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Intrigue In Otepka Probe Increases, Testimony Shows

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(Washington Bureau of The Sun)

Washington, Jan. 6 — Another layer of intrigue was added today to the struggle between the State Department and the Senate Internal Security subcommittee over the Otepka case.

J. G. Sourwine, the subcommittee counsel, suggested in the latest release of testimony that members of his staff were investigated by the State Department's Office of Security.

David I. Belisle, a State Department witness, denied having anything to do with the alleged probe of the Senate group that specializes in probes.

His only information in this regard, Belisle explained, was Sourwine's personal statement that he had been questioned by the FBI. But as for a State Department investigation of Sourwine and his staff—Belisle said he never heard it even discussed.

This latest whiff of espionage and counter-espionage between two rival Government units came as the subcommittee kept up its pressure in the Otepka case.

Otto F. Otepka, the department's security-risk evaluations chief, is under dismissal charges for having leaked information about his superiors to the Senate subcommittee and for having suggested questions that Sourwine could ask of witnesses.

While Otepka continues to draw his Government salary pending his appeal, two State Department men who investigated him have resigned their posts. They are John F. Reilly, former deputy assistant secretary for security and Otepka's one-time immediate superior, and Elmer Dewey Hill, chief of the technical services division under Reilly.

Reilly quit last November after testifying that an attempt had been made to "bug" Otepka's telephone. He said his earlier testimony might have misled the subcommittee into thinking no effort had been made to intercept Otepka's conversations.

Hill resigned for the same general reasons. But according to Senator Dodd (D., Conn.), the subcommittee chairman, Hill also testified that actual conversations had been intercepted as a result of the tapping of Otepka's telephone. The senator said this conflicted with the testimony of Reilly, who denied the tap had worked or had been put into operation.

Belisle in the testimony given November 14 and released today said he had been told the wiretap had "fizzled."

The idea that the tap on Otepka's phone might not have worked drew an angry response from Senator McClellan (D., Ark.) "I don't believe this dubious story that you tapped it and got no information because you weren't capable of tapping it properly," he told the witness.

"... I can't understand the security officers of the State Department in that business not being capable of putting on a successful wiretap on a telephone in their own department. It doesn't make sense to me."

Belisle, who still is an employee of the State Department, insisted under lengthy cross-examination that he was "amplifying" but not "correcting" testimony he had given the subcommittee in July.

In his July appearance, according to the record, he answered "No, Sir." When asked: "Do you

have any information with respect to the tapping of the telephone of Mr. Otto Otepka, chief of the division of evaluations of the Department of State?"

When he came before the subcommittee, Belisle repeatedly said his answer was based on the fact that he had neither seen nor taken part in the bugging of Otepka's phone and therefore regarded information he had been given by Reilly as "hearsay" which he did not feel he had to mention to senators.

Question Pressed
"Can you sit there," Senator Hruska (R., Neb.) asked the witness, "and tell this committee that, in your considered judgment, you were telling the truth when you answered 'No, Sir?'"

"Senator," Belisle replied, "I did not have first-hand information of it, and therefore that is why I answered it that way."

Hruska retorted by saying: "I think that explanation is an affront to this whole committee." Belisle said the wiretap had been taken off Otepka's telephone after a check had been made of the discarded trash Otepka had placed in "burn bags" the State Department uses for disposal of security documents.

The burn bags contained carbon papers showing questions Otepka allegedly was preparing for Sourwine's use in interrogating Reilly and Belisle. The evaluations officer had been feuding with his superiors over what he felt to be laxity in screening security risks... a belief shared by the Communist-hunting Senate subcommittee.

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Also Takes Stand

Thomas Ehrlich, a State Department legal adviser, also took the witness stand November 14 to tell how Reilly, Hill and Belisle prepared statements "amplifying" their earlier testimony at the request of Dean Rusk, Secretary of State, and George W. Ball, Under Secretary of State.

Ehrlich related that Rusk and Ball indicated a desire that statements be prepared before November 5, the date on which the possibility of perjury was mentioned in an exchange on the Senate floor between Senators Dodd and Thurmond (D., S.C.).

But he said the amplifying letters sent to the subcommittee were not prepared until a few hours after the Dodd-Thurmond colloquy.

Ehrlich said he and Ball went to Rusk's office where the Secretary of State glanced at the statements and then handed them back to Ball for transmittal to the subcommittee.