

U.S. Aide Was Briefed on Assassination Equipment

By NICHOLAS M. HORROCK

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WASHINGTON, Jan. 22—A top official of the Federal Drug Enforcement Administration said today that he had been briefed on what has been described as electronic assassination equipment by a private manufacturer of wiretapping and bugging equipment.

The official, Lieut. Col. Lucien Conein, acting director of the special operations and field support section of D.E.A.'s international intelligence division, said that he received the briefing in May, 1974, from representatives of the now defunct B. R. Fox Company.

Colonel Conein said he had not asked for the briefing and had no interest in the equipment.

Several law enforcement officials and Senate investigators said that this was the first time they had seen evidence that a domestic Federal agency would even look at assassination equipment.

Several senior D.E.A. law enforcement officials have become concerned that the agency's widespread overseas operations have opened it to questionable law enforcement practices. D.E.A. agents operating in foreign countries—62 countries in all—are often under far looser regulations on covert operations and investigative techniques than are their counterparts in this country.

Concern about the agency's activities has also been aroused as a result of its close association with the C.I.A.

Under orders from President Nixon, the C.I.A. was ordered to get into the war on illegal narcotics in 1971. A department in the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs, a predecessor of the D.E.A., was funded by the C.I.A., and C.I.A. operatives were on duty with the narcotics agency in the United States and abroad.

This "agreement" with the C.I.A. was ended in 1973, but the D.E.A. hired a substantial number of foreign intelligence officers in staffing its present intelligence operations.

Served in Saigon

According to the Pentagon papers on United States involvement in the Indochina war, Colonel Conein was a senior operative of the Central In-

telligence Agency in Saigon in 1963 and served as liaison between the United States Government and forces that deposed President Ngo Dinh Diem.

Senator Lowell P. Weicker Jr., Republican of Connecticut, who has been conducting an investigation of C.I.A. involvement with other Government agencies, said that he has a copy of the typewritten catalogue of instruments described to Colonel Conein.

When questioned by a reporter, Mr. Weicker described the devices as "used for assassination, pure and simple."

Mr. Weicker said that he had brought the catalogue to the attention of John Bartels, administrator of the Drug Enforcement Administration, and that he had interviewed Colonel Conein and the colonel's deputy, Searl Frank. He said that the officials had assured him that the agency had not purchased any of the devices.

The Senator said that he had been told that the agency's men had done nothing to encourage the manufacturer to think that he might make a sale to their agency.

"My question was, why in the hell didn't they do something to discourage him," Mr. Weicker said.

One of two men who briefed Colonel Conein, Michael Morrissey told a reporter that he had met with him for three hours, showing him audio equipment and going over the devices described by Senator Weicker in detail.

Colonel Conein, asked about the briefing, said that he had not solicited the briefing on assassination aspects of Fox's equipment, and "I wouldn't touch that stuff with a 10-foot pole."

He continued: "That stuff is

only good in a war, and who's got a war? It was very sophisticated stuff. They had a telephone that could be triggered by remote control. If the wrong person picked up the phone, you'd blow him up."

Colonel Conein said that he had found the material "fascinating" but that he had said nothing to encourage the idea that the agency would purchase such equipment. He said that he

had purchased about \$500 worth of audio equipment from the B. R. Fox Company, which he said could be used for bugging.

The equipment he bought, he said, cannot be used in the United States without a court order but is for use in D.E.A.'s foreign operations. He said, however, that the gear had not been used, and "I still have it in my safe."

The briefing for Colonel Conein was conducted by Mr. Morrissey and an unidentified New York man on behalf of the Fox Company, which had offices in Alexandria, Va., and New York City. Mr. Morrissey said that he had presented details on the company's electronic surveillance equipment and what the catalogue calls "astro equipment."

Senator Weicker has obtained a memo that he said was from the files of the B. R. Fox Company, written to an official of a Georgia arms manufacturer, that says:

"Enclosed is a catalog which was put together only after we started working together with Lou Conein. I wrote out this line of astro equipment with you and Lou in mind, and because of the nature of the devices, it is not being given to anyone else . . . Some of this equipment was demonstrated to Lou in this office about 3 weeks ago."

Memo is Signed 'Mike'

"The memo was dated June 10, 1974, and was signed 'Mike.'"

It is part of the evidence that has caused Mr. Weicker to question, he said, whether the relationship between Colonel Conein and the "astro" equipment manufacturer was a casual one.

When asked by a reporter about the memorandum, Colonel Conein said that he was shown it during an interview with Senator Weicker.

