

Russian spy intrigue fizzles as Hawaii stolen ID trial nears
Jennifer Sinco Kelleher (Associated Press) - AP

U. S. prosecutors who introduced Russian spy intrigue into the case of a couple accused of living for decades in Hawaii under identities stolen from dead babies are now saying they don't want jurors to hear about photographs showing them wearing foreign uniforms.



FILE - This combination of undated photos provided by the United States District Court District of Hawaii shows Walter Glenn Primrose, left, also known as Bobby Edward Fort, and his wife, Gwynn Darle Morrison, also known as Julie Lyn Montague, purportedly in KGB, the former Russian spy agency, uniforms. (United States District Court District of Hawaii via AP, File)© Provided by The Associated Press



FILE - The home where U.S. defense contractor Walter Glenn Primrose and his wife, Gwynn Darle Morrison, lived for years allegedly under aliases, is pictured, Wednesday, July 27, 2022, in Kapolei, Hawaii.

A U.S. judge granted the request last week, ruling that the uniforms are not relevant to the upcoming trial for charges involving identity theft and passport fraud. Defense attorneys have said from the start those uniforms were worn once for fun.

When the former U.S. defense contractor and his wife were arrested last year, prosecutors suggested the case was about more than just identity theft.

According to prosecutors, Walter Glenn Primrose and Gwynn Darle Morrison are the real names of the couple who have been fraudulently living for decades under stolen identities Bobby Fort and Julie Montague.

Prosecutors say Primrose spent more than 20 years in the Coast Guard as Bobby Fort, where he obtained secret-level security clearance. After retiring in 2016, he used the secret clearance for his defense job, prosecutors said.



FILE - This combination of undated photos provided by the United States District Court District of Hawaii shows Walter Glenn Primrose, left, also known as Bobby Edward Fort, and his wife, Gwynn Darle Morrison, aka Julie Lyn Montague.

There is no indication in court papers why the couple in 1987 assumed the identities of deceased children, who would have been more than a decade younger than them.

A search of the couple's home in Kapolei, a Honolulu suburb, turned up Polaroids of them wearing jackets that appear to be authentic KGB uniforms, an invisible ink kit, documents with coded language and maps showing military bases, prosecutors said.

They have pleaded not guilty to conspiracy, false statement in a passport application and aggravated identity theft. Trial is scheduled for next month but could be delayed because a new lawyer was appointed for Primrose last week.

Prosecutors last month filed a motion "to preclude examination or testimony concerning Defendants wearing or being photographed in foreign military uniforms." Prosecutors said they were irrelevant to the charges and U.S. District Judge Leslie

Kobayashi agreed. Defense attorneys for the couple have said they took a photo wearing the same jacket years ago as a joke.

In an email from prosecutors to defense attorneys, Assistant U.S. Attorney Tom Muehleck wrote that a witness said the photos were taken sometime in the 1990s and U.S. agents were given the "alleged uniform" Defense attorneys said that debunks the spy theory.

In a subsequent email from prosecutors to defense attorneys about seized letters referring to the couple using other aliases, Muehleck wrote, "The United States retracts that argument," adding that they later learned those were just nicknames "and some of them were the product of inside jokes in relation to Primrose and Morrison."

Alexander Silvert, a retired federal defender for the Hawaii district who is not involved in the case, said it sounds like prosecutors overreacted to the photos.

Upon searching further, "they probably ... realized they overreacted and these are not Russian spies," he said. "These are people who stole other people's identity, which is not, unfortunately, uncommon these days." But there's also another far-fetched possibility, he said.

"The wild conspiracy theorists would say maybe they really are Russian spies, but the government doesn't want anybody to know that," Silvert said.

In response to an Associated Press email asking what became of the spy speculation, First Assistant U.S. Attorney Elliot Enoki, a spokesperson for the office, said, "We have nothing further to add to any public filings or comments already made."

A hearing is scheduled Wednesday for Morrison's request to reconsider a previous [detention ruling](#). A hearing for Primrose's similar request hadn't yet been scheduled.

"I said from the beginning this is not a Russian spy case," Silvert said.

"It's just a vanilla ID theft that had a wrinkle to it."