

CIA Fires Officer Who Rifled Files

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A CIA security guard assigned to the House Assassinations Committee was fired last summer after it was discovered that he looked at sensitive files he was not authorized to see.

CIA spokesman Herbert Hetu said today the agency discharged the guard, Regis T. Blahut, "for using poor judgment in examining files at committee staff headquarters that he was not supposed to touch."

"He broke no law," Hetu said, "but when we were satisfied from fingerprint checks that he had handled the files without clearance to do so, all we could do was discharge him."

Hetu acknowledged that the employee was subjected to questioning and to polygraph examinations so the CIA could satisfy itself that he had looked at the files independently and had not done so on behalf of anyone inside or out of the agency.

"WE ARE SATISFIED that it was just curiosity on his part, nothing more," Hetu added.

The materials consisted primarily of envelopes containing copies of photographs of the autopsy and X-rays made of President John F. Kennedy after his assassination in Dallas in 1963.

A source on the now-disbanded committee staff said "the things he looked at were not in a security status for any reason except our fear that somehow the gruesome pictures might find their way into public print. There are publications which would have paid a lot of money to publish pictures of this kind."

Any documents or photographs possessed by the CIA or FBI in a high security status were never left in the hands of committee staff members overnight and had to be returned each day to the intelligence agencies or to National Archives, officials acknowledged. On several occasions committee members were required to go to the Archives to view certain materials there.

HETU SAID HE did not understand published charges that committee counsel G. Robert Blakey used the guard incident to force the CIA to provide documents allegedly being withheld from the committee. He said the assassinations panel was already getting everything it asked for from the CIA.

Both committee and CIA sources agreed that the incident did not involve any surreptitious entry into a safe where the evidence was being kept. They said Blahut was assigned to protect CIA materials being used by Blakey's staff and was authorized to be in the room where the materials were. However, he was not authorized to see everything in the office.

The photo files apparently were in the open on a table during normal working hours.