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# FBI admits it heard about Hanssen in 1997

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May 28, 2001 Posted: 8:03 p.m. EDT (0003 GMT)

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From Jack Date CNN Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON (CNN) -- The FBI confirmed Monday that a former agent who pleaded guilty to spying in 1997 told them four years ago that FBI agent Robert Hanssen was involved in suspicious activity.

The #1 Name: in News

Hanssen was arrested in February and is accused of spying for the Soviet Union and Russia.

The former agent, Earl Pitts, is serving a 27-year sentence for espionage.

The identification of Hanssen by Pitts occurred more than three years before the FBI has said it began to focus on Hanssen as a possible spy in late 2000.

In a prison interview published in the New York Times Monday, Pitts said he told FBI interrogators during a debriefing after he pleaded guilty that Hanssen may have been involved in suspicious activity.

FBI spokesman John Collingwood said in a statement, "Pitts described as 'unusual' a computer hacking incident involving Hanssen. Pitts did not identify Hanssen as a spy."

An attorney for Pitts, Nina Ginsberg, told CNN in a telephone interview her client told the FBI in 1997 he thought there was another mole within the FBI because he felt his Russian handlers knew too much inside information about the bureau.

"He didn't feel that they [Pitts' Russian \* handlers] were taking full advantage of what he might have been able to do," Ginsberg said. Latest Legal News

During 70 hours of debriefing, Ginsberg said, Hanssen was the only person Pitts named as suspicious. Ginsberg said Pitts recalled an

**5** 6-5-5-The case against Robert Hanssen



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Criminal espionage indictment filed against Robert Phillip Hanssen: Part 1 | Part 2

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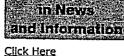
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suspicious. Ginsberg said Pitts recalled an incident involving a female agent who was angry because her computer had been broken into by Hanssen. Pitts, according to Ginsberg, thought the incident was odd because, "ordinarily that kind of incident would have been investigated."

Hanssen was arrested February 18 after he was observed allegedly making a drop of classified information for his Russian handlers in exchange for \$50,000. A 25-year FBI veteran, Hanssen is accused of spying for the Soviet Union and Russia for over 15 years, and taking \$1.4 million in cash and diamonds as payment.

A 21-count indictment alleges Hanssen compromised national security secrets, including the identities of U.S. spies, highly classified eavesdropping technology and nuclear war plans.

Plea bargain negotiations between Hanssen's attorneys and government prosecutors broke down over the government's refusal to rule out seeking the death penalty. He is scheduled to be arraigned on Thursday in Alexandria, Virginia.

Pitts was arrested in December 1996 for spying for Moscow and accepting over \$200,000 for his services between 1987 and 1992 while assigned to the FBI's Quantico, Virginia, training facility. He later agreed to a plea bargain.

When he became aware of Hanssen's arrest, Pitts wrote a letter to his attorney to point out he had named Hanssen in his 1997 debriefing.

Ginsberg wrote a letter to Randy Bellows, an assistant U.S. attorney who prosecuted Pitts, inquiring about whether the information Pitts provided might reduce his 27-year prison sentence. Ginsberg said she has received no reply. Bellows also is prosecuting the Hanssen case.

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