

Time running out for jury in probe of Nazi suspect

By HERB JAFFE

A federal grand jury in Manhattan, which has been investigating the World War II activities of Passaic County public employe Tscherm Soobzokov for 15 months, has one year remaining to determine if there is probable cause that Soobzokov perjured himself.

The question of perjury, which has a five-year statute of limitations, is only one of the matters of official concern in the Soobzokov investigation being handled by the office of U.S. Attorney Robert Fiske of the Southern District.

Affidavits and other documents produced last week by a high-ranking Soviet diplomat reveal facts which conflict with sworn statements given by Soobzokov Sept. 30, 1974, to a Newark investigator for the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS).

At that time the Newark INS office was conducting an investigation of Soobzokov on allegations that he was a Nazi collaborator who participated in executions and atrocities against civilians in his native North Caucasus region of Russia during World War II.

Soobzokov came to the U.S. from Jordan in 1955 and became a naturalized citizen in 1961. He has lived in Paterson since he came to this country. At present he is the chief inspector of the Passaic County Purchasing Department.

As a prelude to the 10-page sworn statement signed by Soobzokov four years ago, Newark INS investigator James Pomeroy said the statement was being taken regarding:

"Allegations made against you concerning your activities during the Second World War that could have a bearing on your United States citizenship and result in the institution of deportation proceedings."

Two and one-half years after Soobzokov's statement was given to Pomeroy, the INS investigation of

him ended, based on a memo from the U.S. State Department, concluding: "Allegations not sustained."

But less than five months afterward, the federal grand jury in New York initiated its investigation, and four months later — last October — INS officials said they, too, were reopening their investigation of Soobzokov.

Shortly afterward, Assistant U.S. Attorney Thomas Belote of the Southern District initiated administrative procedures for denaturalization against Soobzokov.

Since last May, however, there has been little movement by the U.S. attorney's office in presenting data relative to the Soobzokov matter to the grand jury, although Thomas Engel, chief of the criminal section in Fiske's office, said the case is still under consideration and that "the matter will be decided one way or another."

Moreover, since last May the U.S. attorney's office has had a considerable number of documents, obtained in the Soviet Union, relative to Soobzokov's World War II activities.

The documents include many which were in the package presented last week by Valentin Kamenev, first secretary and counsel to the Soviet Embassy in Washington, to Nazi war crimes researcher and author Charles R. Allen Jr. of New York, based on a formal request for such information made by Allen last April.

Among the documents which Kamenev said came from the Soviet archives in Moscow are 18 affidavits, several letters allegedly written by Soobzokov during the 1940s and a variety of other papers.

The affidavits, which include statements given to Soviet prosecutors under the Russian equivalent of sworn testimony — which carries serious penalties for falsified information — include statements from several of Soobzokov's relatives who recall that he served in a Nazi-established collaborator unit and wore a German uniform.

In his 1974 statement, under oath, Soobzokov was asked if he was aware of any Nazi execution squads in his region of the Caucasus, after the Nazis invaded the area Aug. 8, 1942, or if he ever took part in any executions.

"Absolutely not," Soobzokov replied to Pomeroy. But the statements requested by Allen from Kamenev, most of which say that they were taken by Soviet prosecutors "in connection with the request" of the U.S.A. organs of justice to render to them legal assistance in the matter of Tscherm Soobzokov, "tell a different story."

Several affidavits identify Soobzokov as a "sergeant" in a punitive unit of the Nazi-established battalion, others are from relatives of victims executed by the unit, one is from a man who said he served under Soobzokov in the unit, and another is from a man who said he was Soobzokov's platoon leader when he entered the unit.

Soobzokov was asked by Pomeroy if he was ever in the village of Edepyukay. At that time there were two such villages, Edepyukay I and Edepyukay II.

His sworn reply was: "No, never." But several affidavits which Kamenev provided. Allen are from persons who lived in the two villages.

Widows and other relatives of victims of the punishment unit detail how the unit, supposedly a platoon composed of between 10 and 15 armed soldiers in German uniforms, came and dragged away certain civilians to be slain.

Several of the affidavits are from persons who identified Soobzokov and allege that he was either member of the punitive unit or its leader.

There are supporting affidavits from persons who identified other members of the unit. And these other members, in their own affidavits, identified Soobzokov as being a part of the unit.

Members of the unit who gave affidavits said in their official statements that they have served sentences in Soviet prisons for their role as Nazi collaborators, while others who served in the unit are no longer alive.

Asked by Pomeroy to describe his duties with the unit, Soobzokov said:

"My duties were supplies. I was able to get a job as assistant to the supply battalion working with horses, getting hay from the towns and feeding the horses. I had three or four carts to gather hay."

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