

Informer Says Police Prompt Radical Acts

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LOS ANGELES, Oct. 24—A long-time informer for the Los Angeles Police Department appeared to offer an intriguing glimpse last week into the shadowy world of domestic espionage against radical political groups. But no one seemed quite sure.

The informer, 28-year-old Louis E. Tackwood, is a self-proclaimed con man and conspirator. The brunt of his rambling and sometimes contradictory testimony is that police informants and undercover agents are deeply involved in these radical groups.

Often, he charges, agents actually help plan criminal conspiracies and then allow them to proceed to where they can endanger innocent victims—just so the conspirators will be caught in the act.

Tackwood alleges, for example, that the police knew well in advance that black militants would try to invade the Marin County Courthouse in August, 1970, kidnap hostages, and then exchange them for the three "Soledad Brothers," including George Jackson.

The escaping kidnappers were stopped by the police, and in the ensuing gun battle, four men were killed, including Judge Harold Haley, one of the hostages.

Passes Lie Detector Test

Tackwood has told his story in a series of press conferences and interviews over the last two weeks. The police acknowledge that he is an informer, and he passed a lie detector test paid for by several news media and administered by a recognized expert.

At the same time, many who have heard him tell his story say Tackwood sounds like a fast-talking "hustler" who seldom tells exactly the same story twice. Even his lawyers concede "that when Louis doesn't answer, he makes it up."

Why Tackwood decided to talk is still uncertain. Apparently disillusioned with the police, he approached a group of young leftists here, who have helped make his story public. He now refers to the Criminal Conspiracy Section of the Los Angeles Police Department as the "gestapo" and insists that, "They believe in the total power of the police over the people."

In addition, Tackwood is hardly averse to publicity and hopes to write a book about his experiences and sell it to the movies for a high price.

He acknowledges that it is virtually impossible to prove many of his charges. What is

needed, he says, is a Congressional investigation that would impartially evaluate his evidence.

The Los Angeles Police Department has refused to answer questions about Tackwood, but it did issue the following statement:

"The use of informants is dangerous unless they are handled by professionals. The L.A.P.D. evaluates everything obtained from informants prior to using. Newsmen should be just as cautious as police are in separating fact from fiction.

"Mr. Tackwood is one of many people our investigators have interviewed. Mr. Tackwood also has developed a flair for fiction, although there have been times he has come up with substantial facts.

"We are not responsive to Mr. Tackwood's allegations. If the news media want more color, let them go back to Mr. Tackwood. If still unsatisfied, let them go to their local insane asylum and interview the inmates."

Without police cooperation it is very difficult to verify many of Tackwood's charges, but it is obvious that he knows his way around. The informer grew up with many of the current black leaders in Watts and joined the "street life" at an early age.

After a long record as a juvenile offender he started cooperating with the police in 1962, when he was arrested for stealing a car. At first he informed mainly about criminal activities, while pursuing several careers on his own—dope

peddler, car thief, armed robber.

In recent years he graduated to political intrigue, and worked mainly for the Criminal Conspiracy Section, an elite corps in the police department formed specifically to monitor radical groups. In payment for his services, Tackwood estimates that he has received \$7,000 to \$9,000—all in cash—as well as a "free hand" to pursue his own illegal enterprises.

Incidents and Charges

Among the incidents in which he has been involved or charges he has made are the following:

¶In 1965, on police instructions, he made an anonymous phone call to a local station-house, telling them that guns were being hidden in a Black Muslim mosque. The mosque was then raided and shot up, but no guns were found.

¶He acted as a contact between the police and Ron Karenga, leader of a group of black cultural nationalists called US. The police were financing Mr. Karenga as an alternative to the increasingly influential Black Panther party, he said, and urged Mr. Karenga to assassinate Panther leaders. Several US members were convicted of shooting Alprentice Carter and John Huggins, two prominent Panthers, late in 1968.

¶He charged that the police had allowed narcotics to be sold in black and Chicano communities to "create a dependency" on the drug and undercut political movement.

¶He infiltrated the campaign

of a radical slate running for the Berkeley City Council last spring. He carried a listening device with him and recorded several strategy sessions and other pertinent information.

¶He charged that the police had been discussing a plan to foment disturbances at the Republican Nation Convention in San Diego next year. The disturbances would give the President a good issue for the campaign and provide an excuse for rounding up known militants across the country, he said.

¶He alleged that Melvin Smith, the state's star witness in the current trial of 13 Black Panthers here, had been a police informant since 1967. Mr. Smith was the No. 3 man in the Los Angeles Panther hierarchy and planned the group's defense strategy. The police say that Mr. Smith turned state's evidence after being arrested.

Tackwood seems particularly knowledgeable about the Marin County shootout. He contends that he was sent to Santa Cruz to investigate a "hit squad" of Black Panthers who were training to invade the courthouse and seize hostages. One of the squad leaders, he alleges, was Mr. Smith.

According to Tackwood, the "hit squad" abandoned the plan on the morning of the attack when they saw that the courthouse was too well guarded. But no one, he says, remembered to tell Jonathan Jackson, George Jackson's 17-year-old brother, who went ahead and was killed in the subsequent shootout.