

Southeastern Bell scandal reaching long-awaited end

United Press International
SAN ANTONIO, Texas — More than five years after top Texas telephone company executive Thur O'Dell Gravitt asphyxiated himself in his Dallas garage — leaving a note saying "Watergate was a gnat compared to the Bell system" — all the charges and counter charges finally are coming due.

When the Texas Supreme Court makes its final ruling, expected this year, on the libel and slander suit filed by Gravitt's survivors and former Southwestern Bell official James Ashley, the lid on Pandora's Box likely will close.

It has made years of interesting — and costly — reading for ratepayers as Southwestern Bell paid some \$2 million in attorney fees to defend itself against the sensational charges generated by Ashley and Gravitt.

The telephone company and some of its executives were accused of maintaining illegal political slush-funds and making illegal campaign contributions, tapping telephones, pressuring female employees into sexual relationships, engaging in underhanded rate practices and winning and dining — and providing women for — the politicians who set the rates.

During the long court battle the reputations of Ashley and Gravitt, which the libel and slander suit ostensibly sought to protect, took a mauling as company witnesses testified the two executives were at the bottom of the very wrongdoing which they alleged was carried out by the huge utility.

Ashley and Gravitt were accused of sexually harassing female subordinates, padding their expense accounts and engaging in conflict of interest.

It never was established definitely who — if anyone — emerged victorious. Both sides now claim triumph and exoneration. But both indicate they would just as soon forget it.

One San Antonio jury awarded Ashley and his wife \$1 million on grounds Bell tapped their telephones, and another local jury presented Gravitt's widow and Ashley with \$3 million on grounds the two executives were libeled and slandered by company investigators.

But Ashley has collected nothing and maintains "money never was the primary issue. It was a principal thing — don't get me wrong — but I'm not sitting around waiting for any money that might be forthcoming."

Bell officials proudly note that both money awards were overturned on appeal on grounds the evidence did not support the verdicts reached by the San Antonio jurors. They also

point to a lengthy Federal Communications Commission investigation which last October absolved the company of any of the wrongdoing alleged in the sensational trials.

The State Supreme Court has forever doomed the original \$1 million wiretapping award and unless it departs from its standard procedure of upholding civil appeals courts in such cases, it will also rule in Bell's favor in the remaining libel and slander suit, previously overturned by the 4th Court of Civil Appeals.

Ashley and his colorful attorney, Pat Maloney, however, contend they are still optimistic the \$3 million jury award will be reinstated.

"We're confident they will (rule) on behalf of Ashley and Gravitt," Ashley said. "We've always felt that way."

"I think this is a different lawsuit," added Maloney, who portrayed his client as David versus Goliath. "We really have high hopes. It's been pending more than a year now. One can conclude from that that it is being seriously regarded."

But Bell officials, with two major court victories to their credit, are more optimistic the Supreme Court also will uphold its arguments.

"Folks over here feel that we don't have any comment. We couldn't add to what we've said repeatedly before," said company spokesman Marco Gilliam. "We consider the case closed and we're looking forward to other matters."

Ashley, who once called himself "The Ralph Nader of the telephone industry," claims his revelations in the lawsuits helped push the legislature to final approval of a Texas Public Utilities Commission, which for the first time regulates telephone rates throughout the state. Previously each city dealt individually with the telephone company, leading to Texas being one of the top profit-making states for the American Telephone and Telegraph Co.

It is debatable whether Texas ratepayers have noticed much difference, however, because the commission continues to approve telephone rate hikes, the most recent one for \$137 million, just \$9 million less than Southwestern Bell requested.

"They're (Bell) the master of the mechanics (of obtaining rate hikes). Throughout the country they've majored in living comfortably with regulation boards," Maloney said. "We're disappointed (with the commission), but obviously it's an improvement."

Maloney admits he may not make any money for his legal services because appeals courts overruled both jury awards, but said he would take

the case again in similar circumstances.

"It's been a costly experience, but one I would relive again," the attorney said. "It's a difficult thing being against the largest corporation in the world which has endless resources."

The allegations began flying after Oct. 17, 1974, when Gravitt, the handsome silver-haired Texas vice president of the company and former president of the San Antonio Chamber of Commerce, closed his garage door in Dallas, started his car and died of carbon monoxide poisoning.

