

Police Say Cause Still Is Uncertain In Paisley Death

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Maryland police said yesterday they are still unable to determine whether the death of John A. Paisley, a former high-level CIA employe found Sunday floating in Chesapeake Bay with a bullet wound in his head, was suicide or murder.

In an unusual response to newspaper reports that linked Paisley's death to his CIA involvement, the CIA yesterday announced that Paisley, at the time of his disappearance, was under contract as a CIA consultant studying "Soviet military expenditures and other economic affairs."

The intelligence agency labeled as "ridiculous" and "absurd" a copyrighted story in the Wilmington (Del.) News Journal which said the CIA fears Paisley was murdered by Soviet secret police because of his connection with the agency's satellite surveillance system.

CIA spokesman Dale Peterson said that Paisley, who retired in 1974 from his full-time job as deputy director of the CIA's Office of Strategic Research, was not a spy and was not involved in clandestine activities for the agency.

As a consultant, Paisley was "a member of the Military Economic Advisory Panel, composed of outside experts," Peterson said. "Much of this (work) is unclassified and released to the public."

Maryland's chief medical examiner, Dr. Russell Fisher, said Paisley, 55, who was last seen Sept. 24 sailing his 31-foot sloop on the bay, died of a gunshot wound to the left side of the head. The fatal bullet was fired from a 9 mm. automatic pistol, the type of gun Paisley was known to keep aboard his sailboat, Fisher said.

Police found an unspent 9 mm. cartridge aboard the sailboat, which was found unoccupied with its sails set on the morning after Paisley disappeared. It had run aground near Point Lookout at the mouth of the Potomac River.

It was learned yesterday that Paisley, although ambidextrous, used his left hand for writing. Fisher said the bullet that killed Paisley was fired with the gun touching the victim's head and the wound, above and behind the left ear, could have been self-inflicted.

Terrence O'Grady, a Falls Church attorney representing the Paisley family, yesterday denied reports that Paisley was heavily in debt at the time of his death. "I've had access to his financial records and there is no evidence of any debts that he couldn't handle with his consulting earnings," O'Grady said.