

TRANSLATION

News

SPECIAL EDITION

CHRONICLE EDITOR FIRED

By Sheila Hopper,
TN Correspondent

Ossining, NY., October 3rd. --
It was learned today from highly placed sources in the American Translators Association (ATA) that T. Donald ("Ted") Crump, Editor of the ATA Chronicle, was dismissed. Although Mr. Crump's sudden dismissal appeared merely to be symbolic to observers of the American translation scene, its significance was not lost. Mr. Crump had planned to resign his editorship at the end of October, and a new editor had already been appointed. The editor of the Chronicle is appointed by the ATA Board of Directors and receives an annual salary of \$3600 plus expenses.

ENTER THE "DRAGON LADY"

Sources close to the ATA Board reported that Mr. Crump's firing had a direct relationship to what has come to be known as the "Dragon Lady" affair. Apparently, a person calling herself "Vivian Yu" undertook a covert study of translation agency fees, using a front to obtain confidential pricing information. Six translation companies identified themselves as having been duped by Ms. Yu's method. Mr. Crump published Ms. Yu's findings in the September edition of the Chronicle,

names of the firms, leaving only their geographical areas. He also informed the readership that he would make Ms. Yu's report available (including full identification of the translation companies involved) upon request.

When one translation agency executive saw through the scam, he immediately alerted the others, and Mr. Crump was suddenly inundated with requests for Ms. Yu's full report. At the very same time, another translation company official determined that the so-called "Vivian Yu" was not an ATA member, a fact confirmed by ATA headquarters in Ossining. Despite a flood of requests and demands for information regarding the true identity of Ms. Yu, Mr. Crump refused to disclose any particulars about her. He then reversed his original position and said that he would not release her report to anyone. Evidently, this refusal to release pertinent information surrounding the gathering of confidential information, described by Robert L. Addis, President of Ad-EX Translations International/USA, as "a deceitful, fraudulent act engaged in with clear intent to do harm", was too much for the ATA Board, and Mr. Crump was ordered to pack up his word processor and leave.

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A TURBULENT EDITORSHIP

An undercurrent of controversy has surrounded Ted Crump since he took over the editorial duties of the ATA Chronicle in November 1987. Previously, Mr. Crump, a Russian translator at the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Maryland, was editor of the Capital Translator, the newsletter of ATA's Chapter in the Washington, D.C. area. It was known to many that he coveted the position of Chronicle editor and campaigned actively behind the scenes for the job. Indeed, Mr. Crump publicly made known his dissatisfaction with the editorship of his Chronicle predecessor, Lee Wright of Berea, Ohio. The late Astrid Johansen, a former ATA Board member, once described Mr. Crump's quest for the editorship as "vintage back-room politics". Other sources said that he was highly instrumental in forcing out Dr. Wright. Dr. Wright has made no comments on this allegation.

However, once at the editorial desk, Mr. Crump demonstrated outstanding journalistic talents. He converted the Chronicle from a dry 12-page newsletter into a 24-page magazine. He was responsible for tripling advertising revenue and opened the pages to all sorts of viewpoints. The Chronicle quickly became an open forum of ideas and philosophies, some highly critical of ATA policies.

JOURNALISM "A" - INTEGRITY "D"

Nevertheless, Mr. Crump never appeared to have a deep-seated commitment to open expression. Often it seemed that his publishing of

critical letters and articles was predicated on some vague self-interest. On several occasions he would send advance copies of critical articles to the recipients of that criticism, asserting that he wanted to get the views of both sides of a question. However, he would readily depart from that policy for no apparent reason.

He often claimed that he was merely the Association's "employee" and did "what he was told" (by the Board of Directors), but this too was belied by many of his independent actions, viewed with some consternation by many ATA officials.

His fall from grace appeared to start when he got caught up in a threat of legal action made against the Association earlier this year. This legal action was threatened by Bernard Bierman, President of AdEx Translations International, Inc. of New York. ATA officials reacted somewhat viscerally to this threat by suspending AdEx's right to advertise in the Chronicle (the dispute has since been settled amicably). However, instead of placing the responsibility on ATA management to inform AdEx of the suspension, Mr. Crump took it upon himself to do the informing and the execution of the suspension.

Mr. Crump's action evidently backfired on him, for very shortly, ATA officials learned that he had been privately railing against them, characterizing ATA officials on several occasions as "dictators". To add to management's displeasure, it was revealed that Mr. Crump had granted special privileges to a Chronicle advertiser with whom he had an unpublicized business relationship.

"I always liked Ted personally," said Mr. Bierman. "and admired his

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journalistic talents and accomplishments as Chronicle Editor. He single-handedly turned the newsletter into a timely, highly readable organ." Mr. Bierman, an often vocal critic of some ATA policies, added, "In journalism, Ted gets an unqualified "A", but in integrity he rates a "D".

