

C.I.A. Allegedly Flew Unwitting Officials

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WASHINGTON, July 7—Intelligence sources said today that members of Congress, two Vice Presidents and other politicians had flown chartered flights on a Washington-based airline, unaware that the line was owned and operated by the Central Intelligence Agency.

Among those who used the airline were Hubert H. Humphrey, Robert F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson, the sources said.

The politicians were also unaware that, over the years, most of the airline's personnel were employes of the intelligence agency, the sources said. Apparently, the politicians paid the full charter rate for the flights.

"It meant that C.I.A. had an unusual entree into the personal and campaign travel of some of the most important political figures in the country," one source said. "It could learn where they flew, with whom they traveled and, if the agency wanted to, it could record or get an employe to listen to what was said."

Over a number of years, these sources said, the air charter service flew "at least a dozen" members of Congress and, in two instances, carried a Vice President while in office. At one point, the organization was routinely chartered by the Democratic National Committee and at another by the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, the sources said.

The air service, called the Fairways Corporation, operates out of a small, plain office in the General Aviation Center at Washington's National Airport. Its president and chief pilot, Charles W. Bing, who is 51 years old, denied that the airline was owned by the intelligence agency.

He said it was owned by a group of former residents of Lynchburg, Va., who were now scattered across the country. He declined to name them.

Mr. Bing added, however, that the airline had a major charter contract from the Department of the Navy and often carried passengers in "Army or Navy uniforms" or officers in civilian clothes who might

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Unwitting Officials Said to Have Used C.I.A. Airline

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be involved with the C.I.A. He said he could not rule out that the agency was connected with the contract.

Intelligence sources said that the airline was secretly created by the C.I.A. more than 20 years ago to act as an "executive airline" for the agency's officials and to carry out secret domestic missions where commercial or other charter carriers would jeopardize secrecy.

One source familiar with the operation said that the airline flew "regular runs" to a secret location in North Carolina that the agency maintained to care for its operatives who had had nervous breakdowns or other emotional problems. "These people were in pretty bad shape," this source said.

The airline also made flights to a secret training base of the agency at Camp Peary, Va., and to "numerous" other secret locations around the country, the source said.

Eavesdropping Denied

Throughout the years, Fairways attempted to "cover" its status as a C.I.A. "proprietary" airline by posing as a private air charter company and signing up regular air charter passengers. It carried business executives, basketball players, private groups and politicians. It was the political charters, however, that raised the concern of several intelligence officials.

Mr. Bing acknowledges that the company has carried political figures. He said that Mr.

Humphrey and Mr. Kennedy had been passengers.

He denied, however, that this travel was involved in any way with the C.I.A., and he said he had never been asked to eavesdrop on a passenger or otherwise compromise their privacy.

Intelligence sources said the company's carrying of political passengers stretched back to "the fifties." At different times, the airline carried Lyndon Baines Johnson when he was Vice President, John F. Kennedy when he was a Senator, Mr. Humphrey while he was Vice President, and Robert Kennedy, these sources said.

Many political figures were unaware that they had been flown on Fairways because the billing for the flight would have been made through Page Airways, a well-established non-C.I.A. charter service that also operates out of Washington.

Page often acts as a clearinghouse for charter services at National Airport, and sometimes passengers fly on planes that belong to another charter company even though the trip was arranged by Page.

Criticism Recalled

One source said that Senator Humphrey's flying on Fairways was particularly "ironic." Mr. Humphrey came under criticism when he was Vice President for his use of Air Force planes to fly around the country while speaking on behalf of Democratic candidates. To avoid this criticism, the source said,

Mr. Humphrey chartered private flights for these trips.

"He was paying for the flights at the full charter rate, and I'm sure he had no idea that the airline was C.I.A.," the source said. But it is funny because here he was trying to avoid criticism for riding on Government planes and, boom, he's back riding on Government planes."

William Connell, who was Mr. Humphrey's executive assistant in the late nineteen-sixties, confirmed that the then Vice President switched to private charter, paid for out of political funds, to avoid the criticism that Air Force planes were used for political activities. He said he could not recall the exact names of the charter companies that were used, but he did say that they had been cleared by the Secret Service.

Used by Democratic Groups

"If we had known it was a C.I.A. airline, I don't think we would have used it, Mr. Connell said. "First, this was what we were trying to avoid, and also, there are very sensitive political matters discussed on such flights."

Several sources confirmed that, over the years, the airline was also unwittingly chartered by the Democratic National Committee and the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee.

The three Fairways planes, which carry 14 or more passengers each, appear to be normal charter aircraft.

Often, groups using the

planes arrange to be served liquor and meals as part of the charter flight. Fairways employs eight persons, Mr. Bing said, including four pilots. He said that neither he nor any other employes were C.I.A. personnel.

But other sources said that over the years the "bulk of Fairways employes were employed by the C.I.A. on regular Government salary levels.

Senate Panel Investigating

An attempt was made to obtain comments from Woodrow W. Edmondson, the former president of Fairways, and several members of the board of directors. The only person who responded was Calvin A. Fallwell of Lynchburg, Va. Mr. Fallwell said Mr. Edmondson had recruited him for the board of directors "several years ago,"

Mr. Fallwell said he did not believe the intelligence agency owned the airline, but he acknowledged that he owned no part of it and took no part in its operations.

The Senate Select Committee on Intelligence is known to be investigating Fairways, along with several other C.I.A. "proprietary."

For several years, the intelligence agency's entire "proprietary" system has come under criticism and scrutiny. The sources said that the C.I.A. owned several airlines, Southern Air Transport, Air America and a repair and a maintenance operation known as Inter-Mountain Air.