"I told him I had no idea the context in which it was written, and that I had not known Mr. Morrissey [before

the sales demonstration]. I said if I was him [Senator Weicker], I would turn the memorandum over to the E.B.I. and let them investigate. I told him I would be glad to take a polygraph on the matter."

Colonel Conein said that he had listened to a detailed presentation on the devices, but he did not "discourage" the manufacturer because he presumed that as a licensed electronics company it had the authority to produce the explosive devices.

Colonel Conein told Senator Weicker, as he had a reporter, that despite the presentation of the explosive gear, he had selected B. R. Fox out of several companies to provide bugging equipment. Although the colonel got presentations from several better-known concerns, he chose Fox.

Mr. Bartels, the agency administrator, said that he was conducting an internal inquiry into the transaction.

Mr. Morrissey identified a copy of the catalogue obtained by The New York Times as a photostat of one that he typed in the spring of 1974. The informal catalogue said that the material could not be delivered for two weeks after order and was for sale only to the United States Government. The following are excerpts on each item available:

Q "Telephone handset insert. Miniature activator with time delay use inside telephone handset. Automatic charge fired at SEC following lifting of instrument handpiece.

Q "Cigarette pack — antidisturbance explosive. Electronics and explosive module packed inside cigarette pack. When the pack is lifted or moved in any manner, the explosive is set off."

Q "Modified flashlight . . . antidisturbance unit. Standard Eveready 2D cell flashlight has antidisturbance electronics concealed inside where batteries have been removed. Remainder of the battery space is packed with explosive."

Q "Remote-controlled, light-activated sensor. Unit delivers a predetermined charge across its output terminals, when activated from a remote location according to its pre-set code. Use with explosive for firing upon the occurrence of certain conditions relating to light intensity."

Q "Booby-trapped, M-16 explosive clip. Use: A mechanically activated electronic charge circuit is built into a common military item. Upon removal of the single round in the magazine, either by firing or by hand removal, the explosive

concealed in the magazine is detonated."

Q "Fragmentation ball — anti-disturbance unit. Unit is similar in its operation as the antidisturbance flashlight, Bkr model FD-2. The exception is in the type of explosive charge."

Q "Explosive black box modules. . . Flat black finish on metal rectangular modules. One screw at each end secures top on unit. Top is removed to pack inside with explosive."

Mr. Morrissey said that he had prepared three copies of the catalogue, and that two copies were in the hands of Federal officials. He declined to identify the two officials or

the Government agency they were connected with.

Mr. Morrissey also declined to identify the person who had introduced him to Colonel Conein. The colonel said that he could not recall how he had learned of the Fox concern but that its name might have come from an acquaintance in Washington.

Mr. Morrissey, who said that he had a degree as an electronics engineer, said that he designed the equipment in early 1974 as an outgrowth of his work in the field of wiretaps and room bugs.

Mr. Morrissey, who also described himself as a law school graduate, said that he believed the equipment he designed, which he said was an electronic triggering device, was legal as long as it was not armed with an explosive. He said that it had nonlethal applications to trigger burglar alarms and other "anti-intrusion" equipment.

He said that he would consider selling such devices only to the Federal Government. He added, however, that he does sell electronic surveillance equipment to local police.

Mr. Morrissey said that the Fox Company was dissolved in November, 1974, as a result of management differences. He said that he had shared management and control of the company with Mrs. Barbara Spindel. The name Fox was Mrs. Spindel's maiden name, Mr. Morrissey said. He said that he continued to sell electronic surveillance equipment as an individual.

Mrs. Spindel confirmed that the company was no longer in

existence and said that she was unaware Mr. Morrissey had

circulated a catalogue for such devices. Her husband, the late Bernard Spindel, who formed the B. R. Fox Company, was often quoted as a wiretap expert.

Several law enforcement officials and electronic experts who were interviewed indicated that the devices as described in the catalogue appeared usable only for assassinations or for the booby-trapping of premises.

Before joining the D.E.A., Colonel Conein was a career Army officer who spent the latter part of his career on detached duty with the Central Intelligence Agency.

Colonel Conein said that he became a consultant to the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs in 1972 and became a full-time official of D.E.A. in December, 1973. His name came up in Watergate committee testimony when it was disclosed that one of the Watergate burglars, E. Howard Hunt Jr., had met with Colonel Conein. Mr. Hunt at the time was gathering information to prepare bogus cables that implicated President Kennedy in President Diem's assassination in 1963.