STORM CLOUDS GATHER

The "Dragon Lady" affair, which appears to be connected to a growing movement of anti-agency dissidents, will no doubt be felt and talked about at the forthcoming Annual Conference of the Association, to be held in Washington, D.C. on October 12-15th.

ATA officials refuse to comment on this, but recent events indicate that they may be hard-pressed to keep a lid on things.

The dissident movement, led by two ATA Directors, George Kirby of San Francisco, and John Bukacek of Chicago, has been very vocal of late, especially in print. Mr. Kirby has gone on record by accusing translation agencies of controlling the market and keeping translators in a near-poverty condition. Mr. Bukacek has echoed Mr. Kirby's sentiments, and has gone one step further by excluding all translation agency and bureau owners and employees from the recently-founded Chicago Area Translators & Interpreters Association, of which he is Chairman. Mr. Bukacek says that his Chicago group is an ATA affiliate, although not a Chapter. The ATA is, however, demanding that Mr. Bukacek terminate the group's exclusionary policy in order to

call it an ATA affiliate. Mr. Bukacek has refused to do this. Moreover, unconfirmed reports attribute the masterminding of the "Dragon Lady" affair to Mr. Bukacek.

Notwithstanding its discomfort with the vocal anti-agency attitude now enveloping the Association, ATA Conference planners appear to be going ahead with one session that will be closed to persons not meeting certain criteria qualifying them as "independent freelance translators". The session and the criteria for admission were conceived by Isabel Leonard, a freelance translator of Hingham, Mass. Ms. Leonard, a former Chronicle editor, has long been in the forefront of the anti-agency movement. Nevertheless, sources report that various ATA officials are concerned about the exclusionary nature of this session and are pressing to have it opened to all Conference registrants. No official comment could be obtained at press time.

ESPIONAGE RELATIVELY COMMON IN TRANSLATION INDUSTRY

By Sam Marlowe,
TN Special Correspondent

Espionage appears to be relatively common in the translation industry, according to several translation company executives. However, they were all quick to add that this espionage is benign, in that it is undertaken almost always to gain a bit of leverage when engaged in competitive bidding. According to

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one translation company official, espionage is usually in the form of a telephone call made under an assumed name, with the information collected being used only by the masquerading inquirer. The method is also often used by free-lance translators when dealing with a direct client for the first time. One long-time free-lance translator, whose dealings had been exclusively with translation agencies, told TRANSLATION NEWS that she resorted to this method when she was approached by a major pharmaceutical company to translate numerous package inserts.

A HIGHLY COMPETITIVE BUSINESS

It is fairly common knowledge that translation companies jealously guard information about their pricing, for in the highly competitive world of industrial translation, a difference of a couple of hundred dollars can be the determining factor in winning or losing a prospective client's business. Even on those rare occasions when translation companies have been approached by a bona fide survey company, giving guarantees of anonymity, to respond to pricing information, they have been less than willing to release that information.

In the past 20 years, translation for commercial and trade sources has become highly competitive. Not only must translation companies compete among themselves, they must also indirectly compete with thousands of free-lancers and corporate staff translators. And in more recent times, translation companies holding lucrative contracts with U.S. government agencies have seen an erosion in their business volume because of the ever-increasing use of computer-aided translation facilities.

A NEW TWIST ON ESPIONAGE

The so-called "Dragon Lady" affair added a new twist to spying in the translation industry, for the method used was less than benign. The person purporting to be "Vivian Yu" conducted her inquiry in writing, and moreover used what appeared to be phony front. Using that method, she was able to convince many translation companies that the inquiry was a legitimate one, and consequently obtained information that could not have been secured by a mere telephone call. And what exacerbated the situation were the purposes behind Ms. Yu's research: to convince others that translation companies are engaged in raw exploitation of free-lance translators. Ms. Yu might have succeeded in her mission had it not been for the keen eye of one translation company official.

OPERATION "INTERPLAK"

"Vivian Yu" began her espionage mission in mid-July of this year, when she sent out inquiries to at least five known translation companies. All of the inquiries were sent by fax. The cover sheet was carefully designed to convince the recipients that they were dealing with a legitimate firm and a legitimate inquiry. Ms. Yu used the name of "Michael Pierce" and assigned the title of "Assistant Writer" to "Mr. Pierce". For a company name she used "The Robert Anderson Group, Inc." of Evanston, Illinois. The document used for the scam was copy for advertising the dental product known as "InterPlak", and the request for quotation covered translation of that copy into Spanish and Chinese, with final copy to be laser printed. The five translation companies known to be "hit" in July

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were American Translators International, Ad-Ex Translations International/USA, Berlitz Translation Services, Rocky Mountain Translators and Accurapid Translations, Inc.

