

Jack Anderson's Washington Merry-go-round

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BY JACK ANDERSON
With Les Whitten

WASHINGTON — A flight of lame ducks, led by Treasury Secretary William Simon, will head north next week for their last official look at the sinister, sullen beauty of Moscow.

The lame ducks, most of them Treasury and Commerce officials, aren't likely to remain in government long enough to apply whatever knowledge they may pick up in the Soviet Union. They will be accompanied to Moscow by their wives and by Simon's two sons, Billy, 25, and Peter, 23.

The U.S. embassy, according to the cable out of Moscow, is dusting off the red carpet for this final junket of the Ford administration. The Washington officials will attend a conference of the U.S.-U.S.S.R. Trade and Economic Council, but the embassy isn't quite sure what to do with the women.

"There are several interesting options," the embassy has cabled Washington. The cable lists various luncheon possibilities and implores the State Department to select the most desirable entertainment. "Please advise ... preferred program," urges the cable.

The embassy is also arranging "a separate schedule for the sons of Secretary Simon. We would appreciate knowing if the secretary prefers that they be invited to the luncheon at the Sovietskaya (Hotel)."

Another possibility, the cable suggests, is "a visit to U.S. bicentennial exhibition now being held in Sokolniki Park, Moscow, for wives or sons or both."

Meanwhile, the sightseeing should be excellent as the first snow begins to silver the golden onion domes of the Kremlin.

Footnote: The Moscow trip was scheduled before the U.S. elections and, therefore, before the officials actually became lame ducks. The arrangements had gone too far, a Treasury spokesman explained, for the conference to be postponed until the new administration takes over.

Our sources say that Simon didn't seek the trip but was asked to head the delegation because his bluntness has made him a favorite with Kremlin leaders. The treasury secretary told us he invited his sons along because there was extra room in the plane. He will pay all their expenses in Moscow out of his own pocket, he said.

PENTAGON COVER-UP — Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld must not have read his own confidential investigative reports when he pooh-poohed charges that the Army's strategic European division was guilty of financial mismanagement and false

readiness.

These confidential reports have been kept under wraps since an April 8, 1976, inspection by the Army Inspector General. The inspected units were rated unsatisfactory in every single area from weapons training to medical services.

One entire battalion "had never conducted a practice load up of ammunition," except for one lone company that had gone through the exercise once.

Other confidential documents indicate about 20 other serious allegations were largely substantiated by Col. Joseph M. Holihen, the investigations chief.

It was alleged, for example, that one unit "was short approximately \$70,000 worth of equipment." The investigative reports indicate this was a \$70,000 misunderstanding that has now been resolved. But an Army spokesman refused clarification on the grounds that another investigation is now in progress.

Many essential vehicles, with missing parts, were reported as "operational." Thousands of gallons of petroleum products were also unaccounted for.

BANNED DRUG — A spinal drug, which has been banned in the United States, is being marketed across the border in Canada by its U.S. manufacturer.

The drug, chymopapin, is a surgical substitute that dissolves spinal disks. In 1975 tests, it was found to be potentially dangerous, yet no more effective than a harmless placebo.

The manufacturer, Baxter-Travenol, quietly withdrew its application, therefore, to get chymopapin approved for U.S. sales. The company nevertheless put it on the market in Canada.

Canadian officials told us they don't always agree with the U.S. interpretation of tests. Baxter-Travenol explained that they presented the same test results to both countries. Different countries have different standards, a spokesman said.

MILLION-DOLLAR DELAY — Four years ago, the Osage Indians received a multi-million dollar land settlement from the federal government, including a \$1 million educational scholarship fund for the Osage peoples. But bureaucratic bungling has held up the money, and not one penny from the education fund has yet reached the Indians.

Our investigation indicates that the delay has been caused by disputes, legal problems and red tape. A staff officer at the Bureau of Indian Affairs is finally getting around to developing regulations to govern the administration of the

money. But the delay has had one advantage: about \$250,000 in interest has accumulated over the last four years.

LEGION DISEASE SUSPECT — The Secret Service is upset with the FBI for failing to tell it about a suspect in the Legionnaires Disease case.

Unknown to the Secret Service, the suspect was at large when President Ford recently visited the Philadelphia hotel where 29 American Legion conventioners were stricken last July.

The breakdown in communications raised the hackles of Secret Service officials who recalled the FBI's failure to warn them about Lee Harvey Oswald before President John F. Kennedy's tragic visit to Dallas in November, 1963.

A mysterious affliction struck down the 29 unlucky legionnaires, all of whom had been at Philadelphia's grand old Bellevue Stratford hotel. Meanwhile, we learned that a vague but ominous letter had been sent to Dr. William Sunderman Jr., the nation's leading expert in nickel poisoning. The letter hinted at nickel poisoning.

Since the anonymous letter reached Sunderman before most experts began to suspect nickel carbonyl may have been the lethal agent, Sunderman turned the letter over to the FBI in Hartford. Whoever wrote the letter, it appeared, might have inside knowledge of the calamity in Philadelphia.

Although the FBI received the letter by August 2, the Secret Service was never shown a copy. In the meantime, President Ford was cleared to a visit to the Bellevue Stratford on the evening of September 23.

The president visited some of the same spots where the dead legionnaires had been seen. Had the Secret Service known a suspect was still loose, with a knowledge of nickel poisoning, it's doubtful the president would have been permitted to visit the hotel.

But the Secret Service didn't learn about the ominous letter until we wrote about it on October 28. We quoted from a confidential study by Rep. John Murphy, D-N.Y., that the killer may have been a "paranoid" person with a knowledge of chemicals.

Alerted by our column, the Secret Service contacted Murphy and, with his help, located the letter. By use of sophisticated ink comparisons and other

scientific tolls, the Secret Service quickly located the letter writer.

He turned out to fit Murphy's description of the possible killer. He was eccentric and possessed some knowledge of chemicals. But after surveillance and investigation, the Secret Service determined that the man had not been in Philadelphia at the right time to have caused the legionnaires' deaths.

"Your column alerted us to the potential suspect," said a spokesman. "We did a thorough investigation. We talked to him. We do not now regard him as a protective interest." In other words, he looked like a possible suspect but has now been ruled out.

Footnote: Officially, both the FBI and Secret Service declined to comment on the break-down in liaison. But not for attribution, Secret Service sources confirmed they were "deeply concerned" over the FBI's failure to forward a copy of the letter to them at once. In fairness, it should be added that communication between the two agencies usually has been excellent since President Kennedy's assassination.

HMMMM CONTROVERSY: A controversy is boiling inside the national Education Assn. over an employee's right to say "Hmmm" to his superiors.

We inadvertently touched off the great "Hmmm" debate by accusing the National Institute of Education of recklessness with the taxpayers' money. Our story was read with special interest at the NEA, which works closely with the federal institute.

A staff aide, named Don McComb, reproduced the column, wrote "Hmmm" at the bottom and circulated it among his fellow employees. He questioned whether the NEA might be involved in the NIE hanky-panky.

This infuriated his boss, John Sullivan, who fired off an angry memo, charging that McComb sought to "undermine" the NEA and threatened "to discharge him for insubordination" if he persisted.

Now the union which represents NEA employes has stepped into the controversy. The union contends that McComb was exercising his freedom of speech when he added the accusatory "Hmmm" to the bottom of our column.

Footnote: Sullivan told us his memo was merely a warning of what would happen if McComb repeated his pamphleteering, without evidence to back it up.