

Gift Orders Filled in Top-Secret Shop Of Colorado Nuclear Weapon Plant

By FOX BUTTERFIELD

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BOULDER, Colo. — In a top-secret workshop at the Rocky Flats nuclear weapon plant, employees built a \$15,000 hardwood staircase for their supervisor and then smuggled it out in pieces in false-bottom cases past guards who had been bribed.

The staircase was one of thousands of items, including gold- and silver-plated jewelry, wine presses and lavish memorial plaques, that were made in the shop from 1968 to 1985 on Government time, a violation of plant rules, according to separate investigations by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Congress and the inspector general of the Energy Department.

The Rocky Flats plant, which produces plutonium triggers for nuclear weapons, is owned by the Energy Department and operated by the Rockwell International Corporation.

The F.B.I. found many of the objects in the homes and offices of Energy Department employees; the department's own inspector general found that managers at Rocky Flats had tol-

Energy Department's attention in 1985 by an engineer, J. David Navarette. Mr. Navarette said at the time that he "finally had enough" after being forced to work on three sets of plans for a retirement home for the shop's supervisor, Warren Rooker.

Mr. Rooker did not respond to any telephone messages left on an answering machine at his home in Colorado.

Mr. Navarette's complaint led to the F.B.I. inquiry and then to an article in The Boulder Daily Camera last year about abuses in the model shop.

Fuller Explanation Sought

But Mr. Synar said he would call more hearings unless his committee obtained a clearer explanation from the Energy Department as to why no one involved had been disciplined and why no money had been recovered from Rockwell.

The Energy Department's own inspector general, in a report last summer based on an audit of the work done in the shop from 1977 to 1985, said the agency should act to collect at least \$52,600 from Rockwell for personal items for which no Government job orders could be found. The inspector general said officials of both the Energy Department and Rockwell were aware of at least \$668,000 worth of other items that might have been improperly charged to regular Government contracts. Mr. Navarette has told Congress that the total is more than \$1 million.

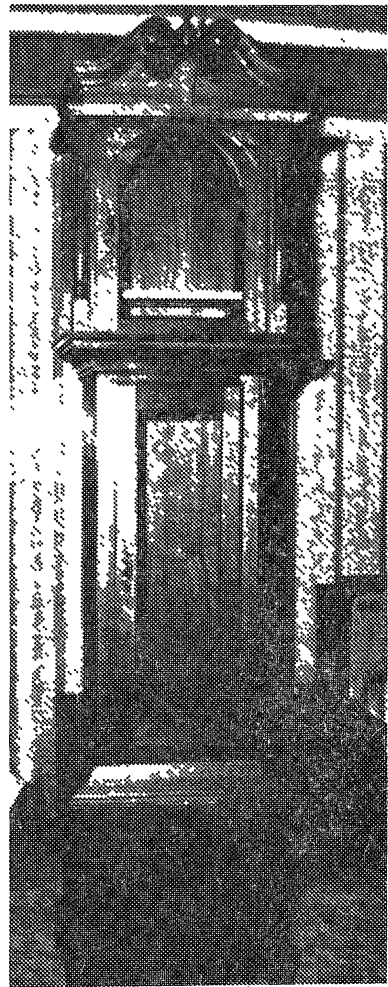
Chris West, a spokesman for the Energy Department, said department officials "certainly weren't aware" of abuses at the shop before Mr. Navarette's disclosure.

Engineer Files Suit

As for the inspector general's call for seeking reimbursement from Rockwell, Mr. West said the Energy Department would await the outcome of a lawsuit Mr. Navarette has filed against Rockwell in the Federal District Court in Denver.

The suit, filed under the False Claims Act, which allows citizens to recover money from contractors who have defrauded the Government, names Rockwell, Mr. Rooker and two scientists at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in California: A. Carl Haussmann, an associate laboratory director, and John L. Emmett, associate director for lasers. Preliminary motions are now being heard.

A spokesman for the inspector general's office said it was now conducting a new inquiry into the laboratory. The spokesman said Lawrence Livermore scientists working on the development of an anti-missile system based in space ordered many of the unauthorized items made at Rocky Flats.



Rockwell International

Mr. Navarette said in a deposition that the scientists at Lawrence Livermore more maintained large standing work orders for legitimate projects with Rocky Flats but then called or wrote letters "explaining that other personal items were actually desired."

In a hearing before Mr. Synar's committee last December, Mr. Navarette said the Rocky Flats shop, the Future Systems Division, had 15 to 20 employees and was equipped with a machine shop, paint shop, darkroom, a design studio and a stockroom for exotic metals and woods.

Security was so tight that even the local Rockwell vice president charged with responsibility for the shop was not admitted without an appointment, other officials testified.

Jack Dorr, Rockwell's general manager at Rocky Flats when the unauthorized work was discovered, said he had exempted the shop from normal accounting and management controls, according to the Energy Department inspector general's report.

Among the more than 4,000 items made in the shop over an 18-year period, Mr. Navarette said in his deposition, were gold, silver or bronze medals, plaques, pen and pencil sets, cuff

Workers made thousands of items in violation of the rules.

erated the abuses. Even so, no one has been punished. And the Government has made no effort to recover money for what it was improperly billed, an amount that could approach \$1 million.

