

Ex-Spy Accused of Espionage from Prison

October 03, 2010

The  Moscow Times

PORTLAND, Oregon — A former CIA spy slipped messages to his son from prison through paper napkins wadded into balls, despite the best efforts of the intelligence agency to monitor his communications, U.S. prosecutors said in a pretrial filing.

The Oregonian newspaper reported that according to court papers prosecutors filed Friday, Harold Nicholson, 59, sent his son around the globe to collect what he considered to be his "pension," and told the Russian government about his older children's debt. In the notes, prosecutors said, Nicholson sought financial assistance from the Russians and let them know he would help them if he could.

He also told them he was thankful for the money and reassured them that his son was trustworthy.

The elder Nicholson pleaded guilty in 1997 to conspiring to commit espionage after being paid \$300,000 to pass CIA secrets to the Russians. He is serving more than 23 years at the federal prison in Sheridan, just south of Portland, Oregon.

According to the recent court filings, the CIA reviewed every letter Nicholson wrote, monitored his phone calls and approved every person who visited, called or wrote to him, yet he was still able to mount the conspiracy to which his son, Nathaniel Nicholson, pleaded guilty last year.

Nathaniel Nicholson pleaded guilty to conspiracy to act as an agent of a foreign government and conspiracy to commit money laundering. The trial for Harold Nicholson on the same charges begins this week in the U.S. District Court in Portland, Oregon.

The younger Nicholson admitted to traveling to San Francisco; Mexico City; Lima, Peru; and Nicosia, Cyprus to meet with Russian agents on behalf of his father. He took about \$45,000 in payments from the Russian agents, who wanted to determine how much U.S. agencies had learned about their operations during the investigation of the elder Nicholson. He said he gave most of the money to family members, at his father's direction.

The 26-year-old Nicholson agreed to testify, if required, against his imprisoned father in a plea deal that could help him avoid jail time.

"Nathaniel was excited about the prospect of acting in a clandestine fashion like his father," prosecutors wrote in a pretrial memo.

A pretrial memo from Harold Nicholson's defense team acknowledges that the pair hatched an "ill-conceived" but successful plan to get the money to Nicholson's family. The memo doesn't dispute that they carried out the plan, but contends that Nicholson didn't commit a crime.

"Simply put," wrote defense lawyers Sam Kauffman and Robert Weaver, "it is not illegal for someone to ask a foreign government for financial assistance, even if that person has previously been convicted of espionage."

Original url:

<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2010/10/03/ex-spy-accused-of-espionage-from-prison-a1878>