

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 44NEW YORK TIMES
25 May, 1985

Spy Suspect's Home Searched

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Special to The New York Times

NORFOLK, Va., May 24 — Swinging sledgehammers, Federal agents pounded away today inside the home of John A. Walker, the retired Navy warrant officer who has been charged, along with his son, with selling Navy secrets to the Soviet Union.

The noisy dismantling of the house, officials said, was a fruitless search for an explosive device. Agents had theorized that Mr. Walker might have booby-trapped the house.

The search of Mr. Walker's two-story, brick-and-clapboard house began this morning when the police ordered neighbors to evacuate the immediate area.

Mr. Walker's block of Old Ocean View Road, in the Bay View section of Norfolk, was barricaded at each end by city police cruisers with flashing red lights. The house itself was ringed late Thursday by yellow tape saying, "Police Line — Do Not Cross."

Neighbors said the house was watched throughout the night by police officers and agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation in parked cars.

Lee Quick, a special F.B.I. agent, told reporters this morning that the neighborhood was ordered evacuated because of the "slight possibility of hazardous materials" in the Walker house, meaning, he said under questioning, explosives. Asked if this was based on letters or notes of Mr. Walker's, the agent would not respond.

At least three houses in the immediate vicinity of Mr. Walker's house were evacuated. Its owners returned to their homes about two hours later.

An hour-and-a-half search by two Navy dog handlers, leading a German shepherd that Mr. Quick said had been

trained to sniff for explosives, yielded no explosives, the agent said.

The dog left, to be succeeded at once by two radio-dispatched carloads of agents from the F.B.I. and the Naval Investigative Service.

The new arrivals, wearing blue fatigue jackets with foot-high yellow letters stenciled on the back identifying them as "F.B.I." or "police," entered the house carrying hammers, crowbars and several black cases of the kind often used to carry electronic or photographic gear.

Heavy pounding began, loud enough to be heard and felt outside, and lasted intermittently for about an hour. Then the agents left.

The excitement caused by the order to evacuate Mr. Walker's block on Old Ocean View Road served to underline a neighborhood characteristic of unusual aloofness.

People who have been neighbors here for a decade or more said they did not know one another's name. Even Mr. Walker's next-door neighbors said they did not know his first name and never spoke to him except to exchange perfunctory greetings.

Today, while neighbors gathered on the front porch of Alma Pacini, a resident in the same house for 39 years who lives across the street from the Walker home, Barbara Barrett, a 31-year-old housewife, remarked, "This has certainly brought everyone in the neighborhood together."

"We've never even talked before," Mrs. Barrett added. "Most people on the block seem much older, and until now we just didn't have anything in common."