Two weeks later his friend, Ashley, was fired from his \$60,000 a year job as commercial manager in San Antonio. Then on Nov. 15, 1974, the \$29 million libel and slander suit was filed, alleging the two officials were being harassed because they opposed widespread wrongdoing in Southwestern Bell.

The suit portrayed Southwestern Bell executives as "super high liver's"

engaging in rampant promiscuity and keeping a double set of books to obtain unjustified rate increases in Texas. The suit charged Bell investigators hounded Gravitt to commit suicide and caused Ashley's firing.

C.L. Todd, local Bell chief, counter-charged that if there was any wrongdoing, Ashley and Gravitt were behind it.

Todd recently preferred to let Gilliam do the talking after claiming numerous times the appeals courts had upheld his original position.

Bell's battery of attorneys countered the allegations in court by calling 15 women who told of alleged sexual harassment and sexual encounters, on desk tops and in motel rooms, with the two former executives. They also presented evidence of false vouchering by the two men and an alleged conflict of interest by Ashley in a printing firm which did business with Southwestern Bell.

1 ayatollah equals 1/2 a restaurant

United Press International
WILLIAMSVILLE, N.Y. — The waiters and waitresses wore military outfits. The customers' uniforms, medals and artillery were worth food and drink and the ayatollah could have been traded for a piece of the profit.

Sunday was "Proud to Be An American Day" at Goldie's Restaurant, and proof that a person once served in the armed forces — discharge papers or dog tags — was worth a free drink. A medal would

get the owner a gift of either food or drink.

A tank was good for a weekly dinner for two for the next two years, and the Ayatollah Khomeini — the real one and "in any condition" — would have netted the captor the jackpot: half-interest in the restaurant.

Proprietor Joseph D'Angelo said two tanks were en route from Carlisle, Pa., and Geneva, N.Y.

"They're on flatbeds," he said. "We're looking forward to them

showing up."

Williamsville High School student Kenneth Coleman came dressed as the ayatollah, and was guarded by his friend, Peter Steiner. "We do a lot of crazy things," Coleman explained, "and we wanted to try this."

He estimated that 1,000 people turned out for the party, "even from Philadelphia and Washington."

D'Angelo also circulated a petition that he will send to Congress in an effort to have Feb. 10 proclaimed "Proud to Be American Day," a national holiday.



PASTA'S
PIZZA
LASAGNE
SPAGHETTI

TUESDAY NIGHT BUFFET SPECIAL

6 to 8 p.m.

Have ALL the Pizza, Fried Chicken and Salad you can eat for **ONLY 2⁹⁹**

"There's no pizza like a Pasta's Pizza! We guarantee it!"

807 TEXAS AVE.

696-3380

PAPER COMPETITION

FOR UNDERGRADUATES
presented by
Pi Sigma Alpha
(Political Science honor society)

- \$100 Award for First Place
- papers written for upper division Pol. Sci. courses are eligible.
- entries are due in rm. 130 Bolton Hall by March 21, 5:00 p.m.

FOR INFORMATION CALL 693-6382

For better grades, spend less time studying.

We'll show you how...free.

Would you like to:

- Raise your grade average without long hours over texts.
- End all-night cramming sessions.
- Breeze through all your studying in as little as 1/3 the time.
- Have more free time to enjoy yourself.
- Read 3 to 10 times faster, with better concentration, understanding, and recall.

Evelyn Wood's new RD2 reading system makes it all possible.

Evelyn Wood works — over 1 million people, including students, executives, senators, and even presidents have proven it. A free 1 hour demonstration will show you how to save hundreds of hours of drudgery this year (as well as how to increase your speed immediately with some simple new reading techniques).

It only takes an hour, and it's free. Don't miss it.

Evelyn Wood RD2

will open your eyes.

Free Mini Lessons will be given February 11th, 12th, 13th and 14th at 6:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m.

Location: Aggieland Inn
1502 S. Texas Avenue

© 1978 EVELYN WOOD READING DYNAMICS/A URS COMPANY

Texans for Connally

*** PARTY & MIXER ***

Join us on Valentine's Day at Last National Bank Bar as we watch John Connally on national television. 8 p.m.

Everyone is invited!

WEDNESDAY SPECIAL

MONTEREY DINNER

3⁷⁹

REQ. 4.25

FIESTA DINNER

3³⁹

REQ. 3.75

ENCHILADA DINNER

2⁶⁹

REQ. 3.15



Monterey House
MEXICAN RESTAURANTS