

Ex-CIA man 'buried alive'

It's not often I speak to a man who has been sentenced to 52 years in maximum security prison, much of it in solitary. Nor, for that matter, to one who claims to have evidence of a crime that could bring down the current government of Egypt.

Ex-CIA agent Edwin Wilson is bitter and furious. Still, there is a professional pride in his voice: "If I wasn't in jail," he told me, "I'd have been running the Contra arms operation."

It was Wilson who created the shadowy network of arms dealers and moonlighting spooks inherited by Lt. Col. Oliver North. Instead, Wilson is serving hard time in the federal prison at Marion, Ill., for running guns to Libya and trying to murder government witnesses and prosecutors. He has been buried alive, claims Wilson, in order to shut him up.

Last year, I detailed in this column how Wilson worked through Australia's Nugen Hand bank to finance anti-communist groups in Asia and Africa whose funding had been banned by Congress.

Wilson, I have long maintained, was no rogue agent, as he was portrayed by the government and media, but on "proprietary," covert status with the CIA.

He was thrown to the wolves when word began to leak out about secret U.S. links to Libya and to Angola's UNITA movement.

It also seems possible that Wilson was buried in prison to prevent him from revealing details about the murky and potentially explosive EASTCO affair. In 1978, the Egyptian American Transport Services Company was set up by Wilson.

EASTCO was one of the byproducts of the Camp David Accord between Egypt and Israel, in which the



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two enemies agreed to a peace pact in return for billions in U.S. aid and arms. The contract to ship U.S.-supplied arms to Egypt was quietly given by the Pentagon to EASTCO. The firm was also involved in other deals that have not yet been made public.

Wilson says that he set up EASTCO with senior Egyptian officials and some of the same group of Washington insiders that was to later become Lt. Col. Oliver North's private supply operation for the Contra rebels in Nicaragua. Among them, Gen. Richard Secord and ex-CIA agent Thomas Clines. Secord denies that he was involved with Wilson.

EASTCO was caught red-handed overbilling the Pentagon by U.S. \$8 million. An investigation was begun against EASTCO but was quashed by the U.S. Justice Department — for reasons of "national security." A fine was paid and the matter was hushed up. Why?

Here we come to Ed Wilson's most explosive charge. Wilson insisted to me that Egypt's two most senior military men were directly involved in EASTCO. At the time EASTCO was shipping arms to Sadat's Egypt, its armed forces were run by Generals Hosni Mubarak and Mohamed Abdel Halim Abu Ghazala.

Both men, claims Wilson, were covert partners in

EASTCO and received millions in secret payments from the company. Was EASTCO used by Washington to help bribe the politically powerful Egyptian military into a peace deal with Israel?

Mubarak is today the president of Egypt; Abu Ghazala the powerful defence minister. If ever proven true, Wilson's charges could bring down the Mubarak regime, Washington's key Mideastern ally and cornerstone of U.S. strategic power in the region. A bigger earthquake is hard to imagine.

Wilson claims he has the evidence and will make it available at the right time. He could, of course, have concocted the story to get revenge for the rough way in which he was treated by his own country. So far, no corroboration of Wilson's charges has come to light. But suspicions aplenty do exist.

Kickbacks on arms sales to senior military men in the Mideast are routine. Under the late Anwar Sadat, Egypt's military, political and business elite was rife with corruption. Millions in U.S. aid were skimmed off by Sadat and his cronies. Abu Ghazala has long been rumored to receive covert support from the CIA and is known as "Washington's man" in Cairo. But this is the first time that Mubarak has been touched with even a hint of scandal.

Wilson's claims come just when internal dissent in Egypt is mushrooming. The last thing Washington wants to hear are charges that could threaten the stability of its key Mideastern ally.

No wonder it squelched investigation of the dangerous EASTCO affair. Wilson has suggested that he may be murdered in prison by people who want him shut up. His fear is not exaggerated. Ed Wilson knows too many secrets.