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Falcons, a CIA Gift Fit for a Sheikh

By Jack Anderson and Les Whitten

The Central Intelligence Agency has trapped rare falcons in Alaska and has presented them to Arab sheikhs. A prize falcon is one of the most valuable gifts the CIA can offer an Arab potentate who has everything.

In some sheikhdoms, an agreement is cemented with the gift of a falcon. It is more binding than a handshake or a signature.

Middle East monarchs reportedly will pay up to \$25,000 for a fine falcon. The most magnificent are peregrine falcons and gyrfalcons. But because they are an endangered species, it is against U.S. law to export them without a permit.

Arab falcon fanciers routinely are denied permits. But for a favored sheikh, the CIA can arrange an occasional falcon. Inside sources tell us that the CIA has wangled secret permits to export both peregrine falcons and gyrfalcons to the Middle East for bargaining purposes.

For someone without the right CIA connections, however, trafficking in falcons can be risky. A wealthy Chicago businessman, Anthony G. Angelos, hoped to entice Sheikh Zayid of Abu Dhabi into a business deal by presenting him a pair of falcons. Unable to get a permit, Angelos sought ways to get falcons out of the United States.

The sheikh, a swashbuckling desert chieftan who heads the oil-saturated United Arab Emirates, is an avid hunter. His proudest possession is a flock of 50 prize falcons. When he gets bored with the affairs of state, he takes off for Pakistan with his falcons for several weeks of hunting.

The enterprising Angelos recently began making discreet inquiries about obtaining a couple of contraband falcons. But the word got back to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which assigned agent Larry Hood to the case.

Posing as a falcon trafficker, he agreed to sell two peregrines to Angelos for \$500. The businessman explained that friends at the United Arab Emirates embassy would help him get the rare birds out of the country.

Agent Hood delivered the two carefully packaged peregrines to the Baltimore airport. Angelos' courier was supposed to drive them to New York City where another courier would fly them to the waiting Angelos in Athens.

But once the money changed hands, the courier was arrested. The United Arab Emirates embassy immediately pulled strings with the State Department, which tried to hush up the falcon scandal. Last week, Angelos

quietly pleaded guilty to violating the migratory bird treaty.

An embassy spokesman, with a straight face, said the hunting falcons were intended merely as a gift for the Abu Dhabi zoo. The embassy had no idea, he said, that it was illegal to export the birds. At the State Department, a spokesman denied trying to suppress the story of the falcon thievery. In fact, he said, the department had refused, in writing, to intervene on Angelos' behalf.

Free Loans—James E. Smith, the feisty comptroller of the currency, has used official comptroller's funds to grant interest-free loans to his subordinates. They regulate national banks, which have never been known to grant interest-free loans to anyone.

Last fall, Smith gave his deputy director, William Suman, a \$14,000 interest-free loan. Smith has also approved interest-free loans for at least four other officials who work for him.

A spokesman explained that the comptroller authorized the interest-free loans to subordinates who had large relocation expenses when they moved to Washington.

The spokesman pointed out that the officials are prohibited from accepting loans from the national banks they regulate. Official funds were made available, therefore, to avoid a conflict of interest, he said.