

Pentagon Had a 'Plumbers' Squad

By Jack Anderson

Deep in the bowels of the Pentagon, another "plumbers" squad has been operating in the style of the notorious White House "plumbers."

Its existence was mentioned by Bob Woodward, the star Watergate reporter, in *The Washington Post*. He wrote about an alleged White House plot to assassinate me in late 1971 or early 1972.

He quoted W. Donald Stewart, a former Pentagon investigator, as saying he had been given "every resource in the book" to stop the leaks to our column. One effort alone, Stewart estimated, cost \$100,000.

Stewart claimed he had traced stories in our column to more than 60 classified documents. "Stewart said the leaks to (Jack) Anderson infuriated the White House to the point that then-President Nixon worried about his ability to conduct foreign affairs," wrote Woodward.

The former President revealed the details of the secret Vietnam peace negotiations several weeks ahead of schedule, according to Stewart, because "they were afraid Jack Anderson was going to scoop them."

The truth is, of course, that we exposed Nixon's misrepresentations about the Vietnam war, the India-Pakistan conflict and the ITT-Nixon connections. We also revealed in 1971 that the CIA had attempted to assassinate undesirable foreign leaders.

Ironically, our story about the CIA's plot against Cuban Premier Fidel Castro described an attempt to poison him with pellets that would leave no trace. According to Woodward, that was how the White House intended to do away with me.

What upset Nixon the most, according to our White House sources, was our revelation that billionaire Howard Hughes had sent two \$50,000 cash bundles, one to Key Biscayne, the other to San Clemente, for Nixon's use in between his presidential campaigns. The money was accepted by Nixon's friend, Bebe Rebozo.

It wasn't national security but political security, in other words, that caused the former President to unleash both the White House "plumbers" and the Pentagon "plumbers" upon us.

Stewart headed the Pentagon "plumbers," who operated out of room 3E993 in the Pentagon. In the spring of 1971, they mistakenly fingered a mild, bespectacled civilian employee, named Gene Smith, as one of our sources.

Smith later told us that Stewart had bullied and badgered him, scolding him with obscenities. Stewart swears that his interrogation of Smith was polite and proper.

In the end, Smith was hauled before a grand jury, which concluded that he was innocent of any wrongdoing.

The most graphic account of the Pentagon plumbers' action has been provided by Navy yeoman Charles Radford, who was also suspected of leaking information to us.

Testifying behind closed doors, he told the Senate Armed Services Committee how the Pentagon plumbers had wrung

a confession out of him. They grilled him abusively, strapped him to a lie detector, brought him back for more questioning and then repeated the process all over again, Radford testified, until he broke down and wept.

Radford identified Stewart as his chief inquisitor. Stewart called him a traitor, threatened him with prison and screamed obscenities at him, said Radford.

"He was convinced that I was the one who had passed information to Jack Anderson..." Radford said. "He used a lot of words, just a whole string of gutter language that you can't imagine."

As the slim, soft-spoken yeoman recounted it, "I was on the machine and then I went back in the other room and talked to him, and then I came back on the machine."

"Did they use a rubber hose on you?" asked then-Sen. Harold Hughes (D-Iowa) incredulously.

"No," replied Radford, "but I would not have been surprised. (Stewart) was pretty angry. He was almost hysterical... His eyes were bloodshot, and he looked like he was mad. He looked like he was mad."

"Were you physically threatened in any way?" pressed Hughes.

"No," said Radford, "he did not lay his hands on me in any way. He pounded the desk. He made motions like I suppose he would leap across the desk at me at any moment. But he did not touch me in any way."

"Then you would be threatened this way and then you would be taken in for a polygraph examination?" asked Hughes.

"Yes, sir, as I recall, that is how it happened."

"And then you would be called back in for more interrogation after the polygraph test?" asked the senator.

"Yes sir..." said Radford. "After I broke down, that is when they let me go home. That is when it ended, after I told them I was passing information..."

He confessed that he had slipped information from Henry Kissinger's desk and briefcase, not to us, but to the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

"Then they stopped. Then they let me go home," he said.

"You broke down and cried?" asked Hughes.

"Yes sir," said the yeoman.

Footnote: Stewart has strenuously denied any abuse of Radford and told us that the entire investigation was conducted by the book.

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