

Justice Department Looking At Alleged CIA Ties To Commune

CAROLYN SKORNECK December 17, 1993

WASHINGTON (AP) _ The Justice Department said Friday it is investigating allegations the CIA used a "front company" run by a commune to train agency employees and that the CIA blocked investigation of the group.

The CIA denied any ties to the commune, called the Finders.

Justice Department spokesman John Russell said the department is looking into the allegations, contained in Customs Service documents sent to some members of Congress.

CIA spokesman David Christian called the charges "ridiculous." He said, "The alleged facts are wrong, and any implication the CIA obstructed justice is outrageous. Conspiracy stories abound, and they often grab headlines in the tabloid press, but this is one of the weirdest we've heard."

The Washington Times reported Friday that the CIA had ties to the Finders, a Washington-based group once accused of engaging in Satanic rituals, child abuse and pornography.

The charges were raised in the 1980s by law enforcement officials, but none resulted in prosecution.

Christian said Friday the CIA sent some employees to a company called Future Enterprises Inc. for computer training in the 1980s. But the spokesman said the CIA did not know about any connections between the company and the Finders and added the company "was in no sense a CIA front or ever owned or operated by anyone for the CIA."

Joseph Marinich, vice president of Future Enterprises, said the company has trained CIA employees in computer use and continues to do so, but that it has never been a front for anyone.

"I'm shocked and appalled" at the allegations, he said. "This is stuff that I could never have imagined."

Marinich said one Finders member, former Internal Revenue Service employee Robert Garder Terrell, worked for the company before he was let go in February 1987.

That month the Finders gained notoriety when two members were accused of child abuse in Tallahassee, Fla. The men spent six weeks in jail before a judge dismissed the charges.

Police at one time had called the Finders a cult that might be practicing Satanic rituals, child abuse and pornography. But former District of Columbia Police Chief Maurice Turner said the department found no evidence of criminal wrongdoing.

Metropolitan Police Officer Robert Garisto declined comment Friday.

The Customs Service documents that have prompted attention to the alleged CIA-Finders tie include an April 13, 1987, report by a Customs agent who participated in raids on Finders' properties in Washington and Virginia.

The agent sent the documents to members of Congress and has pushed for an investigation, officials said Friday.

The Washington Times reported that the agent provided documents suggesting the CIA was blocking investigations of the Finders by the FBI and District of Columbia police.

The newspaper also said a police document of Feb. 19, 1987, quotes a CIA agent as confirming that his agency was sending its people to "a Finders Corp., Future Enterprises, for training in computer operations."

A later Customs report says the CIA "admitted to owning the Finders organization as a front for a domestic computer training operation but that it had 'gone bad,'" the newspaper said.

Customs spokesman Bill Anthony said Tallahassee police contacted Customs about the group during an anti-pornography crackdown led by then-Attorney General Edwin Meese III.

"We were totally tangential to all of this" and Customs dropped the matter when it found no Customs violations, Anthony said. "Nobody asked us to shut down the case."