

U.S. Produces Kidnap Plot Letters

3/7/72
By Betty Medsger

Washington Post Staff Writer



United Press International

Zoia Horn at Harrisburg court before going to jail.

HARRISBURG, Pa., March 3—The government introduced into evidence today two letters, attributed to the Rev. Philip Berrigan and Sister Elizabeth McAlister, that attest to a plan to kidnap presidential adviser Henry A. Kissinger.

"It needs much more thought and careful selection of personnel," Sister McAlister allegedly wrote in an Aug. 20, 1970, letter to Father Berrigan about a proposal "to kidnap—in our terminology make a citizens' arrest of—someone like Henry Kissinger."

Replying from his cell at Lewisburg, Pa., federal penitentiary, where he had been destruction of Selective Service records, Father Berrigan allegedly wrote Sister McAlister:

"... The project as you outlined it is brilliant, but grandiose. I've found with bitter experience, that when people opt for too much they're either stupid or egotistical... Nonetheless, I like the plan and am

just trying to weave elements of modesty into it.

"Why not coordinate with the one against capitol utilities? . . . To disrupt them, and then grab the Brain Child (Kissinger) — This would be escalation enough."

Father Berrigan, Sister McAlister and five others are charged with conspiracy to kidnap Kissinger, to bomb tunnels under federal buildings in Washington and to raid federal offices.

Boyd Douglas, the government's chief witness, who smuggled the letters in and out of the prison, testified today that despite the fact that Father Berrigan thought kidnaping could not be carried out "without the use of violence," he persisted in accepting the idea as a valid form of protest.

"I told Philip Berrigan I didn't see how it could be done without the use of a gun," said Douglas. Philip Berrigan agreed that it could be loaded

See PLOT, A7, Col. 5

U.S. Produces Plot Letters

PLOT, From A1

with blanks rather than real bullets.

"I told Philip Berrigan I was sure I could obtain a gun for use in the kidnaping if it was requested of me . . .

"Philip Berrigan further said it would have to be considered by the people recruited for the project that a very severe sentence might be given for such a kidnaping."

Douglas testified that letters and telephone calls continued to come to him about the project from Sister McAlister and the Rev. Joseph Wenderoth, another defendant, after Father Berrigan was transferred from Lewisburg to Danbury Federal Prison in Connecticut, where he joined his brother, the Rev. Daniel Berrigan, also imprisoned for destruction of Selective Service records.

On the Sunday before Father Philip Berrigan left Lewisburg Douglas said, the priest outlined 22 tasks he wanted the informer to either do himself or relay to other persons.

Sister McAlister, Douglas said the priest told him, should coordinate "both projects"—the tunnels and the kidnaping. "Also, Elizabeth McAlister and John Swinglish should be able to recruit the necessary people," Douglas said Berrigan told him.

The priest is also supposed to have told Douglas to advise Father Wenderoth to "see if utility trucks could be stolen from the Washington, D.C., area" for the two-day project.

"He told me he was counting on me, when I was released from the federal penitentiary, to make sure these

projects would be completed," said Douglas, who testified he had been carrying contraband letters for Father Berrigan since late April when they first met. He copied each of them and, after he met the FBI June 3, made each of the letters available to the FBI.

The two letters introduced today were made public last April when they were attached to the second indictment handed down in the case.

In the letter Sister McAlister allegedly sent to Father Berrigan she says, "Eq wants to do it well before anyone else does it badly & I believe he has the know how to direct such an escapade."

"Eq" is a reference to Eqbal Ahmad, a Pakistani, who also is a defendant in this case. He is on the staff of the Adlai Stevenson Institute for International Affairs in Chicago.

Douglas testified that Ahmad did continue to be involved in the alleged kidnaping project. On Sept. 5, at a meeting with Father Wenderoth and the Rev. Neil McLaughlin, another defendant, Douglas said he asked Father Wenderoth "if he thought that Eqbal could carry out such a plan as kidnaping."

"Joseph Wenderoth said, yes, he thought he could. He told me that Eqbal was the most violent one of the whole group. He told me that they were afraid in a way of Eq. His parents had been killed in Pakistan by guerillas."

At the outset of the discussion of blowing up the tunnels in July, Douglas said he had told Father Berrigan and others that he was an expert in explosives. At the Sept. 5 ses-

sion with the two Baltimore priests, he said, he was told that he could go to Tom Davidson's farm in Maryland to "train people in the use of explosives."

Davidson was named in the first indictment as a coconspirator, but he was dropped in the second indictment.

The FBI, said Douglas, gave him Army manuals on explosives, manuals which he said he gave to Father Wenderoth who allegedly copied them for those who could participate in the proposed tunnels project.

When Sister Elizabeth sent the "kidnap" letter to Father Berrigan, Douglas testified, she enclosed a letter to him which advised:

"Boyd—the enclosed is dynamite and I mean it. The proposal (No. 3) is something no one, and I mean no one, should know about . . ."

In exchange for Kissinger's freedom, according to Sister McAlister's letter, the kidnapers would "issue a set of demands, e.g. cessation of use of B52s over N. Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, & release of political prisoners. Hold him for about a week during which time big wigs of the liberal I would be brought to him—also kidnaped if necessary— & hold a trial or grand jury affairs out of which an indictment would be brought . . ."

"There is no pretense of these demands being met & he would be released after this time with a word that we're non-violent as opposed to you who would let a man be killed . . . so you can go on killing."

In his alleged reply, Father Berrigan warns that the plan "opens the door to murder. . . . When I refer to murder it is

not to prohibit it absolutely . . . it is merely to observe that one has set the precedent, and that later on, when government resistance to this sort of thing stiffens, men will be killed."

Judge Jails Librarian On Contempt Citation

HARRISBURG, Pa. March 3 (AP)—A 53-year-old librarian was jailed for contempt of court today when she refused to testify at the federal conspiracy trial of antiwar priest Philip Berrigan and six others accused of plotting to kidnap presidential adviser Henry Kissinger.

Zoia Horn of Turlock, Calif., who called the trial "a black charade" was sent to Dauphin County Prison by U.S. District Court Judge R. Dixon Herman and ordered held there until the trial ends "or until you purge yourself."

The reluctant witness was the chief reference librarian at Bucknell University in nearby Lewisburg in 1970 when the government alleges the conspiracy was hatched.

Berrigan was imprisoned at the Lewisburg Penitentiary at the time, serving a six-year sentence for destroying draft files in Maryland.

The government says Mrs. Horn was acquainted with Berrigan and also entertained some of the other defendants and FBI informer Boyd F. Douglas Jr. in her home.

She was cited for contempt on Monday but the judge gave her until today to change her mind. When she didn't he committed her to jail.