

Car Burnings and Assaults on Radicals Linked to F.B.I. Agents in Last 5 Years

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The following article was written by Nicholas M. Horrock and is based upon reporting by him and John M. Crewdson.

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WASHINGTON, July 10—Agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation committed widespread acts of unauthorized lawlessness, including the burning of automobiles, assaults and illegal wiretapping, while conducting internal security investigations in the last five years, law enforcement sources said today.

These sources, who are deeply familiar with the bureau's domestic security operations, said that they believed the current Department of Justice investigation of alleged burglaries by agents would uncover other wrongdoing because techniques of harassment and illegal investigation methods were used by the same men who were committing the burglaries.

These sources said that agents risked doing such things as roughing up antiwar radicals or placing illegal wiretraps—called "suicide" or "wildcat" taps by agents—because they were under "tremendous pressure" to halt bombings and snare fugitives in the early 1970's.

Militant antiwar activists at Queens College in Flushing were one target of illegal and unauthorized electronic surveillance, these sources said.

Clarence M. Kelley, director of the F.B.I., said in a statement to The New York Times today that he had "no information indicating that these allegations are true.

"However," he continued, "as in all allegations by bureau employees this will be looked into and if evidence is found to substantiate the allegations, actions will be taken against the employees involved.

"It is hoped that anyone having such information will come forth because without their assistance the investigation is much more difficult," Mr. Kelley said.

Agents placed illegal "wildcat" telephone taps and electronic bugs, the sources said, after bureau orders specifically forbade the activity because these were often the best methods of getting intelligence on militant leftist activity.

Agents would disguise the source of the information in their reports to make it appear that it came from live informants, the sources said. One source said, however, that he believed that supervisory F.B.I. personnel were "aware" that information was coming from taps but did nothing about it.

Car burnings and assaults upon individuals in the radical left were efforts to disrupt antiwar activity, these sources said. The Times has received a report of two car burnings in the New York area, but other sources could not confirm these particular acts. One source said, however, that the technique of burning or vandalizing a car was "known to a lot of people."

The cars were set afire with "Molotov cocktails" made from glass bottles filled with gasoline. This was done in such a manner as to appear to have been an attack by another extremist group. Cars were also disabled to strand suspects during a surveillance, these sources said.

Agents, the sources said, from time to time "roughed up" radical antiwar figures to frighten them or to disrupt a demonstration or protest activity. Earlier, bureau sources told The Times that at least one radical was kidnapped for the same reason.

One source said that the victim of a beating was never seriously hurt because agents did not want to create a situation that might be traced back to the bureau. The victim, this source said, would not know he was attacked by bureau men.

These activities were never officially sanctioned by the bureau, the sources said, but again they said they believe that field supervisors knew such techniques were used.

Another widespread practice, these sources said, was to use credentials from the New York Police Department and other state and Federal agencies to establish "pretext identities"

that would permit agents to make entries or get information without being connected with the F.B.I.

One source said that he had often posed as a sanitation inspector to enter and search a premises without a warrant. He obtained genuine credentials from the Sanitation Department, he said.

These sources said that the main use of burglaries in the 1972-1973 period was to try to locate fugitive members of the radical group known as the Weathermen. One source who took part in burglaries said they were aimed at the homes or offices of persons who might be harboring Bernadine Dohrn, Kathy Boudin, Cathy Wilkerson and Mark Rudd.

The agents, a source said, would gather extensive background information on the habits and activities of persons whose homes were to be burglarized. This was partly to help the agent avoid being surprised while in the home and partly so he could recognize unusual items in the house that might lead to one of the fugitives.

The source said, for instance, that if the agents had established that the owner of a home did not drink and a matchbook from a bar was found in a burglary they would stake out the bar and see if the fugitive might come in. Agents, he said, also dusted for fingerprints, took samples of dirt from the bottom of bathtubs, and small swatches of clothing if they thought the items might establish that a fugitive had been in the house and could lead to the area of the country in which he might be hiding.

Federal Government sources said that in the current investigation of the burglaries the Justice Department may review F.B.I. laboratory transmittals to see if the reports pinpoint any burglary.

One source said that there was no pattern on whether agents carried their bureau identification or a gun during burglaries. This source said it was his practice to make the entry without his identification but to carry a small caliber nonregulation pistol in case he unexpectedly encountered a dog. He would not have shot a person if he had been surprised.

Other agents did not carry guns, he said, because they were concerned about laws that carried stiffer burglary penalties if the burglar is armed.

This source said he never heard of an agent's being arrested or shot while making an illegal entry but said that occasionally agents who had been surprised had to knock someone down or fight to get away.