

Spying on a Kennedy



Jack Anderson

THE WASHINGTON police attempted to plant an informant in the household of Ethel Kennedy, wife of the late Senator Robert Kennedy, in 1971 to spy on the Kennedy crowd.

The informant, E. Robert Merritt Jr., also committed burglaries and other dirty deeds not only for the police but for the FBI. Indeed, confidential FBI files say of him: "Nothing has developed . . . to indicate that the informant has furnished other than reliable information."

The police provided Merritt with Ethel Kennedy's private phone number and home address. He was instructed to apply for a job opening and then to use the position to gather information about the friends, associates and members of the Kennedy family.

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THIS PARTICULAR plot fell through, but he completed many even more bizarre undercover assignments. Under the guidance of his attorney, the 31-year-old Merritt has now told us about some of his exploits:

- When anti-war demonstrators descended upon Washington on May Day, 1971, the police asked Merritt to infiltrate the inner circle and to spy on activist leaders Jack Davis, Rennie Davis and a young lawyer named Ray Twohig. The police gave Merritt pills and marijuana to plant on Twohig.

Merritt was also instructed to distribute bad drugs, including blue-striped capsules that would cause nausea.

- At the instigation of FBI agent William Tucker, Merritt entered the Red House Bookstore, which is associated with prison reform, and swiped mail which he turned over to the FBI.

- Merritt was also instructed to spy on the Institute for Policy Studies, a respected left-wing research group. Told to take anything he "could get away with," he walked off with a sack that turned out to contain first-class letters. He turned over the mail to the FBI's Tucker.

- Both the FBI and Washington police asked Merritt for any gossip he could glean about the following Members of Congress: Senators Tom Eagleton, (Dem-Mo.), Hubert Humphrey, (Dem-Minn.), Ted Kennedy, (Dem-Mass.), Charles Mathias, (Rep-Md.), George McGovern, (Dem-S.D.), Lee Metcalf, (Dem-Mont.), Ed Muskie, (Dem-Me.), William Proxmire, (Dem-Wis.), Abraham Ribicoff, (Dem-Conn.), and Stuart Symington, (Dem-Mo.), also Representatives Bella Abzug, (Dem-N.Y.), Mario Biaggi, (Dem-N.Y.), Shirley Chisholm, (Dem-N.Y.), John Conyers, (Dem-Mich.), Ron Dellums, (Dem-Calif.), Don Edwards, (Dem-Calif.), Walter Fauntroy, (Dem-D.C.), Richard Ichord, (Dem-Mo.), Claude Pepper, (Dem-Fla.), and Charles Wiggins, (Rep-Calif.).