

# Ex-CIA Operative Pleads Guilty To Blackmail Attempt at Agency

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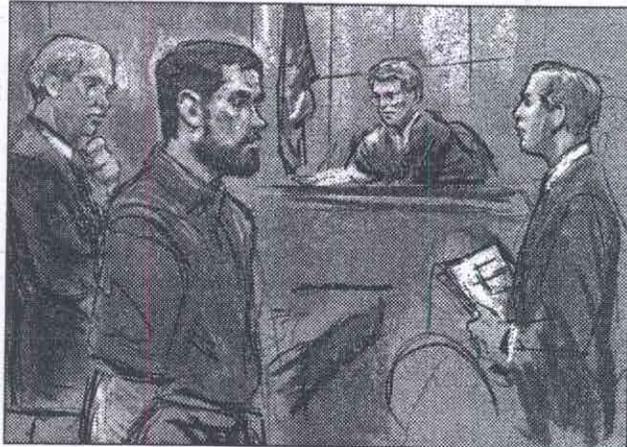
Former CIA covert operative Douglas F. Groat pleaded guilty yesterday in U.S. District Court here to one count of attempted extortion after admitting that he had demanded \$1 million from the agency in return for not disclosing to foreign governments how the U.S. intercepts their communications.

Although Groat's indictment in April included four additional counts of espionage—including two that could have carried the death penalty—his plea agreement calls for a maximum sentence of just five years in prison, followed by three years' probation. In addition, the government will recommend he serve his time in a medium-security prison or lower. The CIA will continue paying Groat, who worked for the agency for 16 years, his pension and benefits.

The sharp reduction from the original charges and the limited penalties reflect not only the difficulty that the government faced in proving an espionage case but its desire to avoid a trial in which embarrassing classified information could have been disclosed. Groat's jobs in the CIA included participating in covert operations to steal code materials from foreign embassies overseas.

U.S. Attorney Wilma A. Lewis said that the guilty plea would limit "public disclosure of highly classified information that would be required at a trial of this matter." She added that the plea allows Groat to be appropriately punished and "successfully resolves a sensitive matter."

CIA Director George J. Tenet



SKETCH BY WILLIAM HENNESSEY JR. FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Former CIA covert operative Douglas F. Groat, second from left, pleads guilty in U.S. District Court to one count of attempted extortion.

rescind the plea agreement.

Groat, who has said that he did not receive any money from foreign governments, claimed after his arrest that he turned over only confidential information, rather than secret or top secret, in an effort to get consulting jobs in the field of communications security. Neither he nor the government has publicly identified the two countries involved in the original charges.

The plea agreement prevents Groat from gaining any financial benefits from his exploits, including writing a book or participating in any print, radio or television adaptations of his story. In addition, like confessed CIA spy Aldrich H. Ames, Groat agreed to submit any writings to the CIA for clearance and to have agency personnel attend any interviews with the news media.

Groat obtained a promise in the agreement that the government would not oppose his placement in the general prison population. Ames was kept for almost a year in isolation, unable to talk to any other prisoners except during his one-hour-a-day exercise period.

The CIA each year faces two or three cases of disgruntled employees, such as Groat, who are put on administrative leave while attempts are made to reach a satisfactory separation from the agency. The agreements are designed to prevent them from trafficking in classified information that could be sold to foreign governments or international drug or crime cartels.

Groat had initially been placed on administrative leave in 1993 after he had successive arguments with his supervisor over the conduct of covert operations.

For the next three years he became increasingly angry as officials debated how to handle his case. Meanwhile, Groat traveled about the country in a camper, still receiving full pay while on leave and negotiating with CIA lawyers about his future. He was dismissed in October 1996.

In court papers filed yesterday, prosecutors presented the most complete picture yet of the extortion attempts that led to Groat's indictment after an FBI investigation. The full dimension of his activities was not revealed since a large section of the plea agreement was classified.

According to a proffer submitted as part of his plea agreement, Groat began sending the CIA a series of letters even before his dismissal, demanding eight payments totaling \$1 million in exchange for his not contacting foreign governments. Then, in March 1997, Groat told the CIA he intended to embark upon a plan to "discuss offering my knowledge and services, as a paid consultant, to select foreign governments," the proffer stated.

Soon after, Groat began contacting "several foreign governments," the proffer said. He wrote a letter to the CIA in July 1997 in which he offered to "suspend any and all actions that may interfere with Agency intelligence gathering activities" in return for \$1 million.

The bearded Groat answered "Yes, sir" in a loud, clear voice when Judge Thomas F. Hogan yesterday asked if he admitted to each allegation contained in the proffer. Groat offered no explanations for his actions in court yesterday. Hogan scheduled sentencing for Sept. 25 and ordered that Groat be kept in custody.

said the plea agreement demonstrated that the government would "take action against individuals who would violate the nation's trust by attempting to blackmail the government by threatening to disclose secrets."

The agreement requires Groat, 50, to tell government officials exactly what information he gave to two foreign governments in March and April 1997. He also promised never again to disclose any classified information learned during his CIA career, or contact any foreign governments or their agents about intelligence or cryptographic materials. Groat agreed to submit to polygraph examinations during a series of debriefings.

If it turns out he has lied, prosecutors can ask the court to