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Weather

Today: Mostly cloudy, afternoon flurries or wet snow. High 42. Low 32. Wind south 8-16 mph.
Sunday: Partly sunny, milder. High 46. Wind south 8-16 mph.
Yesterday: Temp. range: 37-43. Wind chill: 30. Details on B2.

116th Year

No. 42

Diary Says Bush Had 'Details'

By Walter Pincus
and George Lardner Jr.
Washington Post Staff Writers

The White House yesterday released excerpts of a long-secret diary President Bush started the day after covert arms sales to Iran were first disclosed in November 1986 and in which he said, "I'm one of the few people that know fully the details."

That private statement of Bush's knowledge while vice president was made on Nov. 5, 1986, months before a newspaper interview in which Bush said he had been "out of the

loop" on the covert dealings with Tehran to gain the release of American hostages then being held in Lebanon by pro-Iranian terrorists.

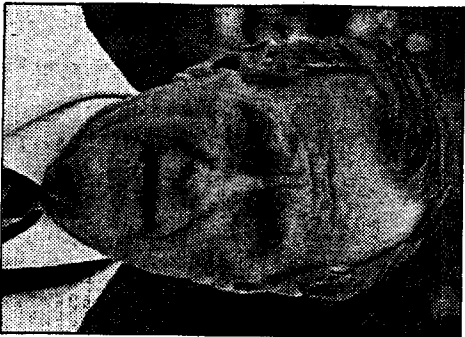
The excerpts show Bush professing less and less knowledge as the furor over the Iran-contra affair intensified. Bush also emphasized that he had no advance knowledge of the diversion of arms sale profits to support the contra rebels in Nicaragua. But he noted that "maybe [then-CIA Director William J.] Casey had been tipped off."

Although Bush said in the first entry that he intended the diary to

be "observations on my run for the presidency in 1988," he began it on Nov. 4, 1986, the day that American newspapers carried the first reports about the arms sales and a secret trip to Tehran taken by former White House national security adviser Robert C. McFarlane.

Although the diary passages contain no bombshells, Bush graphically described the infighting and fears that gripped the White House and top advisers to then-President Ronald Reagan at the outset of the scandal.

Reagan himself, on the day the



PRESIDENT BUSH
... reveals infighting over scandal

Post

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of Iran Arms Deal

public was first told that Iran profits had been diverted to the contras, was depicted by Bush as "troubled" that two White House aides were resigning. Bush said Reagan "didn't quite see that there was anything wrong."

The 45 pages of diary excerpts relating to the Iran-contra scandal were selected by Bush's outside lawyer, former attorney general Griffin Bell, as relevant to the long-running investigation of the affair by independent counsel Lawrence E. Walsh.

The publicly released notes, how-

ever, deal only with the first two months following the disclosure of the scandal, up to Jan. 2, 1987. Walsh has inspected entries through 1988 as part of an inquiry he launched last month on learning for the first time of the diary's existence. He has said he first requested any such records from then-Vice President Bush's office in February 1987 and expanded on that request last June. Delivery of portions of the diary to Walsh began on Dec. 14.

Hired to represent Bush after
See IRAN-CONTRA, A4, Col. 1

'Details' of Iran Arms Sales

dent. The prosecutors at the time were preparing to seek an indictment of former national security adviser John M. Poindexter, former White House aide Oliver L. North and several others on charges of conspiring to defraud the U.S. government during the Iran-contra affair.

In his deposition, Bush repeatedly said he could not recall specific events relating to arms sales to Iran in 1985 or other incidents concerning secret support of the contras that involved him or his aides.

For example, Bush said he could not remember any details of a meeting he had in Jerusalem in July 1986 with Amiram Nir, a counter-terrorism adviser to the Israeli prime minister. At that time, Nir was assisting North in the arms sales to Iran. According to notes taken at the meeting by Bush's top aide, Nir told Bush at the meeting of a new plan to deliver arms to Iran in return for the release of American hostages.

Asked if he recalled Nir talking about the finances involved in the arms shipments, Bush replied: "I don't. I don't think—if this thing [his aide's notes] reflects it, I don't. I mean I haven't looked back at this item in detail, but I don't recall it."

Near the end of the nearly five-hour session, prosecutors asked Bush about his activities on the weekend prior to the Nov. 25, 1986, public disclosure of the diversion of arms profits to the contras. "Do you remember that weekend whether or not you discussed with

anyone the subject of the Iranian arms sales?" Bush was asked.

"No," Bush replied, "I would have to prompt my memory. I would have to look at a personal schedule and then I could tell you."

Bush did not disclose, nor was he asked, whether he had a diary covering that period. As Bell pointed out in his report, Walsh's prosecutors "failed to ask Vice President Bush during his January 1988 deposition about the existence of any additional materials, including diaries, that might be relevant to Iran-contra."

Bush dictated the diary entries into a tape recorder, and they were not transcribed until months later by an aide in Houston. They place Bush in the midst of Iran-contra backbiting to which Reagan seemed oblivious. Bush recorded that he "couldn't sleep all night" after learning about the diversion, which he said he knew would be "a major flap."

The next day, after Poindexter and North were ousted, Bush dictated that a presidential commission to investigate the matter "is not supposed to find out who did what. It is supposed to find out what . . . how we should handle foreign policy in the future, etc." He suggested that he might head the panel himself, but he saw "the problem being that I am so close to the administration that some might say coverup."

Bush also awarded an "A for John Poindexter and Ollie North, too. Both patriots—both decent and honorable men. Both walking the plank."

