

CIA

U.S. Investigating Loss of Notebook Containing National Security Data

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WASHINGTON, Sept. 15—The Department of Justice is conducting an investigation to determine how a notebook, which contained national security information gathered on a foreign trip by one of President Ford's key intelligence advisers, was lost and fell into the hands of an ex-convict and self-styled journalist, Government officials said Wednesday.

The notebook, a three-by-five inch Government-issue tablet, was used by Cmdr. Lionel Herbert Olmer of the Navy to keep notes of the conversations of Leo Cherne, a member of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, during a fact-finding mission in March 1975.

Mr. Cherne, who is now chairman of the board, said in an interview that he had been assigned to make the trip by the board's former chairman, Admiral George W. Anderson. A high Administration source said, however, that the trip had been ordered by Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger, who then was also Mr. Ford's chief adviser for national security affairs.

Three Main Problems to Study

Mr. Cherne said that he was to study three main problems on the mission: the growing international energy crisis; the heavy unemployment being suffered by Western nations and the sharp shift of economic power to the oil producing nations.

As a "corollary matter," he said, he had been asked to determine whether disclosures about domestic activity by the Central Intelligence Agency raised by The New York Times in December 1974 had affected the ability of the United States to gather foreign intelligence.

Commander Olmer said in an interview that he had tried to keep careful and complete notes of what was said at each session during the trip, which occurred March 14-29, 1975. He is an intelligence officer and a specialist in cryptology, or secret language.

Commander Olmer said he was sure the notebook was in his possession the entire time until at least 30 minutes before the Trans World Airlines flight he and Mr. Cherne were aboard on their return trip landed at Kennedy International Airport in New York.

Commander Olmer said he realized the book was missing when he arrived at his home in suburban Maryland the same day. After a search of his house, he immediately reported the loss to Wheaton Byers, executive secretary of the foreign advisory board.

Mr. Byers and Commander Olmer said that they tried unsuccessfully to locate the book through the airlines and other means. Mr. Byers said the loss was then reported to Admiral Anderson and to the Central Intelligence Agency, which determined that the contents were "classified" and that their publication "would be injurious to the national security of the United States."

Call from a Journalist

Mr. Cherne and Commander Olmer said in separate interviews that the contents might also be "embarrassing," as Mr. Cherne put it, since they included candid assessments by American officials of their superiors and foreign officials.

On July 24, 1975, Mr. Cherne said he received a call from Michael Casey, who identified himself as a free-lance journalist and who said he had the notebook.

Mr. Cherne said he had received "guidance" from Federal authorities he would not name (reportedly the F.B.I.) to "string him along, maintain contact, not to set too much value on the book, to see if it could be recovered."

Mr. Casey, 32 years old, said in an interview that he had served time at Soledad penitentiary in California for passing forged checks and had been in prison for juvenile violations.

He said that he received the notebook from a man he would not identify aboard an Air Vietnam flight between Saigon and Hong Kong on April 23, 1975.

Mr. Casey has a record of helping Vietnamese refugees that has been confirmed by State Department and news officials. Because of this, he was retained by the International Rescue Committee in its Los Angeles office on August 18, 1975, according to Robert deVecchi, an official of the committee.

Mr. Cherne was chairman of the committee's board of directors at the time, but Mr. Casey said he did not realize that.

Mr. Casey pledged to return the notebook and on August 26, 1975, Mr. Cherne received the book by registered mail. It was at this time that the matter came under F.B.I. scrutiny.

Meanwhile, Mr. Cherne said, he had checked Mr. Casey's background with an official of the rescue committee in Hong Kong and was advised to "sever connections" with Mr. Casey immediately. He recommended that Mr. Casey be dismissed, and he was on September 18, 1975.

Mr. Casey said he met voluntarily with an assistant United States Attorney in New York in April and turned over some copies of portions of the book. He said he still possessed a copy, which he said was hidden. Mr. Casey offered to turn the copy over to The New York Times on the condition that he be retained to investigate its contents. No copy was ever made available to The Times.

Mr. Casey also said he had been interviewed by F.B.I. agents who are seeking the return of any and all copies of the book and the names of any journalists who may have seen the contents.

Reporter Given Documents

In September 1975 after returning the original copy of the notebook to Mr. Cherne, Mr. Casey showed Robert Dietrich, a reporter for The San Diego Evening Tribune, what he described as typewritten copies of the book's contents along with other purportedly secret documents allegedly obtained from the C.I.A.'s Air America office in Saigon.

Mr. Dietrich said he had a copy of the typewritten version, but declined to discuss the contents in detail.

Mr. Casey said he and Mr. Dietrich set out to investigate the contents and that a series of threatening incidents ensued, including the burglary of his home in Los Angeles.

Casey Tells of Robbery

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On Sept. 2, while staying at Washington's Mayflower Hotel, Mr. Casey reported to the police that he had been robbed at gunpoint of "about \$850" and a tape-recording of a telephone conversation between himself and Mr. Cherne made in August 1976.

Both the Washington police and the major crimes unit of the United States Attorney's office here are investigating Mr. Casey's allegations.