

George at least on paper ignored mandatory kill on Sunday. AH.

Dismissed CIA officer is linked to rifling of House panel files

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WASHINGTON — The House Assassinations Committee discovered last summer that its most sensitive files had been rifled and it then traced fingerprints on them to an officer of the Central Intelligence Agency, according to informed sources.

The incident involved surreptitious entry of a combination safe at the congressional committee's offices, the sources said. The safe was reserved for physical evidence of President Kennedy's assassination, including the autopsy photos, X-rays, and other articles such as the so-called "magic bullet" that wounded both Kennedy and Texas Gov. John B. Connally.

Apparently nothing had been taken but, the sources said, there was no doubt that the files in the safe had been tampered with. For instance, they said, the autopsy photos of the head shot that killed Kennedy had been taken out of their slip cases and were left in disarray inside the three-drawer safe.

"It looked as though someone had just run out," one source said.

AFTER SEVERAL INQUIRIES by a reporter this week, the CIA acknowledged that it has dismissed the individual in question, but indicated that it plans no further action.

"We're satisfied that it was just a matter of curiosity (on the individual CIA officer's part)," said CIA spokesman Herbert Hetu.

Asked whether it might have been a matter of conscious CIA spying on a congressional committee, Hetu replied, "Good Lord, no."

The unauthorized entry was discovered when committee staffers arrived at work early one morning last summer, probably last July, sources said.

"Blakey (the House committee's chief counsel, G. Robert Blakey) was told right away," one source recounted. "Only three or four people were supposed to have access to that safe. And I understand that one of them said he'd locked it the night before."

FINGERPRINT EXPERTS from the District of Columbia police department — where several committee staffers had friends — were called in. By then, someone had thoughtlessly had the documents rearranged neatly, so that there were other prints on them and on the safe. But the security-conscious committee reportedly had fingerprint records of everyone who worked there, both those with access to the safe and those who had no business being there.

Sources said the only unauthorized set of prints the police found belonged to Regis T. Blahut, a CIA liaison officer who had been detailed to assist the committee with the CIA records it needed for its investigations.

"His fingerprints were all over the place," one source reported. "On the photos, inside the safe, and on all sorts of different packages."

Particularly telling, another source indicated, was the fact that some of the prints were found on autopsy photos themselves rather than the plastic slip covers in which they had been encased.

THE EPISODE REPORTEDLY produced a great wave of anxiety within the CIA, which has been claiming for several years now that it has learned its lessons and that its domestic spying and misdeeds are relics of the past. In any case, the agency launched an intensive internal investigation, including polygraph examinations of Blahut and perhaps a number of his superiors.

In a brief telephone interview with The Washington Post, Blahut denied any wrongdoing. He acknowledged that his fingerprints had been found on the documents in question, but insisted there was an innocent explanation. He refused, however, to say what that was.

"There's other things that are involved that are detrimental to other things," he said. Asked what he meant by that, he refused to elaborate.

"I SIGNED AN OATH of secrecy (with the CIA)," he said. "I cannot discuss it any further."

Sources quoted Blakey, who was kept informed of the CIA's in-house inquiry, as having stated on several occasions that Blahut had been given three polygraph examinations in all and that he had failed them in important respects.

"He denied he did it and he flunked that," one source said. "They also asked him whether anyone ordered him to do it. He said no one and he flunked that."

Blahut, who said he worked for the CIA Office of Security, insisted that he had come through the tests with his credibility unblemished.

"I'VE ALREADY DEFENDED myself to my employers," he said when asked about the incident. "As far as I'm concerned, that's all cleared up."

Blakey, who has been working on the now moribund assassination committee's final report in recent weeks, refused to comment. Sources said he seized on the incident last year and used it as leverage to get the CIA to cough up a number of documents it had been holding back from the committee. Some of the records reportedly pertained to Lee Harvey Oswald's visit to Mexico City in September 1963.

"There was a marked improvement," one former staffer recalled. "All of a sudden, they were giving us everything we wanted. Blakey kept saying he wanted to go slow, to let them (the CIA) conduct the investigation. . . . But I think he'd have to admit we wanted better cooperation."