

Frankhouser: A man who crossed the line

By NORMAN KEMPSTER
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PHILADELPHIA — In the seamy world of paid informers, Roy Frankhouser was considered a star. His U.S. government contact sent a memo to Washington praising his courage and he once received a foreign assignment that apparently had the direct approval of the White House.

But in United States District Court here on Tuesday, Frankhouser — a Ku Klux Klansman and American Nazi from Reading who the government now says crossed the line between infiltrator and willing criminal — goes on trial on charges that could put him in prison for a long time.

"My partner in crime was Uncle Sam." The 35-year-old Frankhouser told a news conference last week despite a warning from his lawyer, and in apparent violation of a court "gag" order.

The Frankhouser case gives the public a rare peek at the methods the government uses in attempting to deal with extremist groups. The case also seems to demonstrate a curious alliance among extremists that appears to blur the line between left and right.

Frankhouser has been an active racism-ranting and gun-toting extremist for all of his adult life. He is a member of dozens of right-wing organizations. He was an officer of the KKK in Pennsylvania and an active participant in the Minutemen, the American Nazi movement and similar groups.

But now that he is in trouble, Frankhouser has joined forces with the U.S. Labor party, a group on the far left that arranged his news conference last week.

Both Frankhouser and Labor party members insist that there is no formal link between them. Apparently the attraction is that they are convinced they have common enemies.

Although he does not deny sharing the racist views of the KKK and the Nazis, Frankhouser says he joined

many right-wing groups at the suggestion of state and federal law enforcement agencies — the FBI, the Mississippi Highway Patrol and others. He said his associations with law enforcement go back 15 or 20 years.

Since government agencies often are not eager to claim Frankhouser, it is difficult to corroborate parts of his story. But there is no doubt that he worked as an informant for the Treasury Department's Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) from September 1972 until early summer of 1973.

Edward Slamon, the head of the ATF Bureau in Frankhouser's home town of Reading, described Frankhouser's activities as a government informant in great detail during the three full days of secret court testimony last year. The 465-page transcript of Slamon's testimony, together with 403 pages of testimony by Frankhouser, an FBI agent and an assistant U.S. attorney, have been made public since then.

Slamon said Frankhouser was interested only in the money he could earn as a government informant.

At the time Frankhouser was working for him, Slamon wrote several memos describing him as an excellent infiltrator and confidential informant. In one memo, Slamon told his superiors that Frankhouser "has been able to penetrate a well-organized burglary and hijacking ring at great personal risk."

In late 1972, Frankhouser traveled to Canada in an effort to make contact with Arab Black September terrorists who U.S. officials feared might try to kidnap or assassinate American Jewish leaders. Slamon said the operation was approved in the White House by the National Security Council.

"Of course, the idea was to find out what the Black September group was planning with regard to skyjacking or assassinations and so forth," Slamon testified. "This was his mission."

Nothing came of the mission but there was no doubt that Frankhouser then was a trusted agent.

Memos placed in the court records

indicate that Frankhouser reported to his superiors that the Black September group was backed by Soviet intelligence agencies. But since his arrest, Frankhouser has told associates that he is now convinced that the CIA and British intelligence are in some way involved in the Arab terrorist organization.

A less romantic mission apparently was assigned to Frankhouser the following April. According to an affidavit he recently signed under oath, Frankhouser spied — on behalf of government prosecutors — on Robert Miles, a Ku Klux Klansman and fundamentalist preacher who was convicted of bombing school buses to prevent school integration in Pontiac, Mich., four years ago.

"Affiant (Frankhouser) was directed by agents of said Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms Bureau to monitor conversations by means of a tape recorder between Robert Miles and four other defendants in the Pontiac bus bombing conspiracy . . . between said defendants and their attorney, James E. Wells, and that affiant did further understand that such information was given to . . . the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the United States Department of Justice."

Frankhouser translated that from legal jargon: "I was part of the framing of several people that went to prison."

Wells, the attorney representing Miles, said the Frankhouser affidavit would be filed in U.S. District Court in Detroit on Oct. 1 as part of a request for a writ of habeas corpus that he hopes will free Miles from prison.

There seems to be little doubt that Frankhouser frequently broke the law in his role as government informant. And, according to Slamon's testimony, other informants also engaged in illegal activity. For example, one informant, who was identified only as "Lou," doubled as a fence for stolen goods, Slamon said.

Slamon also said Frankhouser recruited at least one additional informant but there was no indication of the other man's activities.