All five responded to the inquiry, and there are unconfirmed reports that about five more fell victim to the ruse. In August, the so-called "Vivian Yu" submitted her findings in a letter addressed to the ATA Chronicle. However, T. Donald ("Ted") Crump, Chronicle editor, refused to publish Ms. Yu's letter unless she removed all positive identification of the translation companies. Ms. Yu evidently acceded to Mr. Crump's demand and her letter was published, identifying the companies only by letters of the alphabet. Assumedly pleased by her success, she dispatched additional inquiries, using the same fronts of "Michael Pierce" and "The Robert Anderson Group, Inc." One such inquiry went to AdEx Translations International, Inc. in New York City, which also responded to the request for quotation. Evidently, that inquiry started Ms. Yu's undoing.

Bernard Bierman, President of AdEx Translations International, Inc., read Ms. Yu's letter in the September edition of the ATA Chronicle and was immediately struck by the similarities to the inquiry which his firm had received in mid-September. Mr. Bierman told TRANSLATION NEWS that there were two elements which caused him to recall the now-mysterious "Robert Anderson Group". "First," he said, "there was this very unusual combination of languages, Chinese and Spanish. Then, there was the advertising copy itself, a piece about a product called 'InterPlak'." Mr. Bierman continued, "I could never forget a

piece about 'InterPlak', for I have had a severe dental plaque condition for many years, necessitating painful quarterly visits to the dentist. When my dentist recommended that I try the 'InterPlak' product, my condition disappeared in a matter of weeks...it was as if I had gotten a new lease on tooth and gum life." Mr. Bierman also added that the format requested, laser printing, was another element which caused him to recall the inquiry.

THE "COPYCAT"

Mr. Bierman then alerted Robert Addis, Director of Ad-Ex Translations International/USA in Menlo Park, California (AdEx/New and Ad-Ex/California are independently owned and operated companies) and Donnie Ruiz, President of Rocky Mountain Translators in Boulder, Colorado. Mr. Addis, in turn, alerted Gabe Bokor, President of Accurapid Translations, Inc. in Poughkeepsie, New York. Evidently, no contact was made with either of the two other companies which were taken in by Ms. Yu's scam.

The American Translators Association confirmed that it did not have a member answering to the name "Vivian Yu". It was also determined in a subsequent investigation by one of the victimized translation agencies that no such company named "The Robert Anderson Group" existed in the Chicago Metropolitan Area, and that Ms. Yu's bogus letters had been sent from a public photocopying and fax service in Evanston, Illinois, called "Copycat of Evanston", just across the Chicago city line.

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As reported elsewhere in "TRANSLATION NEWS", efforts by the translation companies and ATA officials to learn the true identity of the mysterious "Vivian Yu" have been unsuccessful. One ATA official, who requested that his name be withheld, said that "eventually, Mr. Crump will have to turn over that information."

E D I T O R I A L

THE PRINCE HAS FALLEN

He was the future of the American Translators Association. Intelligent, articulate, an outstanding writer, devoted to the profession of translation, Ted Crump was one of the shining lights of the early 80's. He was leadership material and quickly rose to a position of leadership in the ATA.

As Editor of the "Capital Translator", he brought a discernible touch of professionalism to a Chapter newsletter, so much so that soon people were asking why the "ATA CHRONICLE" couldn't be like the "Capital Translator". Ted Crump heard those voices and asked himself, "why not?". He set his eyes upon the Chronicle and soon it was his. And he measured up to the promise. The Chronicle was transformed almost overnight. And Ted's audience applauded.

But the Chronicle editorship is also a graveyard in the byzantine world that is ATA politics. Most of Mr. Crump's predecessors can attest to that. It is a thankless job, a job with built-in conflicts, conflicts between a Board's desire to project a certain image for the Association and an editor's desire to have the readers speak freely. That is the way it has been for a long, long time. It is also a job that brings applause and boos at the same time.

Had Ted Crump boned up on his ATA history, he would have seen that editors cannot afford to go down to the subterranean catacombs of ATA politics. Even when remaining above ground, they are apt to lose their way. Ted tried to navigate within those catacombs and got himself completely lost. And as a relative newcomer to Association politics, he thought that he could match wits with some of the more battle-hardened veterans.

On his merits as an editor, he deserved a farewell with flags flying and trumpets blaring. He probably could have had it, had he not indulged himself in all of the Association's intrigues.

He leaves by the back door, which is a shame. We all wish him well, and we should all remember him for his strengths and forgive him his weaknesses.

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