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CIA AGENT OR CON MAN? Keiser  
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MAMARONECK, NY

Ernest Keiser has been described as an undercover intelligence agent, a professional con artist and a mystery man who exists in a "bizaare world."

Keiser, 65, helped the federal government lure renegade CIA agent Edwin Wilson from Libya in 1982. Besides trapping Wilson, Keiser claimed to be working on capturing fugitive financier Robert Vesco, and had offered help in finding Nazi criminal Josef Mengele.

Keiser has been missing from his northern Virginia home since Jan. 31 and is believed to have jumped \$5,000 bail, authorities say.

"There's no question in my mind he jumped bail," said Westchester, N.Y., County Assistant Prosecutor Tony Berk. "Finding him is not imminent."

"I'm not sure that anyone outside of his immediate family knows who he is," said former federal prosecutor Chris Hoyer. "He exists and functions in a bizarre world."

Hoyer said there were too many strange stories from the man, who spoke with a German accent.

The mention of Keiser's name prompted one of his neighbors to say: "We don't discuss Ernest Keiser, sorry."

Berk, who called Keiser a "professional con artist," had sought to have \$5,000 bail forfeited after Keiser was convicted of land fraud in White Plains, N.Y. in the belief Keiser would vanish.

Judge Gerard Delaney, who continued bail despite Berk's argument, noted Keiser's "rather colorful background," but said federal authorities would have taken Keiser to Florida anyway for another trial.

"In all probability I was going to fine him rather than put him in jail," added Delaney. "He's in his 60s and I didn't want to saddle taxpayers with his care."

Keiser's attorney William Aronwald acknowledged Keiser's intelligence work, but called him a businessman.

Keiser had been ordered to report to Aronwald every three days. He last spoke to the attorney Jan. 28, and a few days later left his home in McLean, Va., a Washington suburb, with his wife, Bahira, and mother-in-law, Margaret Demachkie. He has not been heard from since.

When Keiser failed to attend a pre-sentence meeting in White Plains and the Florida trial, warrants were issued. His wife also is being sought.

Family clothing, cars, dogs and bank accounts were nowhere to be seen and officials speculated the family has fled the country.

Keiser approached the government about helping capture Wilson when the former CIA agent was charged with smuggling arms to Libya. He helped persuade Wilson to go to the Dominican Republic and then to New York to resume CIA work, he said.

But when Wilson arrived in New York he was arrested, tried and sentenced to more than 60 years.

Prosecutors speculated Keiser felt his federal work and contacts would enable him to beat the charges he himself faced.

Not much was known about how Keiser got involved in the search for Vesco, who fled the country 13 years ago when he was sought for taking part in misappropriating \$224 million from Investors Overseas Service.

Vesco also was charged with making illegal contributions to President Richard Nixon's 1972 election campaign.

Keiser lived in Mamaroneck during the Wilson case and was convicted of swindling neighbor John Farris of \$415,000 in the same Florida land deal he used to entice Wilson to return to the United States, where he was arrested.

Keiser's conviction for grand larceny and issuing a false financial statement stemmed from a 1980 claim he owned 2,000 acres of land near Orlando, Fla.

Keiser was going to develop it and sought Farris' investment. Prosecutors said Keiser only had an option on the land, which is 60 percent swamp.

Keiser sustained a gunshot wound in December, and one claim was that Wilson or Vesco may have shot him, delaying Keiser's trial. Keiser said his attacker stole a briefcase containing Vesco-related documents.

Sgt. Dominic DeMarco of Westchester's warrant squad, which is looking for Keiser, said Friday the fugitive's \$300,000 Virginia house has been seized by the IRS for back taxes.

Aronwald said if Keiser stood trial in Florida he planned to require Justice officials to testify.

Keiser is charged there with telling Tampa bank executive Donald Regar that for \$60,000, he could use federal connections to fix an indictment. Mrs. Keiser faces charges she lied for him at a bail hearing. Virginia police speculated Keiser may have shot himself, but Aronwald denied that and stood by Keiser's claims of government work.

"Based on my information there's no doubt he was working on getting Vesco back," said Aronwald, who reported Keiser missing. "There were also discussions on the possibility of his helping locate or capture Mengele."

To former neighbors in Mamaroneck, Keiser was a quiet mystery man.

Frances Stern called the family friendly but "not very talkative."

"The mother-in-law spoke German and I spoke German," said Stern, noting the family left their rented home suddenly. "I never knew what he was doing. He was traveling and there were rumors of the CIA."