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Spy-case figure hopes CIA links will help him

By David Willman

Staff Writer

William Bell Hugle, the Silicon Valley entrepreneur named as a target of a federal grand jury espionage probe, has performed "several jobs" for the Central Intelligence Agency, he told the Mercury News on Wednesday.

In a wide-ranging interview by phone from his suite at a Paris hotel, Hugle denied any involvement in the espionage under investigation and said he hopes his past links with the CIA will help shield him from prosecution.

"I'd like to think," he said, "that if push comes to shove, that I'll have the support of the CIA. I've done several jobs for the CIA in several countries for them."

"I have talked with them and cooperated with them in many cases."

Hugle would not elaborate on what those jobs entailed, but he said he was never paid for any of the work. A spokesman for the CIA in Washington, D.C., did not return a phone call on the subject.

Hugle has previously said that he aided the State Department during the Iran hostage crisis in 1979-1980. The State Department has verified that Hugle assisted in the negotiations with Iran, apparently as a liaison with his son-in-law, Ali Reza Nobari. Nobari at the time was governor of the Central Bank of Iran and was considered a top aide to then-President Abolhasan Bani-Sadr.

Hugle has been named as a central figure in the government's espionage case against Mountain View resident James D. Harper Jr.

Harper, a Silicon Valley engineer and promoter, was arrested Oct. 15 and later indicted by a grand jury on six counts of espionage and three counts of tax evasion. He allegedly stole Minuteman missile secrets and sold them to Polish agents. The secrets allegedly were later delivered to Russian agents.

An FBI affidavit composed in support of Harper's arrest contained an allegation that Harper had agreed to give Hugle one-third of the \$250,000 to \$1 million paid by the Soviet bloc for the military secrets.

The FBI document, which named Hugle 19 times, also said that Harper had known him as "the Big Man" who first introduced him to a Polish intelligence officer. Moreover, a federal prosecutor on Nov. 10 said in open court that Hugle was a "target" of the same grand jury in San Francisco that indicted Harper on Dec. 9.

But Hugle has not been indicted, and, with less than three weeks until Harper is to go on trial, prosecutors steadfastly have refused to discuss his status.

In the interview Wednesday, Hugle said he is confident he will not be indicted on any espionage charges because he has done nothing wrong.

'No evidence whatsoever'

While Hugle recalled first meeting Harper in 1972, he said he has not seen him for five years. He said he also knew Zdzislaw Przychodzien, who the FBI says is a Polish agent. But Hugle said he does not recall whether he introduced the two.

"There's no evidence whatsoever that I was involved in that case," he said. "I think the espionage thing has to be kind of a laugh, in a way. . . . I was there in California and they could have indicted me already. And I appeared (before the grand jury in San Francisco) all the times they asked me to appear."

Hugle said the FBI and the U.S. Attorney's Office assisted him early this year in obtaining a new 10-year passport when other agencies were insisting that he was eligible only for a five-year passport.

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