

Attack on Video Store Owner Blamed on Mental Instability

By WENDY MELILLO
Washington Post Staff Writer

A 51-year-old State Department employee who objected violently when charged a late fee on a rented video was unstable because he had been given the wrong psychiatric medication, his attorney said at a court appearance yesterday.

Gregory H. Stanton was accused of hitting a McLean video store owner over the head with a video-cassette, then driving his car at the man, knocking him through the plate-glass front of a restaurant. Stanton fled to Amsterdam on his diplomatic passport before returning to the United States and turning himself in to police.

In Fairfax County Circuit Court yesterday, Stanton did not contest the charges. When sentenced, he faces a possible five to 20 years in jail for malicious wounding and up to five years for destruction of property.

Judge Kathleen H. MacKay revoked Stanton's \$10,000 bond and ordered him held at the Fairfax jail until a sentencing hearing June 5. "This is an incredible set of facts, all to rent a video," MacKay said.

Stanton said he was "deeply mortified" and "sorry" for the damages and injury he had caused. "This was an aberration in my life," he said.

Thomas Abbenante argued that his client should remain free because he had no prior record and was being treated by two psychiatrists who would testify that he poses no dan-

ger. Abbenante declined to identify Stanton's mental health problem or to say what medicine he was taking at the time of the Jan. 24 altercation at the Box Office Video in McLean.

Assistant Commonwealth's Attorney Mark C. Simmons said Stanton committed a "violent, impulsive" act against store owner Hassan Mostafavi. He also noted that Stanton fled the country after the incident.

"If his bond is continued, I do not think it is right that he could ride down the same courthouse elevator as his victim," Simmons said.

According to police, Stanton argued with Mostafavi over a \$4.49 late fee. He then whacked Mostafavi over the head with the video he wanted to rent—"Nothing to Lose"—as the men wrestled each other to the floor.

Once outside the video store at 1392 Chain Bridge Rd., police said, Stanton drove his 1993 Cadillac into Mostafavi, who had pursued him, and knocked him through the window of the Three Pigs barbecue restaurant next door.

Mostafavi, 54, who suffered cuts, bruises and a tailbone fracture, said he was satisfied with the outcome so far. "Even though the man tried to kill me, I kind of felt sorry for him to be handcuffed and put away," he said.

Stanton is on paid administrative leave from the State Department, where he has been a junior Foreign Service officer since August 1992. An official said the agency would determine what action to take about the job since Stanton was in jail.

Food Safety
Ground Beef

Ground Beef Recalled After Test Finds E. Coli

Associated Press

The country's biggest meat-packing company is recalling more than 282,000 pounds of ground beef nationwide following the discovery of contamination with a virulent strain of E. coli bacteria.

The tainted sample was found during a routine test conducted by the Agriculture Department on a single package of beef produced April 14 at IBP Inc.'s plant in Joslin, Ill. The recalled amount represents that entire day's production and was possibly shipped to numerous states,

Jacque Knight, spokeswoman for USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service, said yesterday.

IBP, based in Dakota City, Neb., said 50 retail and food service customers have been asked to return the meat. It is typically processed further, so there are no product codes for consumers to check.

No illnesses had been reported from the meat, but health departments in all 50 states and the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have been alerted.

Symptoms of infection include abdominal cramps, diarrhea and fever.

E. coli, a microbe that gets into meat mainly through contaminated manure, is particularly dangerous for children, the elderly and people with AIDS. Cooking hamburger to an internal temperature of 160 degrees Fahrenheit will kill the pathogen.

The recall is the latest involving E. coli and ground beef, including the record recall of 25 million pounds last summer by Hudson Foods Co. People were sickened in that case.

IBP said it is reviewing all of its procedures and is installing new technology in its plants to prevent contamination.

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FBI Joins Va. Probe of Motorist Assistance Budget Overruns

By ALICE REID
Washington Post Staff Writer

The FBI has joined a Virginia State Police investigation examining why a state contract for a motorist assistance service has run about \$1 million over budget this year, officials said yesterday.

FBI officials would not comment on their action—revealed in internal state documents obtained by The Washington Post—and referred questions to the state police.

"We are looking into allegations from various sources of improprieties involving expenditures in the safety service patrol," said state police

spokeswoman Lucy Caldwell, who would not provide further details. "They will keep investigating until they are satisfied that there has been no wrongdoing or until evidence indicates charges should be filed."

Meanwhile, Virginia Department of Transportation officials have backed off their recent statement that part of the problem was unauthorized charges by the contractor, D&D Safety Service of Seaford, Va.

Yesterday, the transportation department released documents indicating that D&D had been granted permission to increase its hourly charges from \$15.80 in 1996 to \$16.47 last year. The contract

amendment, unearthed yesterday in the department's Richmond office, "shows that overcharging is not an issue," spokeswoman Joan Morris said. "VDOT did not overpay D&D. We're still continuing our own investigation of the matter."

While state and federal investigators look for instances of fraud or mismanagement, the safety patrol, which for years has provided gridlock-reducing assistance to motorists, will be forced to cut back on service because of the overspending.

Transportation officials say they will trim back the safety service patrol substantially to keep costs from rising further. D&D's 22 patrol-

lers will be cut to 15 on May 15 and to 10 by June 12. By June 30, only five contract patrollers will remain.

"We plan to stay with five," said Morris, adding that the contract service, as well as VDOT-operated service patrols, will be concentrated during rush hours.

Mike Payne, D&D's president, said yesterday he was relieved that the state had exonerated his company from overcharging the state.

"I knew I was right all along. I just didn't know how to prove it," Payne said.

As traffic has increased on state roads, the demand on the safety service patrol has risen; in 1997, it

helped 65,000 motorists, an increase of nearly 50 percent from 1995.

"It's one of those taxpayer programs where the people actually see some benefit," Payne said.

The probe into overspending at the transportation department follows another embarrassing episode last fall, in which a high-ranking engineer at the agency, Charles Leroy Williams Jr. of Scottsville, Va., was convicted of embezzling more than \$300,000 from the department.

Williams had submitted phony invoices for parts of the automated toll collection system used on the Dulles Toll Road.