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Agent Says Spy Suspect Told of Secrets Sale

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JACKSONVILLE, Fla., Sept. 26 — Testifying as though reading from a spy thriller, an agent of the Federal Bureau of Investigation said yesterday that Joseph G. Helmich Jr. admitted he had slipped top-secret codes to agents of the Soviet Union in France in 1963.

The Federal agent, James K. Murphy, testified that Mr. Helmich told him of high-speed automobile rides through the dark streets of Paris, secret meetings in back-street cafes and clandestine trips to the Soviet Union's Embassy and trade mission.

Mr. Helmich, 44 years old, is charged

with selling the Russians ciphers, a coding machine and maintenance instructions while stationed with the United States Signal Corps in Paris and at Fort Bragg, N.C., in 1963 and 1964. The Federal Government contends that the secrets he is accused of selling for \$131,000 could have enabled the Soviet Union to decipher and read American messages "scrambled" for security reasons during the Vietnam War.

Testifying in Federal District Court here, the F.B.I. agent said Mr. Helmich told about his dealings with a Russian agent named Viktor Lyubimov in interviews last February at a hotel in Niagara Falls, N.Y.

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Mr. Helmich was then working for a hardware store there. He moved last June to Jacksonville Beach, where he was arrested July 15 on a four-count indictment charging him with espionage.

Mr. Murphy said Mr. Helmich volunteered his story in the Niagara Falls interviews. Defense attorneys had asked that information from the meetings be suppressed because Mr. Helmich was not advised of his legal rights and did not have an attorney present until the ninth interview.

Mr. Murphy quoted Mr. Helmich as saying he got into financial trouble in Paris and was given 24 hours to settle his debts and bad checks or face discharge from the Army. Mr. Helmich was quoted as saying he tried to borrow the money but failed.

"He decided to contact the Russians and make some money that way," Mr. Murphy said.

Visit to Russian Embassy

He said Mr. Helmich recalled looking up the address of the Russian Embassy in Paris in a telephone book and going there in civilian clothes to avoid suspicion. The agent quoted Mr. Helmich as telling a woman in the embassy that he wanted to speak to a military attaché.

Mr. Murphy said Mr. Helmich recalled bringing a teletype message that he had retrieved from a "burn bag" at the Signal Corps center in a blockhouse in Paris and offering it for \$20,000, the agent said.

He said Mr. Helmich told him two Russians at the embassy did not think the information was worth \$20,000 but agreed to meet him privately later.

The next day Mr. Helmich was given 50,000 francs, or about \$1,000 in United States currency, which he used to pay his debts, the agent testified.

Plans for Tipoff

Mr. Helmich was quoted as saying Viktor wanted to know about American communications and any military plans for the United States to invade or attack the Soviet Union. Mr. Helmich was quoted as saying the Russians gave him an address in Switzerland at which he could tip them off to any American attack by ordering railroad ties. The number of ties, say 1,230, would indicate the time of attack.

Mr. Murphy said Mr. Helmich told of delivering photographs, manuals and a parts list for a coding machine known as the KL-7. Mr. Helmich said that he received initial cash payments of \$2,000 and \$5,000 and that his pay from the Russians went from \$15,000 to \$20,000 for each delivery of classified materials, the agent said.