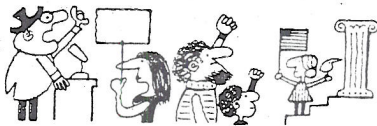


THE U.S. SCENE



Confidential

By Mary McGrory
Washington Star

Washington

AS OF last week, a Marine in mufti has been posted at a table barring access to the confidential files of the records room of the Presidential Clemency Board.

It's too late, according to some of the people who work there.

Despite a presidential promise, written into federal regulations and instructions to the staff, that applicants will have full privacy and protection from other agencies, representatives of the FBI, the Defense Intelligence Agency and the Office of Naval Intelligence, have inspected the records — "looking," as one source put it, "for fugitives and new addresses."

Applicants who went AWOL after March 28, the deadline for clemency, are obviously vulnerable.

The attorneys and legal interns who have informed the press of the practice insist on anonymity. Some receive government aid for law school, some are still presenting cases of Vietnam deserters and draft evaders to the board.

They acquired information from talks with record room aides, who now deny all knowledge. The charge first surfaced in an unsigned press release prepared by four legal interns to counter Chairman Charles E. Goodell's rosy progress report issued last week.

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BUT ONE valiant GS-5, a 28-year-old woman who once acted as supervisor in the record room and has since returned to her job at the General Services Administration, is willing to talk about it — for the record.

Linda McDonald, who comes from Blatchley, Ore., says she protested when she was ordered to make available files to FBI men sometime last May.

She says she was told to hand them over by her superior, Colonel D. G. Benson, former chief of the records section, who in the last month has been transferred to a job as special assistant to general counsel Lawrence Baskir, former counsel to Senator Sam Ervin's privacy committee.

"I told him I did not think it was fair that people can come in and see these cases," she remembers telling Benson.

He informed her, she says that the agents were looking at the files because the applicants were being considered for government jobs.

Under federal rules, the military records of applicants are available to other government agencies. But under the clemency board's rules of confidentiality, the letters and forms and the "best addresses" that comprise the application, are strictly private.

Everything, according to Ms. McDonald, was in the files she turned over to the FBI men in Benson's office. "I said to the Colonel, 'I guess just anyone can look at these cases'."

His reply according to her, "No, just the people I authorize."

Benson denies that the incidents or the conversation ever took place.

On August 6, Baskir issued a memorandum instructing the staff not to give any information to the FBI and to accept only written requests which were to be sent to him.