

'Wherever Terrorism And Torture Are, They Are

'Bama Probe Leads To Death Merchants

By Scott Shepard
The Associated Press

A chance encounter in a mountain jail in Alabama led investigators inside a ring of international terror peddlers — American merchants of death with entree to the torture chambers of some of the world's most sadistic despots.

What began as an investigation of fraud in the Appalachian coalfields resulted in gun-running convictions for an ex-CIA operative and a New Jersey businessman, men who one New York prosecutor said "contributed to instability and to chaos throughout the world."

The Alabama connection came to light after the June 8 sentencing of Frank E. Terpil, 41, of McLean, Va., and George Korkala, 40, of Nutley, N.J., on New York state charges of negotiating to sell to undercover agents 10,000 machine guns, 10 million bullets, a bomb, firearm silencers and four other guns.

New York state Supreme Court Justice Thomas Galligan sentenced the two men in absentia. After posting bonds of \$100,000 each following their arrests at a New York hotel on Dec. 22, 1979, Terpil and Korkala skipped the country the day before their trial.

Galligan, in handing down sentences of 53 years in prison if the two are brought to justice, said, "They have no allegiance to any flag. They prosper in a world at war. Wherever terrorism and torture are, they are."

Indeed, in transcripts of four secretly recorded meetings involving the undercover agents and the fugitives — 542 pages of which were made available to The Associated Press by Alabama authorities — Terpil and Korkala bragged of their fiendish exploits.

The agents heard tales of poison being tested on unsuspecting restaurant patrons, "rat" tortures by former Ugandan dictator Idi Amin, and a gun-smuggling Texan named Sam who exhibited his wares by cutting winos to ribbons with automatic weapons fire.

Terpil, a Brooklyn native with close ties to Amin, also was



Ugandan strongman Idi Amin (left) let Terpil, who drove a car registered to Ugandan diplomats in the U.S., witness public—and private—executions in that country . . . Libyan leader Moammar Khadafy (right) bought \$2.5 million worth of military hardware from Terpil and Wilson, as well as commissioning them to recruit ex-Green Berets to train Libyan troops.



indicted in April 1980 along with his former business associate, Edwin P. Wilson, another ex-CIA agent, on federal charges of illegally supplying and training terrorists in Libya.

At the time of the arrests, New York District Attorney Robert Morgenthau said Terpil, who was fired from the CIA in 1971, had sold \$3.2 million worth of weapons, explosives and surveillance equipment to Uganda during Amin's rule and operated various front businesses in Washington, Paris and Panama.

Terpil, a stocky, brown-haired man with a thick mustache, lived with his wife and two teen-age sons in a \$266,000 Japanese-contemporary-styled home in McLean, Va., across the road from Ethel Kennedy.

Described by associates as a "super salesman" with a knack for charming influential people, he spent much of his time on airplanes, shuttling to another home in Crowe, England, to Paris, to Geneva and to the palaces of arms customers in Africa and the Middle East.

By 1976, Terpil and Wilson had become friends with Moammar Khadafy and began supplying the Libyan leader with a total of \$2.5 million worth of military hardware, authorities said. The two recruited American-trained guerrilla fighters, including former Green Berets, and electronics experts, to teach Khadafy's troops how to fight and make bombs.

After Terpil and Wilson parted company, Terpil turned to Uganda as a new arms market. His other business associate,

Korkala, drove a car with diplomatic license plates to the Ugandan mission to the United Nations.

Probe Started In Coal Mines

The investigation of terrorism began as a probe in the coalfields of Alabama and six other states years ago under the code name "Leviticus Project."

Thomas L. Krebs, 37, director of the Alabama Commission, organized the multi-state crime task force, brought together some of the best investigators in New York, Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Indiana, Pennsylvania and Virginia.

Mathew Crosson, assistant district attorney in Alabama who coordinated the Leviticus Project, was looking for the activities of William Nardone, 50, of Lawrence, N.Y., who was indicted by a New York grand jury in March on charges of defrauding investors of more than \$3 million and promissory notes in coal deals.

Meanwhile, two of Krebs' agents in September 1979, in a jail at Fort Payne, Ala., questioned Alabar George Lambert, who had been arrested on charges of bad checks.

Unexpectedly, Nardone, whose financial dealings with Lambert were under investigation by New York state officials, walked into the jail with a man he introduced as Stephen Sacks of New York.

Sacks, who a month later would be indicted for practicing law without a license, aroused the investigators' suspicion he implied he had "Mafia connections."

"Nobody will talk to a lawman like that, especially an attorney," one investigator said.

The Alabama authorities contacted Crosson in Alabama and subsequent inquiries by the Leviticus agents disclosed Sacks, 37, was an imposter. He had no law degree and he had successfully defended a number of alleged figures in New York.

Following his indictment, Sacks agreed to testify rather than face reprisals from his former legal clients. He could no longer claim the attorney-client privilege in communications with him.

In conversations with investigators Sacks men-

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Terrorism

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gun-running friends, Terpil and Korkala. He agreed to introduce two Spanish-speaking undercover agents — identified on the transcripts as "Rodriguez" and "Raad" — to Terpil and Korkala.

