overlooked at home.

He met in Pittsburgh with Irish-American leaders, many of them dogmatically anti-British. A militant priest read Carter what purported to be a copy of the Democratic platform on Ireland and asked whether he supported it.

The platform was carefully calculated to offend neither side. But the priest spiked the non-controversial platitudes with some language of his own. Between two innocuous sentences, he inserted the words: "The U.S. should encourage the formation of (a) united Ireland." These are trigger words, which

disregard Protestant views and uphold the position of the Irish Revolutionary Army. The unsuspecting Carter, groggy from the grueling campaign, overlooked the inflammatory sentence.

The British press, however, focused on the quote that Carter hadn't noticed. Within a few hours, the British and the Irish Protestants were in a rage. Carter was denounced by several English parliamentarians, one of whom called him an "irresponsible . . . peanut politician."

To make matters worse, one sensational English paper reported that Carter had backed the Irish terrorists' position while sporting a pro-IRA button, declaring "Britain Out!" In fact, a photographer had caught him with an anti-British button. But it had been planned on him at a St. Patrick's Day parade months earlier. He immediately snatched it off, but the photographer was too quick for him.

Carter's real position was that the warring factions should sit down together and talk peacefully. He sent a telegram to the Irish Prime Minister explaining his views. Such responsible papers as the London Times also tried to set the record straight.

But the damage had been done. Our European sources tell us that the denial has never caught up with the original story. Only in the United States has the story gone mostly unaided.