

Daniel Schorr / What isn't printed

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The "Dear Friend" letter from Richard Nixon's publisher advised that, as "one of his loyal supporters in his time of need" who had stood up for him "during the darkest hours of Watergate," I was eligible to receive, for \$250 plus handling costs, a handsomely bound copy of "Memoirs," personally autographed for me.

Wondering whether the "enemies list" had been mistakenly fed into the computer, I declined the honor. But I found the experience unsettling enough to discourage me from any attempt to break the heavy security on Nixon's own story, now descending upon us.

But one passage omitted from the book carries an intriguing story. What Nixon deletes, as we learned from the White House tapes, may be more interesting than what he includes. According to some galley proofs of "Memoirs" that fell into the hands of the New

York weekly, Soho News, the following paragraph was marked to be killed:

"In early July we received a report that the Soviet Embassy had received a set of the Pentagon Papers prior to their newspaper publication. John Mitchell informed us that the Justice Department was working on a possible conspiracy theory and that some of Ellsberg's known associates were said to have communist ties."

The former president has good reason to obliterate the reference to the Soviet Embassy in connection with the Daniel Ellsberg case. That episode could still embarrass him.

In July 1971, Assistant Attorney General Robert Mardian passed on, through John Ehrlichman, a report from a secret FBI source. It said the Pentagon Papers had been delivered not only to American newspapers, but to the Soviet Embassy — raising the possibility of espionage.

The report specified that on June 17, four days after the New York Times had begun publication of excerpts, the documents were delivered to the Soviet Embassy by a man who handed over a letter signed with an alias.

But the FBI's round-the-clock surveillance of the embassy failed to confirm any such thing. CIA Director Richard Helms advised the White House, "We know the fellow who is giving us these reports and

we have our doubts about them."

Nevertheless, the White House, eager to stamp Ellsberg as a traitor, acted as though it was true.

The "truth to it" was that someone had delivered a set of the documents to the embassy. Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin, scenting a provocation, quickly brought them to the State Department.

Where did the FBI originally get the word about the Russian angle that stirred things up in the Oval Office? The source, we now know from author Edward Jay Epstein, was "Fedora," the FBI's informant in the Soviet United Nations delegation.

Epstein concluded that Fedora, a double agent, had passed on "misinformation" to poison the atmosphere in the Nixon White House, provoking the president to set up the "Plumbers" who eventually caused his downfall.

I discussed the episode with Henry Kissinger.

"Why," asked Kissinger, "would a Soviet double agent provide false information against the Soviet Embassy? That doesn't make much sense."

Indeed not. It's quite possible that Fedora was reporting truthfully what he had heard — that the embassy received a copy of the Pentagon Papers.

Which may be why Nixon, in his memoirs, would just as soon forget the whole thing.