Agents Meet Suspects

The first meeting, with Korkala, took place in Room 2737 of the New York Hilton on Nov. 15, 1979. The room was bugged.

Raad was introduced as the "patron," leader of a group of right-wing Latin American terrorists who wanted to buy weapons. Rodriguez, a military intelligence officer and weapons expert before joining the New York City police force, was introduced as Raad's interpreter.

Korkala indicated he could provide a variety of weapons: American M-16 assault rifles, Soviet-made AK-47s, French MAT-49 submachine guns, Swiss Sig rifles, Soviet SA-7 surface to air missiles, 105 millimeter howitzer shells, handguns, silencers, laser sights, grenades and explosives.

The next day Terpil was also present and the two gun merchants discussed exploits involving Amin and Khadafy.

Terpil, bragging that he was an important member of Amin's entourage, said he was the only American allowed to witness public executions in Uganda, including one at a stadium where some of the spectators were killed because the AK-47s used by Amin's firing squad were so powerful the bullets passed through the bodies of the intended victims.

Terpil claimed he was a guest at a state dinner where Amin displayed the severed head of a political foe and shot another on the spot.

The minister of defense was not at the dinner, Terpil said, and Amin told his other ministers, "We have him up at the State Research Bureau (the secret police headquarters)."

"Man, that was a one-way gate," Terpil said. "That's where my offices were up there."

Amin then told his ministers, Terpil said, "One of you people is working for Kenya. If you tell me, we'll let bygones be bygones." When no one spoke up, the waiters began serving the food.

"They put this big tray in the middle of the table and Idi's guy lifts off the lid and there's the head of the minister of defense," Terpil said.

'We'll take you down there and he'll (Sam the Texan) kill a guy for you. They get winos out of Dallas, and they set 'em up maybe 20 feet away and you ought to see what two blasts. . . .'

—George Korkala

One of the ministers gasped and Amin shot him in the face with a .357-caliber Magnum revolver, Terpil said, adding that the gun was a gift from him and engraved with the words, "I want this man killed completely."

Testing The Merchandise

Later, Korkala told how they tested the strength of 50 kilos of cyanide he was trying to sell to a group of Middle Eastern terrorists at a Beirut restaurant. A spoonful was slipped into the soup of an unsuspecting diner.

"One spoonful and his head fell in the bowl of soup," Korkala said. "He was gone like that (snapping his fingers)."

Korkala said one of his contacts, a man identified only as Sam the Texan, could provide heroin, as well as shotguns modified into pistol-grip automatics that fire 12 rounds per second.

"We'll take you down there and he'll kill a guy for you," Korkala said. "They get winos out of Dallas, and they set 'em up maybe 20 feet away and you ought to see what two blasts. . . ."

Korkala said he had been "knocking around" the United States doing odd jobs — like installing machine guns on the boats of drug runners in Key West, Fla. — when he "hooked up" with Terpil in 1975.

He said Terpil's connections in the Middle East, especially Libya, helped him establish ties with Amin.

"Khadafy had been supplying (Amin) with all these things and that's how (Terpil) got in there," he said. "Then, unfortu-

nately, the country fell."

After the first two meetings, Rodriguez flew to Manchester, England, to inspect and test-fire weapons Terpil and Korkala wanted to sell.

It was at a third meeting, at the hotel on Dec. 20, 1979, that Terpil described his "favorite" torture in Uganda.

"What they do is take a rat, a real hungry one," he said. "First, they put a slit in your stomach."

The rat is placed on the victim's stomach, underneath a copper pot, which is then heated with a Bunsen burner, Terpil said.

"The rat goes crazy," he said. "There is only one way out."

The two gun runners also discussed how to detonate an automobile by filling the radiator with explosives and the rigging of weight-sensitive briefcase bombs.

"We trained all the Libyans on how to do this . . .," Terpil said.

They also discussed how the weapons would be shipped to Puerto Rico with phony documents, obtained by bribery, indicating the munitions had been purchased by defense officials in the Philippines.

Time To Move In

The Leviticus Project investigators decided it was time to move.

On Dec. 22, 1979, detectives knocked on the door of the room at the Hilton. Rodriguez opened it. "Freeze," one detective barked. "Freeze. Police. Freeze. Don't move."

Terpil had pulled out a Browning automatic pistol equipped with a silencer.

"Put it down, friend," a detective ordered. "That's it." Terpil complied.

Two days later, simultaneous raids were conducted in New York, Nutley, N.J., and Crewe, England. They netted millions of dollars in arms, briefcase bombs, letter bombs, grenades, poison darts and scores of documents, authorities said.

Today, the Leviticus investigators are still hunting Sam the Texan.

Sacks, the ersatz lawyer, is no longer in custody, but is "still under protection," Crosson said.

Raad, 53, has retired from the police force and Rodriguez, 40, is off on another undercover assignment.

Terpil apparently is in Damascus, Syria, after a stint in Libya, Crosson said, and Korkala was last known to be living at the Weiner House Hotel in Beirut, a hangout of the Palestinian Liberation Organization.

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