

U.S. Seizes Computers In Germany

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WASHINGTON, July 14 — In a continuing effort to block the illegal export of strategic high-technology equipment to Communist countries, the United States Commissioner of Customs said he has seized \$400,000 worth of American-made computers in West Germany that were believed to be en route to the Soviet Union.

But the head of the Toronto company that purchased and exported the equipment denied in a telephone interview today that the computers were destined for the Soviet Union or that they were strategically important.

"That's incorrect," Glen Langdon, the president of MLPI Business Systems Inc. of Canada, said of the computers' alleged destination. Mr. Langdon also said that the computers have "been on the market since 1975" and were "as significant strategically as sending over a Dodge Dart."

Mr. Langdon said that he had sold "four minicomputers and a lot of spare parts" to the two West German companies, Semitech A.G. and Elmont A.G. He had not done business with them before, he said, but "they came armed with letters of credit" from Swiss banks, "the usual trade papers and introductions from sources in West Germany we were familiar with."

Mr. Langdon said his company had bought the computers from Digital Equipment Corporation, whose headquarters is in Maynard, Mass., for an undisclosed price. He said he knew of

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no connection between the orders and did not identify the models that were sold to the German companies.

Robert S. Mueller, an Assistant United States Attorney in Boston, said today that no charges had yet been filed in the case and that "there is no outstanding complaint or indictment." Because a criminal investigation was under way, he said, he was prohibited by Justice Department guidelines from discussing the case in detail.

Mr. Mueller confirmed that Customs agents on Monday had also searched the Phoenix premises of a company affiliated with MLPI.

Albert Beeson, a vice president of the MLPI affiliate in Phoenix, said today, "We think it's a routine seizure. We don't know if it's final." He said the founder, principal owner and president of the company was one Gary Deseelhorst and that a corporation controlled by him owned both the Phoenix and Toronto companies. He did not elaborate.

In a press release on Tuesday, the Customs Commissioner, William von Raab, an appointee of the Reagan Administration, said the seizure had been made in a joint operation carried out by American, Canadian and German agents.

American and Canadian agents, he said, had kept the equipment under surveillance as it was trucked to Toronto from the United States and had continued to watch it, in cooperation with German agents, after it arrived by air in West Germany.

Mr. von Raab said the seizure on July 6 was part of the Administration's effort, begun in October 1981, "aimed at stopping the smuggling out of the country of high-technology equipment that has a military application."

United States policy for decades has been to deny export licenses to Communist countries for goods and technical information believed to have "strategic" value. The meaning of "strategic," especially when similar equipment could be bought elsewhere, has kindled intense political debates since the 1950s.