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FBI Frustrated in Search for Anti-Red Leader

Family of Eight Disappeared 16 Months Ago—Car Found

By ROBERT H. COLLINS
of the Post-Dispatch Staff

The mysterious disappearance 16 months ago of John R. Harrell and seven members of his family has been a frustrating case for the Federal Bureau of Investigation, which has had as many as 100 agents working on it at one time, an authority connected with the search told the Post-Dispatch yesterday.

Harrell was the wealthy leader of the anti-Communist Christian Conservative Church. His automobile was found on a side road near Springfield, Ill., April 1, 1963. He was reported to have been carrying between \$14,000 and \$20,000 at the time of his disappearance.

Robert B. DePugh, national leader of the Minutemen and friend of Harrell, said he believed Harrell and his family are being held captive.

Dead or In Hiding

Some law enforcement officials believe that Harrell and his family are hiding. Others think they may be dead.



John R. Harrell

Friend Believes Harrell Is Held by Communists or CIA

Shortly after Harrell's disappearance, DePugh offered a reward of \$5000 for information about the family's whereabouts. DePugh, Norborne, Mo., is president of Biolab Corp., a pharmaceutical firm.

Questioned by FBI

DePugh said the FBI has questioned him many times about Harrell's disappearance. "FBI agents try to leave the impression they believe John is hiding out," DePugh said.

At the time of his disappearance, Harrell was en route to Springfield for a conference with officials of the Internal Revenue Service about income tax problems. Harrell operated a mausoleum and construction business.

He had oil well and real estate holdings.

The FBI first showed official interest in the Harrell case last November when he did not appear for trial in United States district court at East St. Louis on charges of harboring an AWOL Marine.

In August 1962, the FBI and Illinois State Police raided Harrell's 100-acre estate at Louis-

"I don't believe it is possible for a man and seven members of his family to hide from the FBI this long," DePugh said. "It's almost impossible for one man to elude the FBI for that length of time, not to mention two women and five children." The FBI officially entered the search last November.

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ville, Ill., to seize the Marine, who had been given refuge by Harrell.

"I heard from John two days before he disappeared," DePugh related. "He said he had some extremely important information and would meet me at the Lexington, Mo., airport, but he called later and said he had decided to drive his automobile."

Evidence on Reds

"He said he had documentary proof of Communist membership of some highly placed people in Government. He did not name them over the phone. He said he felt he should give me the information in person."

DePugh said that Harrell was not a member of the Minutemen, a secret anti-Communist group that specializes in armed guerrilla tactics in preparation for "a last-ditch fight against the Communists when they finally subvert the United States."

"There are two reasons why it is illogical to assume the Harrells are hiding out somewhere," DePugh said:

"(1) They left their baby behind. I know of an instance in which John and his wife went on a vacation without the children. After four days, she insisted they cut the vacation short and return home because she missed the baby and was worried about him. It doesn't make sense that they would leave the baby for a year and four months."

"(2) John's mother was with him. I could conceive that he might have felt himself in danger and that there was so much pressure against him that he would hide out, but his mother was a hard-headed old business lady who was not the type to have anything to do with any voluntary disappearance."

Letter Cited

"So I find it difficult to believe he's hiding. The letter he wrote saying he was being held prisoner seems to indicate he is alive."

Last October, three letters signed "John H. Harrell" were mailed with Cairo, Ill., postmarks. The Rev. A. Vance Comer, president of the Christian Conservative Church, who received one of the letters, said he was convinced that, as the letters said, Harrell was being held captive by Communists and was being questioned about his church

movement and knowledge of Communists in the United States.

"I feel that the FBI is skeptical about the letters from what they have said to me," the Rev. Mr. Comer said. "I know it does sound fantastic and unbelievable, but everything the Communists do is unbelievable."

DePugh said that FBI agents have told him that handwriting analysts have determined that it was Harrell's handwriting. "People who knew John also have said it was his handwriting," DePugh related. "I don't completely discount the possibility it was a forgery. It could be that he was dead and somebody wanted the authorities to think, for some reason, that he was still alive."

Lists Possible Abductors

Only three organizations in this country—the FBI, the Central Intelligence Agency and the Communists—are capable of "so completely hiding a man, two women and five children for such a long period of time," DePugh asserted.

"The FBI would never be a party to such a trick, and there's no reason why it should be, so that leaves the other two," DePugh said.

He said that the Communists were his prime suspects but that he would not eliminate the CIA from suspicion because "it has come under Communist influence."

DePugh said that the CIA "has exceeded its grant of authority. It was established to operate outside the United States. The FBI has jurisdiction within the United States. The FBI, relatively speaking, is a patriotic organization. It is trustworthy."

"John Harrell wasn't the fanatic a lot of people thought," DePugh said. "I know the Communists considered him dangerous."

Tells of Hideout

"Some time before his disappearance, John had bought a hideout and about \$100,000 worth of food, general supplies and military equipment, including several hundred rifles and a large quantity of ammunition. I don't know where the hideout was, but I would guess it was in New Mexico."

DePugh was highly critical of the Federal Government for its "long delay" in beginning an investigation of the disappearance.

"John's friends asked the FBI to investigate, and they said it was beyond their jurisdiction until they finally came into the case some seven months after he and his family disappeared," DePugh said.

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