

Cop relieved of duty over drug-dealer link

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A Miami police detective who served as a wiretap operator in the Operation Tick-Talks probe has been relieved of duty because of an alleged link to a suspected narcotics dealer, a Dade Circuit judge was told Thursday.

Judge Gerald Kogan, who is presiding over the Tick-Talks case, said Officer Raul Puig, 36, a long-time member of the department's sensitive Special Investigations Section (SIS), was seen "fraternizing" with Oscar Cantu, 54, a Miami man indicted in 1978 on federal narcotics charges.

Miami police, who were investigating Cantu at about the same time, used wiretaps in their probe. Those tape recordings, stored in a locked vault at police headquarters, were discovered this week to have been sabotaged, Kogan disclosed.

Kogan, who is hearing pretrial motions by defense attorneys to suppress 1,000 hours of wiretap evidence collected in the Tick-Talks case, discussed the matter in court after being briefed on Puig's status by Maj. Paul Oboz, head of SIS.

Cantu also was the subject of a Miami police investigation in which wiretaps were used, Judge Kogan said Maj. Oboz told him. The judge said he was told that the Miami police probe of Cantu was held in abeyance until the federal case against Cantu was concluded.

Cantu was convicted, and sentenced to 12 years in prison, Sam Smargon, the federal prosecutor, said. Cantu appealed the conviction, but last month the U.S. Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals affirmed his conviction for conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute cocaine and marijuana, and use of a telephone in the furtherance of a conspiracy, Smargon said.

Miami police recently reopened their own Cantu investigation. This week, Kogan said, Oboz and another SIS officer retrieved the wiretap recordings from the vault where they had been stored since 1979.

Police discovered the tapes had been tampered with, Kogan said. The distortions rendered them "unusable in any prosecution," the judge said.

An investigation showed that someone had passed a magnet over the tapes, Kogan said. The tampering was done in the police locker where they were kept, he said.

The judge did not elaborate further. He promised to turn over an edited transcript of his in-chambers conversation with Oboz today.

No suspect has yet been linked to the tape-tampering.

Efforts to reach Puig Thursday were unsuccessful.

Puig has been with the police department since January 1974. He resigned in August 1980 to go into business with his family — a police spokesman said he didn't know what type of business — but was rehired in February 1981 and re-assigned to SIS, at an annual salary of \$24,710.

Most of Puig's career has been spent in that unit. His work has brought him numerous commendations, including one from a March 1978 drug bust in which 56 pounds of cocaine valued at \$32 million was seized, \$913,000 was confiscated and seven persons were arrested.

Puig's personnel file includes a December 1979 letter from Dade State Attorney Janet Reno to Miami Police Chief Kenneth Harms complimenting the officer's work in the Video-Canary sting operation.

Puig also was commended by Maj. Oboz for his work in the Tick-Talks case. He was a wiretap operator, monitoring conversations from four telephone wiretaps and two room transmitters.