

VIP

Spies Taking the Navy to Task

By Maxine Cheshire

HE HAD WORKED for the FBI, the CIA, the National Security Agency and Naval Intelligence. Finally, for more than four years in the 1970s, he worked for the Navy's super-secret intelligence unit, Task Force 157.

He was a "spy for hire," using commercial and business covers for espionage. He worked in major port cities on the East and West coasts in the United States. Because he speaks four languages, he was assigned by his military supervisors to one of Task Force 157's dozen overseas units.

When the Navy informed him in December 1976 that Task Force 157 was being "terminated," he was given nine months to relocate himself and his family, plus severance and benefits settlements totaling \$40,000.

In addition, he claims the Navy offered to give him and other undercover operatives falsified employment resumes—anything of their choosing—to assist them in getting new, non-governmental jobs.

"If I'd wanted them to say I'd been a real estate tycoon," he said, "they'd

have furnished me with all the phony papers I needed to prove I'd been a whiz in the real estate business."

Some 20 of the other intelligence operatives with whom he worked are now relocated with new, mostly big-business employers, nationally and internationally, who have no idea of their real backgrounds as spies.

He himself worked for two weeks for the city government of a large eastern municipality on the basis of faked references and records which showed him to be an experienced "social statistician" and an expert in "urban studies."

"But I had always been in intelligence," he explained. "I wanted to stay in intelligence."

There, the Navy refused to help him. He was denied access to personnel records or any other documentation that would reflect truthfully where he had been working from 1972 to 1976.

Without verification of that missing federal employment, he started over, taking a \$15,000-a-year job in the Treasury Department. His last year with "157" he had earned \$35,000.

Now, he has worked his way back up to a \$25,000 salary, with an agreement from his new superiors that he will be compensated retroactively if his Navy employment is ever acknowledged.

He is one of some 30 former Task Force 157 operatives who have been trying since February 1978, to get the Department of the Navy to recognize them as federal employees, entitled to all the credits that status implies.

This past week, on Wednesday, he showed up at the Merit Systems Protection Board of the Office of Personnel Management.

The procedures have been hope-

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lessly mired down for the past two years because the Navy has "classified" almost every piece of paper pertaining to Task Force 157.

When the Navy judge advocate general concluded that Task Force 157 members were ineligible to receive federal employe credit, the memorandum of that ruling was itself classified. According to a petition for appeal, the "Navy denied appellants access to that memorandum" and "appellants have never been informed as to either the reasoning behind Navy's denial or the nature of the record upon which that decision was based."

Duplicate personnel records which the appellants had in their possession when Task Force 157 was terminated were destroyed by them at the directive of the Navy. Now the Navy is refusing to allow the appellants access to original records on grounds that they are "classified."

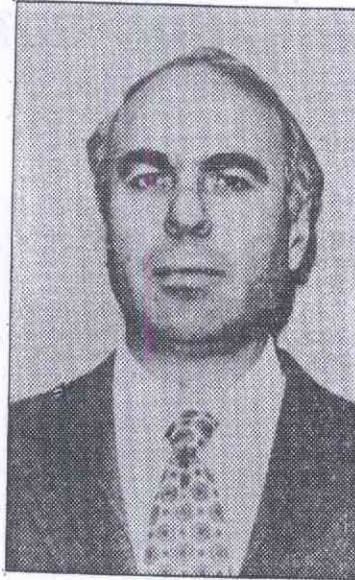
The meeting on Wednesday was closed to the press by the administrative law judge who is hearing the case on the grounds that "classified" information is involved. Documents pertaining to the case have been sealed.

In a further Kafka-like twist, the Merit Systems Protection Board's Administrative law judge decided Wednesday that everyone involved in the case must get security clearances, one source said, including the appellants, the lawyers and the judge himself. And those security clearances will be conducted by the Navy, which is now a party in the case along with the Office of Personnel Management.

"The whole thing is sort of crazy. Why is the Navy fighting this?" one person close to the case said last week. "It's a no-win situation for the Navy."

Naval Intelligence Command staff officer Art Wolff said the Navy "wasn't at liberty" to say why the Task Force 157 employes were denied federal employe credit.

The only one of the appellants to show up on Wednesday was asked by the judge, John McCarthy, not to talk about anything that went on in that hearing room, and he did not do so.



Edwin P. Wilson

The one-time spy doesn't want his name to appear in print if he can help it. He doesn't know why the Navy is taking the stand it is, he said. But he is aware that there are those who think the Navy is trying to put as much distance as possible between the military who ran Task Force 157 and the civilians who worked for them.

Edwin P. Wilson, another Task Force 157 contract worker from 1971 to 1976, was indicted last April in U.S. District Court for allegedly conspiring to ship high-powered explosives to Libya in connection with a terrorist training project. Wilson is a fugitive and is being sought by law enforcement authorities.

In April 1977, The Washington Post reported that Central Intelligence Agency Director Stansfield Turner personally investigated another case where two CIA employes were accused of providing unauthorized assistance to Wilson, who allegedly was selling explosive devices to Libya.

When the decision was made in May 1977 to abolish Task Force 157, a government source said at the time, "The simple truth is that the spies are too hot to handle . . . there were too many questionable business deals. They got the job done, but the potential for abuse was too great."