

# The Australian money laundry

The chairman of Australia's Nugan Hand Bank was found shot to death in his car on a deserted Australian road in January, 1980. News of the mysterious death caused the bank to collapse. Investigations revealed that the secretive bank's main business had been money-laundering — at least \$1.5 billion a year.

On the chairman's body was found the business card of William Colby, the former CIA director. Further examination of the bank turned up a fascinating network of ties to former and active CIA operatives, senior American military men and a bevy of international arms merchants. Among them was the infamous ex-CIA agent, Edwin Wilson; and the man who headed up the Pentagon's foreign arms sales, Maj.-Gen. Richard Secord. Remember the two names.

Remember also the reply of arms magnate Sir Basil Zaharoff, the famous "Merchant of Death," to objections that his latest deal would be opposed by Britain's Parliament. "What," he sneered, "that little jabber-house?"

Nugan Hand Bank, it turned out, was being used by the CIA to fund a large number of secret operations and a host of individuals in Asia and Africa. It also was an important conduit for covert American arms deliveries. Two of the most interesting clients of Nugan Hand turned out to be Libya and Gen. Jonas Savimbi's anti-communist guerrilla army — known as UNITA — fighting the Marxist regime of Angola.

Congress, dominated by timid, left-leaning liberals, had banned any aid for Savimbi. Libya, which was falsely believed to have hit men running around Washington, was also on the U.S. boycott list. In spite of the congressional bans, both Libya and



Savimbi secretly received arms and money from the CIA. Savimbi was preventing the Soviets from taking over Angola and neighboring Namibia. Inside Libya, were active pro-American groups within the Khadafy regime fighting to prevent closer ties to the Soviet Union. Helping both parties made excellent sense — except to Congress.

Does all this sound familiar? Shades of Zaharoff! Nugan Hand was set up and used to circumvent the obstructionist Congress. Just, in fact, like the current Iranian arms scandal. Only this time, to deal with Iran, the Reagan Administration had not only to end run Congress but also its own fevered bombast over "state terrorism."

History, as usual, repeats itself. Yet, curiously, the Nugan Hand episode went almost unnoticed, though its secret aid to Libya and UNITA was as illegal as the covert aid to the Contras that is now causing such a ballyhoo. No doubt, the national hysteria over Iran and terrorism, strongly promoted by the Reagan administration, backfired and had much to do with making the second scandal a bombshell.

Fascinatingly, there are tendrils of suspicion that link the two mysterious stories. Edwin Wilson is rotting away in solitary, sentenced to an incredible 32 years in jail for illegally shipping explosives and small arms to Libya. He got another 25 years for allegedly trying to arrange the murder of government witnesses. Wilson always maintained that he had been secretly working under cover in Libya for the CIA.

Wilson was lured back to the U.S. and arrested. The CIA denied Wilson had been working for them in Libya. But I have long suspected that Wilson actually had been doing so. What happened, I think, was that Reagan's conservative advisers decided to "get Libya." The CIA, rather than admit it still had links to Khadafy, who was being built up into a monster by the White House, pulled the plug on the operation and threw Wilson to the wolves.

Then there is that other interesting character who keeps popping up in all these stories, Maj.-Gen. Richard Secord. He was reportedly involved with the Nugan Hand group. Secord also had links, through his firm, Stanford Technologies, to Edwin Wilson. Stanford and Wilson are reported to have done a number of secret arms deals with Iran — after the U.S. embargoed Iran.

And who should surface as a central figure in the current Iranian arms scandal? None other than the ubiquitous Secord. He, apparently, was involved in the covert supply of arms to the Contras in Central America and in dealings with Iran. Which leads me to believe that there is still an awful lot more here than meets the eye. A mere glimpse, in fact, of the enormously powerful international freemasonry of arms merchants.