

Summary of FBI Computer Systems

By Ralph Harvey

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The FBI maintains several computer systems. The most common of which is call NCIC (National Crime Information Computer). NCIC maintains a database of information about such things as stolen cars, stolen boats, missing persons, wanted persons, arrest records. It provides quick access to these records by State, Local and Federal law enforcement agencies. NCIC is directly linked with the Treasury Department's TECS computer and many State computer systems. According to William H. Webster, Director of the FBI:

When a police officer stops a car and is uncertain about who he's going to meet when he gets out, he can plug into this system [NCIC] and in a matter of a few seconds he can find out whether that person is a fugitive or the automobile is stolen. Incidentally, we receive almost 400,000 inquiries of this nature each day in the NCIC system.

When an agency determines that a subject is a fugitive, it supplies the FBI computer with as much of the following information as possible: 1) Name and case number; 2) Alias; 3) Race; 4) Sex; 5) Height; 6) Weight; 7) Color of hair; 8) Color of eyes; 9) Description of any identifying scars, marks and tattoos; 10) Date of birth; 11) Place of birth; 12) Social Security Number; 13) Passport Number; 14) Last known address; 15) Nationality; 16) If a naturalized U.S. Citizen, date, place, and certificate number; 17) Occupation; 18) The criminal violation with which subject is charged; 19) Date of warrant; 20) Type of warrant -- Bench, Magistrate, etc.; 21) Agency holding warrant; 22) Any information as to whether the subject is considered dangerous, is known to own or currently possess firearms, has suicidal tendencies, or has previously escaped custody; 23) Driver's license number, year of expiration and State issued; 24) License number of vehicle, aircraft or vessel subject owns or is known to use, include the year and State; 25) Description of vehicle, aircraft or vessel subject owns or is known to use; 26) Associates of the subject*1; 27) FBI number; 28) Name and telephone of the person to contact when subject is apprehended.

One of the major problems with the system is that the agency that submits an entry is responsible for keeping it up to date. Once an entry has been made, there is little motivation for the originating agency to ``waste'' its time keeping it up to date, so many entries become incorrect with the passage of time.

Another FBI computer system is their Investigative Support Information System (ISIS). This system is only used to provide support for major investigations that require the handling of a large volume of complex information. It is limited to handling a maximum of 20 cases at a time.

The ISIS system was used during the investigation of the murder of Federal Judge John Wood in San Antonio, Texas. In this case, the FBI entered 300,000

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pieces of information, including 6,000 interviews, hotel registration information from every hotel in the area, etc. The accused, while on trial, claimed he was several hundred miles away. The FBI cross referenced his name & known alias with the hotel registration database and got a match. Contact with the hotel employees resulted in a positive identification and conviction of the subject.

The FBI has a system called the Organized Crime Information Systems (OCIS) of which director William Webster is ``particularly proud.'' The system was started in 1980 in Detroit, Michigan and is one of their most sophisticated computers. The system is now functions in over 40 locations.

The OCIS system allows agents in different field offices to share and analyze information collected in each other's areas. This system was used to identify some of the United States citizens who were released from Cuban prisons in 1984 that had criminal histories in the United States. An OCIS link was recently opened in Rome, where it's used to support drug investigations.

The OCIS system was used in the major Sicilian mafia heroin investigation, commonly referred to as ``The Pizza Connection.'' According to Webster, ``OCIS support ranged from direct assistance in collating information for Title III court-authorized wiretaps to the analysis of the case for grand jury presentation.''

Currently under development is the Field Office Information Management System (FOIMS). The purpose of this system is to fully automate the administrative and record keeping functions of the field and resident offices.

*1 One of the basic freedoms in this country is the First Amendment right to freedom of association. The Privacy Act was enacted to stop government invasions of privacy, and includes a provision specifically prohibiting the collection of information on the exercise of First Amendment activities.

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