

5 U.S. Agents Who Guarded Agnew Set Up Tennis Firm

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Five Secret Service agents who guarded Spiro T. Agnew while he was Vice President have been principal officers of a reportedly cash-rich corporation developing commercial indoor tennis courts.

Incorporated in 1971 with the legal assistance of George W. White, Agnew's personal attorney, the firm, the Lancer Corporation, has been represented in public proceedings at least once by Charles S. Bresler, a long-time Agnew friend and ad-

viser who served on Agnew's vice presidential staff in 1969.

Lancer now has assets of more than \$500,000 in cash and securities, according to Joseph Dorsey, recreation director for the city of Bowie in Prince George's County, where Lancer is just completing its first private tennis club on public parkland leased from the city.

Dorsey said the information on Lancer's cash position came from a confidential financial statement Lancer was required to sub-

mit to the city of Bowie during negotiations with its City Council last year on the lease for the tennis club development on nearly 5 acres of city land in Whittemarsh Park on the eastern edge of Bowie.

The financial statement, which both Lancer and the city of Bowie have refused to make available to The Washington Post, lists nine stockholders in the Lancer Corporation, according to Dorsey.

Other financial details See LANCER, A10, Col. 1

LANCER, From A1

about Lancer are sketchy, except that it obtained a \$500,000 mortgage from the Consolidated Investment Co. for construction of the private tennis club in Bowie, with the public park land pledged as collateral for the loan. The city of Bowie specifically permitted this unusual arrangement in its lease with Lancer.

Lancer's president and founder is William D. Berkshire, 30, a Secret Service agent first assigned to Agnew's security detail in July, 1969. Berkshire is still assigned to guard the former Vice President, as is William T. Cravens, another Secret Service agent who also is Lancer's treasurer, according to an official spokesman for the Secret Service.

Berkshire refused last week to answer any questions about Lancer. "I don't feel there's any reason to discuss this with you at all," Berkshire told a reporter. "The business of Lancer is the business of Lancer."

However, the day after this initial response, Berkshire called the reporter back and read the following statement:

Mr. Agnew has never had, nor does he now have, any financial or other interest in Lancer Corporation."

Asked whether Agnew had approved his statement or knew of it, Berkshire said he could "speak for no one else" and could not elaborate on the statement. Agnew failed to return a reporter's call.

Robert L. DeProspero, an-

other agent who guarded former Vice President Agnew from January, 1969, to mid-1973, serves as Lancer's vice president and secretary, and Roger D. Counts, who guarded Agnew during the same period, is a director of the corporation.

A fifth Secret Service agent, John R. Simpson, who also guarded Agnew while he was Vice President, was one of the original directors of Lancer, but he said in a recent interview, "I'm no longer involved."

As a result of inquiries by The Washington Post, the Secret Service made an internal investigation of the five agents' involvement with Lancer, and found that none of them has violated Secret Service regulations pertaining to outside employment or conflicts of interest, according to Jack Warner, public affairs director for the Secret Service.

Agnew resigned from the vice presidency and pleaded no contest to a single charge of federal income tax evasion on Oct. 10. As part of a plea-bargaining agreement, the Justice Department released a 40-page exposition of evidence against Agnew documenting allegations that the former Vice President had accepted at least \$87,500 in kickbacks from a few government contractors since Agnew first entered public office in 1962.

In a nationwide television address after his resignation and sentencing, Agnew denied these charges and said he had not enriched himself at public expense.

In its 40-page document, the Justice Department did

not list the total amount of money Agnew allegedly received in kickbacks nor did Justice say how Agnew had spent the money.

George White, Agnew's attorney, said that he has "known Bill Berkshire for some time." When asked if Agnew had introduced him to Berkshire, White said, "I'm sure that's how I probably met him." White said his firm incorporated Lancer in 1971, but "we haven't represented them for about a year."

Bresler, a wealthy Washington-area developer, in addition to being a friend to Agnew, said he spoke on Lancer's behalf at a public hearing on the tennis club lease in Bowie on July 10, 1972. Bresler said Lancer had approached one of his companies to bid on the construction of the tennis club but that the deal hadn't worked out.

Bresler said he owned no stock in Lancer and was agreeable to helping them because "I've never met a finer group of men in my life. I can't believe they would do anything beyond the pale."

Asked why Berkshire and Lancer would have come to him, Bresler replied: "Ask them. Maybe it's because I'm in the construction business. I've seen the agents before, I've worked with them. A lot of them rented apartments I own and manage. People know me," Bresler said.

Asked if he thought Agnew might have invested in Lancer, Bresler said: "If I were in a position to know I wouldn't tell you anyway. In

all the years I worked with him, he put everything in a blind trust."

Lancer, like other small, privately held companies, is not obligated to reveal publicly any of its financial dealings, assets or a list of its stockholders. It is required by the state only to file a list of its officers and directors, which Lancer has done. In negotiations with the city of Bowie, Lancer officials indicated that they intend to build a number of private tennis clubs across the country.

The Whittemarsh Tennis and Recreation Facility, as the Lancer project in Bowie is called, will have six indoor tennis courts, four indoor handball courts, a sauna, and four outdoor tennis courts.

The prefabricated building now under construction is the only large structure in Whittemarsh Park, which the city of Bowie has developed as a nature and recreation area with a football field, baseball diamond and nature trail. The tennis club should open before Christmas, city officials said.

Lancer will charge an annual membership fee of \$25 for an individual and \$40 for a family. Fees for renting a court, according to Dorsey, will range from \$2 an hour in the summer to \$11 an hour in the winter. In the lease agreement, the city promised not to build any free tennis courts in Whittemarsh Park.

Lancer first approached the city of Bowie in February or March of last year with its proposal to build a private tennis club on public park land.

Dorsey, the city's recreation director, said he does not recall the exact date of Lancer's first conversation with the city. "They just walked through the door and said they wanted to build a tennis club," Dorsey said.

After considering three possible sites for the proposed club, Whitmarsh Park was agreed upon by both Lancer and the city as the best place, Dorsey said.

Bowie City Council member William W. Wildman characterized the negotiating sessions between Lancer and the Council as "hard-nosed business dealing."

Wildman said there was never any question in his mind about the propriety of building a privately owned, profit-making facility on public land. A financial statement was required of Lancer because "we were concerned that they fulfill their contractual obligations," Wildman said. "Lancer had a good presentation, they knew about tennis."

The lease negotiated between the city and Lancer provides that the corporation build the half-million-dollar tennis facility with its own money, and upon completion, deed it to the city.

The city will then lease the finished club back to Lancer for 15 years at an annual rental charge of \$2,000 per year. Lancer has an option to extend its lease for 5 more years after the original 15-year lease expires.

In addition to the \$2,000 yearly guaranteed rental, the city receives a percentage of gross receipts and pretax income from the tennis club and reserves the right to inspect Lancer's books. Dorsey said the city expects a total of between \$8,000 and \$10,000 a year from the tennis club.

The most controversial aspect of the Lancer lease is the corporation's right to use the public park land on which the tennis club is to be located as collateral for Lancer's \$500,000 loan from Consolidated Investment Co. Joseph Casula, now Prince George's County attorney and then Bowie city attorney, said recently that he questioned the advisability of this provision last year when the lease was signed. He concluded, however, that the provision was not illegal, Gasula said.

Denis L. Murray, Bowie's present city attorney, said Consolidated Investment does have the right to sell the public park land at public auction should Lancer default on its mortgage payments.

"Of course, we (the city of Bowie) would step in and redeem the land," Murray said. The attorney also pointed out that the city may step in and assume Lancer's mortgage payments should it appear that the private company might go bankrupt.