Representative Mike Synar, Democrat of Oklahoma, asserted in a recent telephone interview that the workings of the shop were "symptomatic of a frightening breakdown in management" by the Energy Department. Other problems with management, safety and procedures at the department's system of plants that produce nuclear weapons have led to the recent shutdown or partial closing of several plants, including Rocky Flats, 16 miles northwest of Denver.

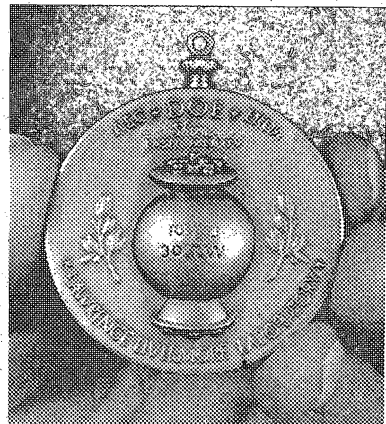
Despite new restrictions imposed in 1985, Mr. Synar said the history of the shop pointed to a system of "inadequate controls, lack of accountability and an attitude of indifference at the Department of Energy." Mr. Synar is chairman of the Subcommittee on Environment, Energy and Natural Resources of the House Committee on Government Operations, which conducted one of the investigations.

The unauthorized operations of the shop, where models of nuclear weapons are made, were first brought to the



Daily Camera/Vern Walker

The Rocky Flats nuclear weapon plant in Boulder, Colo. Among the unauthorized items that were made at a top-secret workshop there were medallions, right, commemorating a laser facility at the Lawrence Livermore Laboratory in California and a grandfather clock made for Warren Rooker, the shop's supervisor.



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links, belt buckles, earrings and necklaces. Another favorite item was gemstones fashioned out of the neodymium glass used to make high-powered lasers at Lawrence Livermore for the anti-missile system. In many cases the shop had to order parts from outside suppliers that would not be needed in its authorized work.

\$30,000 Grape Press

Some items were given to employees in retirement or to mark special occasions, like the testing of a Lawrence Livermore anti-missile laser. Energy Department contracts provide for small amounts of money to be used for such mementos.

But other items that appeared to be for personal use clearly exceeded the guidelines, such as a \$30,000 press to crush grapes and a \$38,000 still to process wine for Mr. Emmett at Lawrence Livermore.

Reached by telephone, Mr. Emmett denied he had ever received "any personal benefit" from the model shop. But he said he could not comment on what had happened to the wine processor or fruit press because of the lawsuit in Denver.

Mr. Rooker was another beneficiary, F.B.I. officials testified at Mr. Synar's hearing. In addition to the staircase and house plans, he also received a handmade \$20,000 grandfather clock, a \$20,000 jack for his mobile home and a number of pieces of furniture and tools, the officials said.

The work was all done from scratch with high-technology equipment and was charged at \$56 an hour for each worker, Mr. Navarette said in his depo-

sition. He and another shop employee who gave Congressional testimony estimated the workers in the shop spent about one-third of their time filling special gift orders.

"Security guards were regularly given preference in ordering items in exchange for their looking the other way when finished products were moved out of the facility," Mr. Navarette said in his deposition.

Some senior Energy Department officials ordered gifts directly. A telephone log introduced at the committee hearing showed that a secretary for Herman Roser, then the Assistant Secretary of Energy for Defense Programs, called from Washington to request a "small MX missile mounted on walnut" to present to the manager of the Oak Ridge nuclear plant in Tennessee. Mr. Roser is now retired.

Medallions From Silver

In another case, James E. Nicks, who was the Energy Department manager at Rocky Flats from 1982 to 1985, approved the withdrawal of 2,900 ounces of silver from the department's strategic stockpile to be made into medallions ordered by scientists at Lawrence Livermore, according to Mr. Nicks's own Congressional testimony.

The silver was intended for use in the nation's nuclear weapons. Asked by Mr. Synar at the hearing if making the silver into medallions served this purpose, Mr. Nicks replied, "No sir."

The silver was billed to Lawrence Livermore for \$13,620, less than half the world market price, documents introduced at the hearing showed.

Representative David E. Skaggs,

Democrat of Colorado, whose district includes Rocky Flats, said the operations of the model shop constituted "a clear misappropriation of public funds." Mr. Skaggs said he was "disturbed," therefore, that no real action had been taken against those involved.

Mr. Rooker, the shop supervisor, who was 54 years old in 1985, was allowed to retire and has been receiving disability pay. Pat Etchart, a spokesman for Rockwell, said it was against company policy to disclose the nature of Mr. Rooker's disability.

Mr. Haussmann and Mr. Emmett maintain their top secret security clearances and positions at Lawrence Livermore.

Mr. Dorr, the Rockwell plant manager at Rocky Flats, was promoted to company headquarters, and Mr. Nicks, the Energy Department's manager at the plant, was also promoted. He is now in charge of the agency's critical study of how to modernize and relocate the entire nuclear weapons complex. It is scheduled to be presented to Congress by Dec. 15.