See Book

Bush Diary Says He Knew

IRAN-CONTRA, From A1

Walsh publicly accused the president of "misconduct" for failing to produce the notes earlier, Bell said he "identified no misconduct on the part of President Bush or any White House employee with regard to the delay in producing the relevant transcripts."

Bell said Bush himself "apparently was not aware of the [Walsh] request for diaries," but even if he had been, "his present view is that" he would not have had to turn them over. According to Bell, Bush believes that since the diary entries "post-dated the relevant events of Iran-contra . . . and were his personal, political thoughts."

Walsh's office issued a terse statement calling yesterday's release "selective. . . . Because our investigation is ongoing, we are not free to comment on the accuracy or the completeness of [Bell's] report," said Walsh spokeswoman Mary Belcher.

In a 14-page report accompanying the notes, Bell said the diary's Iran-contra contents were not discovered until last September when a career White House employee, Patty Presock, found them in a safe on the third floor of the White House and brought them to Bush's attention.

"President Bush did not believe that the transcripts had any relevance to Iran-Contra, but Ms. Presock believed that they did," the report said. "As a result, the President asked [White House counsel C. Boyden] Gray, who was unaware" of the diary, to review it "for relevance."

Gray reviewed the diary between Sept. 25 and Oct. 1 and determined that various passages were relevant

to Walsh's requests. However, Gray decided "unilaterally" not to do anything about the relevant entries or tell Walsh of their existence until after the presidential election, Bell said.

Bell said Gray's decision was based partly on "the need to interview individuals who might have had knowledge of why the transcripts were not discovered earlier." Bell said Gray also felt the delay justified because Walsh himself had postponed an interview with Bush because of the possible publicity it might produce in the midst of the campaign.

Gray waited almost a month before discussing the diary with his White House colleagues, and another week went by before an attempt was made to notify Walsh. Walsh's office was told about the entries on Dec. 11 and began a review with the first delivery on Dec. 14.

Ten days later, Bush pardoned former defense secretary Caspar W. Weinberger and five other Iran-contra defendants, a step he had once recommended against as vice president on the grounds that "a pardon imputes guilt." The action prompted Walsh to reveal the belated disclosure of Bush's diary notes and accuse the president of "misconduct."

Walsh plans to question Bush, Gray and others about the failure to tell him about the diary's existence until last month. The Iran-contra prosecutor also wants to interview Bush about the coverup of the scandal that Walsh says began in November 1986.

Along with the diary entries, the White House yesterday released the 174-page deposition that Bush gave to Iran-contra prosecutors on Jan. 11, 1988, while he was vice presi-

Bush Officials Ordered to Preserve Copies of Computer Records

By Matt Yancey
Associated Press

A federal appeals court yesterday ordered departing White House and National Security Council officials to make portable backup copies of records stored in their personal computers before deleting the materials from the machines.

Only after the millions of electronic messages—E-mail—and other electronic records are preserved in full on backup disks or tapes can officials erase them from the internal hard drives of machines that will be inherited by their replacements in the Clinton administration, the court ruled.

The order by a three-judge panel of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit partially overturned lower court rulings Thursday and last week forbidding

the White House from cleaning out or writing over the computer data before President Bush leaves office next week.

"Defendants may remove, delete or alter such information as they see fit, so long as the information is preserved in identical form . . ." said the appeals court panel headed by Chief Judge Abner J. Mikva and including Circuit Judges Stephen F. Williams and David B. Sentelle.

However, the panel said, the backups must "faithfully replicate all information removed, deleted or altered, including message logs, user directories and any other information contained in the original system."

The White House had said earlier yesterday it would hold off destroying any electronic records while awaiting the results of its emergency appeal seeking to overturn the

previous orders of U.S. District Judge Charles R. Richey.

In seeking to reverse Richey's orders, the White House had said in court papers this week that Bush's national security staff had been given a Jan. 15 deadline to "write over user data at each work station in order to create 'clean' user space for the incoming administration's staff members."

Richey had looked upon that as a defiance of his order of last week to the administration to "take all necessary steps to preserve, without erasure, all electronic federal records" generated by the National Security Council's staff and other White House offices.

Michael Tankersley, an attorney for the public interest groups whose 1989 suit brought about the spate of court rulings in the past 10 days, said

the appeals court decision leaves intact the thrust of Richey's orders.

"The window the court of appeals gave them is very narrow. They're still required to preserve the stuff," said Tankersley, who represents Public Citizen and the National Security Archive, a private group that collects declassified government documents, in the case.

"If they adhere to the [appeals court] order, everything will still be around," he said. "Our concern is that not everyone will strictly adhere to this. So there's going to be a lot of watching the next few days."

The administration had asked the appeals court to reverse Richey's order on grounds that it compromises Bush's right to keep certain presidential records confidential.

The case is the first to apply the 50-year-old Federal Records Act to electronic communications. The

White House had argued that as long as paper copies were made of such E-mail, the electronic versions in the computers could be erased.

Richey, however, noted that printed copies seldom contain all the information that was in the computer, such as who besides the named recipient received a copy of a memo and when it was received.

"The question of what government officials know and when they knew it has been a key question in not only the Iran-contra investigations, but also in the Watergate probe, said the judge, who was appointed to the bench by President Richard M. Nixon.

The plaintiffs also contended that only the final versions of policy statements and memos are often reduced to paper, denying investigators, journalists and historians an opportunity to see how they evolved.