

# Military Snooping At the Conventions

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WASHINGTON — Plainclothes military intelligence agents played a questionable — and still secret — surveillance role at the 1968 national conventions.

An investigation of the Pentagon's little-known but extensive watch on civilian dissidents has determined:

- A unit of top secret Army Security Agency (ASA), normally assigned only to national security communications and foreign electronic surveillance, was deployed in Chicago during the strife-ridden Democratic meeting. The unit reportedly eavesdropped on political headquarters, including that of Sen. Eugene McCarthy (D-Minn.), as well as protesters.

- Agents of Army, Navy and Air Force military intelligence units mingled on the floors of both the Democratic and the Republican conventions with unsuspecting delegates.

- Convention leaders and such party officials as the then national chairmen, Democrat John Bailey and the GOP's Ray Bliss, were never informed of the presence or activities of military agents.

- Although the Secret Service denied the military agents were given any orders to spy, each intelligence unit filed detailed reports on what their agents had seen and heard during both conventions.

Under a 1965 executive order, former Attorney General Ramsey Clark was required to approve all federal electronic surveillance. But Clark said he gave no such approval to any federal agency, including the military.

## Official Refusals

How the ASA was sent to Chicago and what plain-

clothes Pentagon agents did other than guard candidates is hidden behind official refusals of the Secret Service and the Defense Department to discuss security at the convention.

The Army's widespread surveillance of civilians — and similar watches by the Navy and Air Force — was under way when the conventions met. This activity was curtailed after the Army's computerized dossier of political dissenters was disclosed publicly last January. The dossiers included high-ranking retired military officers and elected officials opposed to the war in Vietnam.

Currently, the extent of domestic intelligence relating to radical politics and crime are under investigation by Sen. Sam Ervin (D-N.C.) and his subcommittee on constitutional rights.

The military and the Secret Service are both expected to be called at subcommittee hearings in early 1971.

Ervin has said that "there is no place in our society for the military to keep watch on civilians."

## Agents Borrowed

Secret Service spokesman John Warner said agents were borrowed from the military because the service had been handed the job of protecting presidential candidates after the assassination of Sen. Robert Kennedy — and didn't have enough men of its own. The Secret Service at that time had 500 agents.

Acknowledging the Secret Service deployed military agents on the floor at Chicago and Miami Beach, Warner said, "Their presence related only to the security of candidates. They were under our control and filed no 'intelligence' reports to us."

But Warner could not explain, for example, the Chicago floor duties of three

Pentagon-based agents of the Army's Counter-Intelligence Analysis Division (CIAD), one of whom sat near the Illinois delegation.

They appeared to have been functioning as observers, but it could not be determined for whom.

## Reports Filed

Warner's explanation also did not cover the assignments of agents like Richard Schaller, a naval intelligence analyst who testified at the "Chicago Seven" trial. He tape-recorded protest speeches in Chicago's Grant

and Lincoln Parks during the convention and filed reports on what he observed.

Schaller said he had Secret Service orders to report on the activities of any group or person who might constitute a threat to a candidate.

There were other conflicts with Warner's description of the military role on the matter of reporting requirements. Since December, 1965, the Defense Department and Secret Service have been systematically sharing intelligence related to presidential protection.

Moreover, reports filed by agents like Schaller were available to Secret Service, other federal and local law enforcement agencies through the Chicago command post they shared.

In Miami Beach, a similar sharing of intelligence data was organized.

## Flat Denial

Warner flatly denied any knowledge of eavesdropping by anyone. He insisted the ASA "did not assist us" in Chicago.

Warner declined to answer all questions about the numbers of military agents or the nature of the units from which they came. He referred the inquiries to the Pentagon.

But the Pentagon refused requests to interview the chief lawyer and intelligence chief of the Army, Air Force and Navy.

The ASA is a separate Army command that reports directly to the service's civilian head. Its prime function is the gathering of foreign intelligence by electronic means for the National Security Agency (NSA) and maintaining the security of the Army's worldwide communications network.

## Can Tune In

The equipment ASA uses is classified, although one facility near Washington reportedly can tune in on over-the-air communications from Canada to Cuba.

The unexplained presence of the ASA in Chicago was first disclosed by SP 4 Ronald E. Weber. Until September, 1969, when he deserted to Canada, he was a visual aids clerk in the ASA's Arlington, Va., headquarters.

Weber told newsmen last July that, weeks before the Chicago convention, the ASA planned to move a reconnaissance company from Texas to Chicago.

The company was in place and listening a week before the convention, Weber said.

According to Weber, the

unit's electronics experts were "listening all day and all night" to radio frequencies, police radio, "certain telephone communications" and short-wave radio bands. Their hope was to learn the plans of protesters.

When trouble started in Chicago, Weber said, the ASA experts "received and threw back to us in Washington read-outs on what was going on."

"One report was actually a read-out correlation of these different reports as to a by-play between some of Senator McCarthy's workers, and actually an intercept recorded message to Senator McCarthy himself," Weber said.

Weber said the intercepted messages concerned medical aid for protesters who during the Chicago turmoil, used the McCarthy hotel rooms for a makeshift aid station. The

rooms were checked and declared free of listening devices by the Secret Service, McCarthy said.

Weber said the intercepted messages, including the McCarthy report and others, became classified.

None of the flood of material Weber said he was coming in from ASA in Chicago ever went back for use by riot-ready troops there. It all went to the Pentagon, he said.

Weber's placement of the ASA in Chicago was confirmed by two other sources, neither of whom would permit the use of his name.

#### Won't Elaborate

A former supervisor of Weber said the ASA was there but declined to elaborate on its role. "That's classified and I could get 10 years and \$20,000 if I talked," he said.

A former Secret Service man knew nothing of Weber personally. But he insisted Weber had ASA's role there incorrect. The ex-agent said, "The ASA was there (in Chicago) to help the Secret Service protect against the use of electronic surveillance against candidates."

Whether the ASA went to Chicago on Army orders or at secret service request, the fact remains a unit with prime responsibilities in foreign intelligence had no business there under government policies in effect at the time.

More importantly, even the possibility of the Army or the Secret Service undertaking such steps illustrates just how little is known about how far government agencies may probe in pursuit of domestic security.