

CIA Office That Lost Its Cover

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Singapore

A man who gave his name as Arthur H. Hochberg left Singapore hurriedly about two years ago, and has not been heard from since.

He left in such a rush that he did not even tell his office landlord that he was pulling out and closing down his small office.

His two local employees were puzzled, as was the landlord, but they were not angry, for he had been a congenial employer and had paid his rent several months in advance.

The landlord did have one small complaint, however: Hochberg had put a special lock on his private, inner office and the landlord had to bring in locksmiths to open it after Hochberg vanished.

All of this would not be very unusual in Singapore, which is an international commercial center where foreign businessmen come and go in large numbers, except that a couple of days ago a report by the minority staff of the Senate Watergate committee revealed that the company Hochberg worked for has for many years been providing "cover" for Central Intelligence Agency operatives stationed abroad.

The firm is Robert R. Mullen and Co., a Washington public relations concern. The Senate committee came up with the information about Mullen as a byproduct of its inquiry into the role

played by the CIA in the Watergate scandal.

The apparent reason for Hochberg's sudden departure from Singapore, according to the report, was that a short time earlier, a CIA agent in Latin America, who was broke and despondent, had given away several agency secrets to a Russian intelligence agent. The CIA man had also revealed the CIA function of the Mullen company, according to the report.

The Senate report said that the president of the Mullen company, Robert F. Bennett, a son of Senator Wallace F. Bennett of Utah, was not told that the secret was out and that the "blown cover" was the real reason the Singapore operation was closed down. Bennett was instead given a "scenario which included a falsified Watergate publicity crisis" as the reason for closing the office, the report said.

The connection between the Singapore episode and Watergate is extremely murky. The only possible connection known is that E. Howard Hunt Jr., a former CIA agent now serving a prison sentence for his role in the Watergate break-in, was employed by the Mullen company while he retained his CIA "cover security clearance."

The Senate report also said that at the time of the break-in, a CIA agent in Singapore and another in Amsterdam were said to be representing themselves as "overseas employees" of the Mullen company.

Hochberg was the only known Mullen representative in Singapore at the time.

A very limited picture of Hochberg's activities here emerged yesterday from conversations with his office landlord and one of his former employees.

The employee, a secretary, described Hochberg as an American in his mid-30s who wore horn-rimmed glasses and had tight, curly hair.

She said he was "a very fair employer" and a "cheerful" man. She presumed him to be a bachelor because he had no family with him in Singapore.

The secretary said she had the impression that Hochberg did not lead an active social life here and kept fairly much to himself.

She described her work as routine business correspondence about public relations matters. She recalled letters to some banking houses and to a cargo container company.

She said Hochberg had "his own small typewriter" in his private office.

The former employee said that Hochberg opened the office and hired her in the summer of 1971 and left Singapore a year later, in August, 1972.

Before taking the office, she said, Hochberg had apparently worked alone out of his home.

The secretary expressed puzzlement over the haste of Hochberg's departure and over the circumstances of the event. She said that the Mullen company wanted the office to remain open, but that Hochberg's departure forced the shutdown.