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Courier Who Admitted Spying Gets Prison Term

Judge Blames Firm for Security Breach

By Nancy Lewis
Washington Post Staff Writer

Randy Miles Jeffries, who pleaded guilty to espionage after offering to sell an undercover FBI agent a transcript of a closed congressional hearing, was sentenced here yesterday to three to nine years in prison by a federal judge, who said he "primarily" blamed Acme Reporting Co. for the security breach and asked why it was not being prosecuted.

Jeffries, 26, of 143 Rhode Island Ave. NE, who was employed as a messenger for Acme, met twice last December with Soviet agents and gave them 60 pages of transcripts that he had stolen from Acme.

Several days later Jeffries offered to sell the FBI agent, who was posing as a Soviet agent named "Vlad," a transcript of testimony before the House Armed Services Committee. The testimony, by Assistant Army Secretary Donald C. Latham and Army Vice Chief of Staff Gen. Maxwell Thurman, compared Soviet and U.S. weaponry, according to court documents.

"Where is Acme?" U.S. District Judge Gerhard A. Gesell asked Assistant U.S. Attorney Rhonda Fields. Saying that the company had "spewed these confidential documents all over for people to take," he questioned why Acme hadn't been prosecuted.

"Why should they be a reporting firm getting the benefit of federal money after what they've done?" Gesell continued.

"I don't understand a U.S. attorney's office that hasn't done anything about it," he said.

Fields replied that "we have and are moving" on an investigation of Acme, and said that the firm's security clearance allowing them to process transcripts of classified materials has been "lifted."

U.S. Attorney Joseph E. diGenova said after the hearing that "Acme Reporting is and has been the subject of an extensive federal investigation concerning violations of federal laws concerning classified information and unauthorized disclosure and improper handling."

A federal official said investigators have also consulted with members of the defense and intelligence communities about Acme's handling of classified documents.

According to an affidavit filed with the court, FBI agents who searched Acme after Jeffries' arrest found documents marked "secret" and "top secret" that had been ripped into four pieces and thrown into a trash cash.

Jeffries' attorney, Allen Dale, said in court that this was the normal procedure at Acme for disposing of documents and that the firm did not own a shredding machine. Defense regulations require classified documents to be burned or shredded.

"The running joke at Acme was, 'What would the Communists pay?' " Dale said.

Officials of Acme did not return telephone calls yesterday.

Steven Ross, general counsel for the House of Representatives, said that under a policy instituted within days of Jeffries' arrest all closed hearings are now being transcribed by staff court reporters. If at any time there were more hearings than available staff reporters, Ross said, any outside reporting firm would be required to make the transcriptions "on site."

No action has been taken to terminate or alter Acme's existing contract, Ross said, pending the final determination by the Justice Department on whether the firm will be prosecuted.

Dale told Gesell that Jeffries hadn't actually planned to sell the transcripts to the Soviets, but to use them to "dupe" the Soviets into paying for documents that weren't authentic.

"I'm sorry," Jeffries told Gesell, attributing his problems to drugs. "I'm not a spy; the intents were not treacherous, they were desperation."

"I cannot accept the idea that the type of conduct in which you are involved can ever be excused on the basis of drugs," Gesell said.

"I think you really are not an addict," he said. "I think you've enjoyed drugs from time to time . . . . I think you have been using it as an excuse for some of the things you've done."

Gesell ordered Jeffries to serve his sentence, of which he must serve at least three years, at Ray Brook federal prison in New York, which he said has a drug treatment program as well as educational facilities for learning a trade.

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