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Drug pilot says he's caught in a CIA plot

Implants called part of plan to control world

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James Pettit, convicted drug pilot, admitted arms smuggler, has told the same story over and over again. Nobody believes him.

Embedded in his neck, he says, are tiny electronic devices put there by the CIA to control his thoughts.

A federal judge heard the tale and ordered a psychiatric examination. The psychiatrist said Pettit is legally competent. The judge ordered a CAT scan, a sophisticated X-ray, of Pettit's neck. The test found nothing.

When a Dade circuit judge heard the story, he thought Pettit was trying to talk his way out of an arson charge. The judge ordered new X-rays when Pettit offered to accept a 30-year jail sentence if they turned up nothing.

To the surprise of the judge, the prosecutor and even Pettit's attorney, the newest tests from Jackson Memorial Hospital show two "foreign objects" in Pettit's neck.

Circuit Judge Howard Gross has ordered exploratory surgery to find out what they are.

"Thoughts that don't belong to me keep appearing," Pettit said during an interview in the Dade County Jail. "The only problem I'm having is getting the implants exposed."

"Up until the newest X-rays, there was nothing to give credence to his story," said Pettit's latest attorney, Roy Gelber. "I feel that now there is some objective proof of what he was saying."

It is the kind of tale that could become a bestseller, a spy thriller with drug smugglers' airplanes crashing in flames, organized crime, murders and mind control by the CIA.

Sitting in a tiny interview room in the jail, Pettit holds up one, then two X-rays. Each is about the size of a sheet of typing paper.

"See the circled areas?" he says. "See that thing that looks like a little bottle? That, my friend, is an implant. They're not metal. They're quartz. They're like tiny radio receivers.

"I think they were going to use me in a program to assassinate someone," Pettit says. "I can't prove the CIA put them in there. But there is no way any other government agency has the power to do that. You think about it

... I can't be the only one implanted."

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Physically, James Pettit, 39, is a wreck. "Burn 'em" Pettit was what federal drug agents called him because of the many planes he crashed during his brief career as a drug pilot.

Pettit's last crash, in April 1982, a Lockheed Lodestar carrying Quaaludes, was the worst: When the plane exploded in a Colombian pasture, Pettit was burned over 54 percent of his body.

Eight days later, he was admitted to the burn center of the U.S. Army Institute of Surgical Research at the Brooke Medical Center in San Antonio, Texas. Hospital spokesman Ray Dery confirmed that Pettit



James Pettit: Says implants control his thoughts.

was treated by two doctors at the center until July 2, 1982.

Pettit said that while he was at the burn center, the implants were put in his neck, face, arms and ears.

Three times during surgery, "I left my body and watched the operation," said Pettit, a believer in astral projection who once listed his occupation as a parapsychologist.

The crash left him badly scarred. He wears long-sleeved shirts to cover the shriveled, baby-pink skin on his arms. His nose was rebuilt, but one nostril is larger than the

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other. His battered face is covered with a heavy, dark beard. The fingers on his right hand stop at the knuckles; they were lost in an earlier fire. The fingers on his left hand are bent back.

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The CIA program was called "Operation Crystal Ball," Pettit says, and he found top secret documents on it in a Key West dumpster in the mid-1960s. They came from a safety deposit box that was broken into at the former Key West National Bank, he says.

The documents described a CIA plan to take over the world's judicial and political systems through mind control by the year 2000, Pettit says.

"The Crystal Ball routine, I'll never be able to prove," he says.

But his discovery of the documents is one reason the CIA focused on him, Pettit says.

The other reason was his search to find out why his older brother, Herschell Neal Pettit, died in the Gulf of Mexico in 1978. Pettit says his brother was "a straight arrow," and he couldn't believe reports that the elder Pettit had committed suicide aboard a boat loaded with pot.

"I think he was working for the CIA or the DEA [Drug Enforcement Administration]," Pettit says. "I went to New Orleans. I talked to [an organized crime] 'family.' I gave 'em a list of names. CIA, CIA, CIA. 'Don't fool with it,' they told me. I put it all together in my head — smuggling ... CIA connected."

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James Pettit is obsessed by thoughts that the CIA can control him.

In a deposition, Pettit asked his ex-attorney in federal court, Kathy Hamilton, if she was working for the agency.

No, she said, but the CIA once offered her a job as she was graduating from college.

Pettit says Hamilton's fidgeting with her hair and with cigarettes were "triggering mechanisms" to control his mind.

Ring called tipoff

In motions filed in court, Pettit says his former attorney, Assistant Public Defender James Webb, once showed up in court wearing a Duke University ring. The year on the ring wasn't the year of Webb's graduation — a tipoff that Webb was working for the CIA, says Pettit. "I accused him of it." Webb says there's no truth to the accusation.

The federal jury that convicted him of drug smuggling in 1983 was controlled by the CIA, says Pettit.

