

ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH
4 MARCH 1980

STAT

Wants Mercenary To Tell Of CIA Role In Angola War

STAT

By Martha Shirk

Post-Dispatch Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — A St. Louis lawyer is urging the State Department to put pressure on Angola to release an American mercenary imprisoned there so that he can return to the United States to testify about the CIA's role in the Angolan civil war.

W. William Wilson of St. Louis, the leading force in a group called Organization for Missing Americans Abroad, said Monday that every effort should be made to get Gary Acker of Sacramento, Calif., released from prison in Angola so that he can tell Congress how he was recruited for military service in Angola in 1976.

Acker was one of several Americans in 1976 who were convicted by an Angolan court for being mercenaries. One of them, Daniel Gearhart, was executed. Acker is serving a 16-year sentence.

Wilson, who served on the mercenaries' defense team, says they were recruited by the CIA to join the forces of the National Front for the Liberation of Angola, a Western-backed guerrilla army that battled the Soviet- and Cuban-backed Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola for control of Angola after Portugal granted it independence. The Popular Movement won.

"The CIA lied to potential recruits, including Gearhart and Acker, in order

to ensure their recruitment for covert operations in Angola," Wilson said at a news conference in the Capitol. "It is imperative now that Acker is freed and brought back to appear and testify before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence to detail accounts of CIA abuses before the proposed charter is allowed to pass in its present form."

Neither the State Department nor the CIA had any comment on Wilson's charges. Wilson said the only evidence on which he bases his charges of CIA involvement is information from the American recruiter, David Bufkin.

Congress is considering a charter for the CIA that would give it a blanket exemption from complying with the Freedom of Information Act. If approved, Wilson said, that provision "would foster future abuses by the agency which could never then be detected and corrected by Congress. CIA exemption from the Freedom of Information Act would release CIA officials entirely from any accountability."

The Organization for Missing Americans Abroad was formed by Wilson and Theodore Fronczak, a St. Louis meat cutter, after Fronczak's wife Sandy, a travel agent, disappeared in Acapulco, Mexico, while on a trip with other travel agents. Another local travel agent, Gary Semmelroth of Belleville, also disappeared. Both are believed to have been slain.