Frankhouser was charged with "aid-

ing and abetting" the transportation of stolen explosives from Reading to Michigan, and he said he has been threatened with 51 years in prison on conviction.

Charles Sims, an associate of Miles, purchased explosives from Bert Jones, a Reading man accused of dealing in stolen dynamite and who was convicted of burglary Friday in an apparently unrelated case. Frankhouser is accused of serving as a go-between linking Jones and Sims.

According to Slamon's testimony, Slamon wanted to use Frankhouser to buy explosives from Jones to expose the illegal traffic and to arrest Jones. But Slamon said the plan was vetoed by higher authority.

Frankhouser's court-appointed lawyer, Stanford Shmuckler, contends that whatever his client did was done as a government agent, which should make him immune to prosecution. Shmuckler said he has advised him to avoid making public statements until after the trial.

But Frankhouser said he is convinced that the government will railroad him off to prison. He also said he assumes that some of his former right-wing associates would like to kill him now that he is exposed as an informant.

He says he is convinced that Jones, Sims and a long list of others engaged in the shadowy business of arms-running also were working for the government. He says he was thrown over the side because he had learned too much.

Frankhouser said Jones was a leader of a left-wing group called the Revolutionary Union which did business with extremist groups of both the left and right — the KKK, black militants, Puerto Rican nationalists and others.

Apparently the relations between left and right extremists was no surprise to the government. Slamon testified that Frankhouser told him that in addition to his associations with anti-Semitic groups like the KKK and the Nazis he had "excellent contacts" in the Jewish Defense League. Slamon said he "chuckled" about that but apparently did not doubt that Frankhouser was telling the truth.

Frankhouser insisted that his plan to expose Jones by buying explosives from him was aborted by government officials who hoped to protect Jones.

At his news conference in Trenton, N.J., Frankhouser made a seemingly fantastic assertion: "The government has consciously fomented and controlled the performance of terrorist activities in this country."

Asked why the government would do such a thing, Frankhouser said, "I know it sounds far-fetched but let's put it like this: as I see it, the FBI, the CIA, numerous other agencies, if there is an existing threat, can justify very much their expansion." The U.S. Labor party has frequently leveled the same charge.

Frankhouser said he learned of the extensive activities of government infiltrators during his service as an informant. In addition, he pointed to FBI documents released last August as a result of a Freedom of Information action which showed that in the mid-1960s FBI informants held top leadership roles in seven of the 14 Ku Klux Klan groups.

Frankhouser says he was "brainwashed" while in jail after his arrest. The assistant U.S. attorneys who will prosecute the case said they were bound by a court order not to talk about the case, but they were known to have scoffed in private at Frankhouser's charges. But there are several reasons why the charges cannot be dismissed out of hand.

Berks County Dist. Atty. Robert Van Hoove said in a telephone interview that he suspects that either federal agencies or the Reading Police Department have links to the city's violent underworld. He said he was referring especially to a series of unsolved bombings in Reading.

"The matter of the bombings is something the government does not want solved," Van Hoove asserted.

Frankhouser said he was instructed by federal agents to try to frame Van Hoove because the district attorney was getting "dangerously close" to unraveling the conspiracy, Van Hoove is known to be convinced that he is still under

investigation.

The situation is complicated by a bitter feud between Van Hoove and the head of the Reading Police Department's intelligence bureau, Lt. Paul Goldberg.

In a telephone interview, Goldberg scoffed at Van Hoove's remarks. He said the district attorney "feels that I had federal agents investigating him." While denying that there was such an investigation, Goldberg remarked, "it might not be a bad idea."

"He has been threatening to put me in jail for nine or 10 months," Goldberg said of Van Hoove.

In Detroit, Wells, the attorney for the Klansmen convicted in the Pontiac school bus bombings, offered another theory on the activities of federal agents.

In a telephone interview, Wells said he hoped to win his clients' release by showing that the bombing was a government job intended to defuse potential violence surrounding racial school bus-

ing. He said he would offer a deathbed confession of the bombing made by Elmer Tacket, a Klansman and explosives expert. Wells said that Tacket, who died about a week later from causes unrelated to the bombing, admitted rigging the explosives at the direction of four masked men he did not know.

Wells said Tacket followed instructions because the masked men knew all of the proper KKK secret signs. But the attorney said Tacket is convinced they were not local Klansmen.

Miles and several other Pontiac Klansmen were arrested eight days after the bombings.

Wells theorized that the bombings, in which no one was hurt, were staged to head off violent antibusing demonstrations in which there may have been injuries or deaths.

"No one wanted to be involved (in potentially violent protests) after the arrests," Wells said.