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This Naked Society

The Big Snoop Means Big Money

This is the first of three articles on the new, lucrative business of snooping. Mr. Abramson, author of "The Barney Ross Story" and "A Child of Miracles," probed into the fast-developing industry and found most of those engaged in the work quite willing to discuss and describe their practices.

By MARTIN ABRAMSON

To paraphrase Winston Churchill, never before have so many been engaged in snooping on so many.

The boom currently accruing to purveyors of civilian espionage stems from the mass invasion of privacy that has suddenly become a way of life in America.

One Congressman, Herbert Tenzer of Lawrence, Long Island, N. Y., estimates the staggering number of 2,500,000 people are now engaged in probing other people and their activities.

Rewards that obtain from such prying can be considerable. Thus, the old-line William J. Burns International Detective Agency has now hit an annual volume of over \$45 million. Pinkerton, which runs the second biggest security business, is believed to be grossing near that figure altho it does not give out public reports.

Globe Security, Inc., has reached a \$15 million annual volume and is being acquired by an engineering firm that regards security companies as the hottest commodity on Wall Street.

In the Washington area the yellow Classified Directory of Chesapeake and Potomac Telephone Co. has nearly five full pages of listings under the heading "Detectives" and about half a page more under "Investigators."

Many of the companies listed here openly advertise "Electronic Surveillance and Detection," "Discreet Use of Telephoto and Electronic Equipment for Evidence" etc., and one company goes by the name of C.I.A. Inc., which of course isn't the government's supersecret Central Intelligence Agency.

In addition to the publicly-listed companies, hundreds of smaller investigative and detective agencies are flourishing as never before.

New manufacturers and distributors of snooping gadgets find themselves in clover almost overnight and large, established corporations — like the Mosler Safe Co. — have started to make spy and counterspy equipment as a profitable sideline.

The Government itself is a choice customer. Not just the CIA and the National Security Agency. A U.S. Senate sub-committee that has been probing the probers has reported that the Post-Office Department, the Internal Revenue Service, the FBI and the Food and Drug Administration all have been guilty of "improper" snooping tactics.

The busybody activities of Government units and utilities, however, pale in comparison to the "Peeping Tom" antics of big business.

Caught up in today's competition, business firms use espionage to collect trade secrets and information about new products and simultaneously employ counterespionage to fend off the spies for the competition.

Bernard Spindel, who has been described as the No. 1 freelance eavesdropper in the United States, says that industrial espionage is growing at the rate of "three times more each year than the previous year." Naturally, business of espionage (and counterespionage) agents like Spindel grows in the same proportion.

The American's constitutional right of privacy is supposedly guaranteed by the Fourth Amendment, but this forbids only physical trespass, and the eavesdropping "bugs" are not considered to be physical invaders. The Federal Communications Commission recently adopted a regulation barring use of tiny transmitters to secretly record conversations but this is purely an agency directive lacking the force of statutory law. Few professional investigators expect it to be enforced.

Our credit and charge account economy has provided a fresh bonanza for credit investigation agencies. One company, the Retail Credit Company, has 7000 investigators and maintains files on 42 million Americans. Other private agencies have files on a total of 60 million more.

If those who are being investigated had a look at some of the information in these records, they'd be inclined to jump thru a plate-glass window. Old-time probers tended to be discreet, but the new breed asks all kinds of personal questions as they meander from neighbor to neighbor and local storekeeper to local storekeeper.

Other kinds of investigators, hired to screen applicants for jobs, will ask even more personal questions about both the applicant and his wife.

The electronic tools that have provided the basis for the snooping boom stem from the invention of the transistor and the printed circuit.

These make miniaturization of the "bug" possible so it can be slipped discreetly into an olive in a martini glass, in cuff-links, wrist watches, sugar cubes, tie clasps, fountain pens, brassieres, and boutonieres.

Ben Jamil, head of Continental Telephone Supply Co., the country's largest purveyor of stranger-than-fiction eavesdropping devices, exuberantly reports:

"Business keeps going up like a Coney Island sky ride. If you're not bugging this year or being bugged yourself, you're just not 'in!'"

Continental's headquarters are on West 46th-st in New York, but Mr. Jamil also has a store in Philadelphia and is setting up franchises all over the country.

Among this year's of devices are these intriguing items:

- Buttonhole microphone — highly sensitive, of course, and designed to operate behind the tie in the buttonhole, or as a cuff link or a lapel pin. Yours for a mere \$24.95.

- Fountain-pen microphone. This miniature mike comes concealed in a dummy fountain pen, and even when it's visible, you can't tell it's a microphone. Same price: \$24.95.

- Postage-stamp transmitter — so called because it's scarcely bigger than a stamp. The world's smallest broadcasting device, it can be taped on a person, popped into a brassiere or deposited in the most secretive place in a room, while it transmits conversations via wireless to an outside FM receiver. Its nickname in the trade is — you guessed it — "the 007." Price tag: \$149.50.

- Cigarette-case transmitter — slightly larger than the 007, designed to fit into a cigarette case, and able to transmit over a greater distance. Trade nick name: "The 008." Tab: \$150.

- Continental Audio-Wall Probe — knob-shaped device equipped with a suction cup. Simply place it against the wall, put on your stethoscopic earphones and listen to everything going on in the next room. Price: \$65.

- Whisper-Light Lamp. Send a lamp to someone as a gift and her (or his) bedroom or parlor secrets will be yours forever. The lamp harbors a subminiature microphone which transmits to a private receiving station.

It needs no batteries, tubes, or visible antenna. It will work even when the light is turned off, indeed even when the bulb is removed, because it is the lamp itself that hides the transmitter.

Continued

It can be incorporated into a picture frame if the victim is the type that prefers pictures to lamps. It costs \$150.

• Telephone Tap Transmitter. Just fit it neatly and snugly behind the mouthpiece of the phone. Replace the mouthpiece. Every word on both ends of a telephone conversation will from that point on be transmitted to your remote FM receiver. Only \$200.

Since many of these devices have non-snooping applications as well, such as in television broadcasting and in sound amplification for stage entertainers — and since the manufacture and sale aren't illegal anyhow — there are Washington electronic equipment companies that deal in some of these items too.

There are more, lots more. There are such things as the thimble-sized telephone line-tap transmitter; the professional bug, especially good for installation in furniture or automobile upholstery; the radar microphone that goes into your automobile spotlight, bounces a band signal off the windowpane of one's house and reports what they're saying inside; the ultimate phone bug which you install in a phone and will pick up every sound in a room if you simply call a number attuned to this bug. It doesn't matter that the phone remains on the cradle and that you're calling from 3600 miles away. You still hear.

Not only is there no law against manufacturing or selling any of these devices, in most cases there is also no law against using them in any way you see fit.

There is also, of course, the anti-bugging device.

"We sell a 'sweep' which will detect and locate hidden transmitters," Mr. Jamil points out. "Then there's our Sentry 161 which will oscillate when plugged into a phone that has a wiretap which garbles any wiretap that might be on the line. We also have an excellent \$250 jammer for a phone, and we're developing a new device to jam any mike, recorder, or transmitter hidden anywhere in a room. Oh, we can give you protection all right."

The Washington Daily News last Tuesday reported that a Washington firm was offering their anti-huzzing slantics to congressmen.

TOMORROW: The polygraph (lie detector) — what it does and doesn't do.

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