Defense attorney Hamilton is convinced that Pettit is linked to the agency. "I'll tell you this," she says. "Jim Pettit has worked for the CIA ... that has been confirmed. Pettit has told me he worked for the CIA. In addition [Charles] Marty has told me he worked for the CIA ... that he had Pettit checked out ... that it was confirmed."

Marty, a co-defendant in the federal drug case, was to have been a co-pilot on a drug flight with Pettit.

In the middle of that trial, Marty's defense attorney, Alexander Martone, asked for a hearing, out of the presence of the jurors, because he had learned that Marty had met secretly with the DEA and CIA.

"The CIA ... tried to get the charges dismissed because of the CIA connection with my client," Martone told U.S. District Judge Jose Gonzalez. "There are letters in their files."

"I have direct confirmation that Jim Pettit has flown for the CIA," said Martone. "Jim Pettit needs some definite help. The government owes him that. He's been impaired as a result of those flights. The U.S. government has never taken responsibility for what happened to Jim Pettit."

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James Pettit says he is a good guy, not a lawbreaker.

He says he flew drug missions outside the United States to tip off law enforcement authorities, that he scuttled planeloads of pot, called the cops and never landed a single load in this country.

"It's no crime to haul dope outside the States," he says.

Pettit says he went through \$50,000 "harassing" drug dealers in Texas and Florida.

He says he tipped an FBI agent named Ty Cobb about drug loads coming into the Miami area. The

FBI says Cobb has been transferred, but won't say where.

Pettit says he tipped former DEA agent Randy Beasley. Not so, says Beasley, the undercover agent in Operation Screamer, an 84-defendant series of busts in 1983.

Pettit "tried to go to Cobb," says Beasley, but Pettit was a target of the Operation Screamer probe at the time. "The guy is not reliable enough to be an informant. The guy is a real character. He kept us entertained. The CIA — that only came up after he was arrested."

Pettit was charged in Operation Screamer with plotting to smuggle two planeloads of pot into Florida in August 1981.

He allegedly attended a series of meetings and developed a landing code for the flights. Pettit flew a DC-3 to Colombia, but instead of returning to Lake Okeechobee with pot, he landed at Treasure Cay in the Bahamas.

Pettit says he never intended to bring the marijuana into Florida. But Assistant U.S. Attorney Stephen LeClair told the jurors in Judge Gonzalez's court that a "mix-up" in signals — not Pettit — forced the landing in the Bahamas.

Mental test ordered

Before Pettit's federal trial, defense attorney Hamilton asked Gonzalez to order a psychiatric test and a CAT scan of Pettit's head.

Dr. Charles Mutter reported that Pettit was competent to stand trial, and added: "It is my opinion that this individual is attempting to contrive a story to evade further legal proceedings. Although his alleged belief would represent a psychotic delusion, there is nothing else in the mental status exam that is consistent with mental illness."

The CAT scan at Jackson Memorial found nothing.

Pettit didn't testify. He refused to cooperate with Hamilton. The attorney said nothing about the CIA or implants.

The jury convicted Pettit. Gonzalez ordered a 15-year prison sentence, one of the stiffest in the Operation Screamer cases.

Pettit's extensive criminal record — he has served several prison terms — prompted the judge to order the tough sentence, Hamilton says.

Now Pettit awaits trial in Circuit Court, accused of setting fire to his girlfriend's house after barricading himself inside when DEA agent Beasley tried to arrest him.

For nearly six hours in mid-June 1983 Pettit refused to leave the house at 5929 SW 16th Ter. The DEA called a Metro-Dade SWAT team. Pettit called TV reporters.

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Six-hour standoff

During the standoff, Pettit allegedly tossed lighted containers of paint thinner from the house. Pettit says he didn't set the fire in the bedroom that caused \$60,000 in damage.

"Who set the fire?" he says. "That I don't know. Whoever, whatever, set the fire came through the west bedroom window. I thought it was a tear gas canister."

In court depositions, there is no mention of tear gas.

The case was scheduled for trial before Judge Gross last week. The day the trial was to begin, hospital officials, responding to a court order, brought copies of the federally ordered X-rays to court.

Pettit, defense attorney Gelber and prosecutor Phil Maniatty huddled in the jury room with Dr. Robert M. Quencer of Jackson's radiology department to examine the X-rays. The X-rays showed the top of Pettit's head, but didn't show the neck area behind his ear.

Judge accepts offer

Pettit, who is representing himself with Gelber as co-counsel, offered to plead no contest to the arson charge and accept a 30-year sentence — if another set of X-rays

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Attorney Roy Gelber

showed nothing.

Judge Gross sent Pettit back to the hospital.

When Dr. Quencer returned with the newest tests, he told the judge that something unexplainable is in Pettit's neck.

"I thought he was just fabricating a story to beat the charges," said Gross. "The X-rays give me something to think about."

"Until the radiologist came in, I thought it was nonsense," said Maniatty. "I don't know what those two things are. The radiologist said it could be metal from an accident. It's certainly worth checking into. But it has nothing to do with this case."

Tuesday, Gross ordered the hospital staff to perform an operation to determine what is in Pettit's neck.