

Background FYI. Please return clip (no hurry). I met Obst shortly after he had split from Hersh and had started as an agent/arranger, etc. I was in the office of The Times of London when he came in to keep a lunch date with Ian McDonald, who had told me Obst and I should get together. Obst said same thing as they left and asked that I get in touch when free. I did on a number of occasions. He said he was and seemed to be excited. Had I doubted it I'd not have spent as much time calling him, getting a different and seemingly reasonable explanation or apology each time. I finally quit. I think I first told him he really wasn't interested and hadn't been and had been making on that he was, and I do think he agreed, explicitly or implicitly. As I learn who his new clients are, I also come to know what I have felt for a long time, that their friends do not serve well those who get into the kinds of trouble visited upon the anti-war people. The case against those who makes the cases against them could by now have been a powerful one, ready for use. Instead it remains almost entirely unknown and not even the lawyers are aware of the missed possibilities. H

Dear Taylor, Branch

12/15/74

Lewis Lapham has clarified most of what your silence left uncertain. That was helpful because I have sold one one-time, non-exclusive use and more are in prospect.

However, some did not involve Harper's and while I could take your silence as meaning the other things you mentioned are off, I'd rather know. As I told you and should have shown, I'm old fashioned in some ways. I trust people, as I trusted you to preserve confidence with what I thought could help you on your book. When I give my word, directly or indirectly, I try to keep it. When you spoke to me about David ^{Obst} but I did nothing thereafter about anything we discussed that you even suggested might interest him.

However, when you remained silent, even though I know this can mean that you are out of town and/or quite busy, with a direct movie approach on some of my earlier work I did not call you or Obst. Someone else, not an agent but with connections, is handling that. I think there can be a movie and that if it is begun soon it can appear at a very topical moment.

When you suggested that Obst could be interested in my Watergate book, I told you he might find a conflict in it. You thought otherwise because you said you would bring us together after the Sunday or holiday you were to dine with him and his wife (who is the cousin of a friend of mine).

The more immediate of the two things that prompt this letter is Mackenzie's story in today's Post, A26, "Sentences Divide Attorneys." It deals with "can's sentence and his lawyer's efforts to get it reduced. Alleged misleading of the FBI seems to loom large in this. In the first version of my Watergate book I have a chapter almost small book length that I think is relevant and could be useful to Shaffer. Should it be, I think one of the results, as it could influence what could happen to a book, is obvious. On my own I may or may not do something. Time will control. But if Obst is going to have any interest I ought not do anything. Other such situations are not improbable. So, I would appreciate knowing, either way.

Dean's lawyer, by the way, is not experienced in covering up. He did a rather professional job when he was a Warren Commission lawyer. I go into it in part in my second Whitewash book. It dealt with a vital bit of the earliest evidence.

Interest in the current book, despite no money for ads or promotions and no review copies, remains good. With sales from radio broadcasts all made from here and by phone, in the first two weeks there was enough cash to repay 20% of the loan to the bank. With what this ancillary use will bring I'm getting out a sail. I have a mailing list of the several thousand who have written me. Despite the thinness of the shoestring I remain hopeful that we will at least pay the bank off. With luck, more.

And what is unique on this subject, I have not even heard of a single snide comment. Coupled with this is an often heavy play. If I didn't tell you, it was often front-page news. The Sacramento Bee had more than 40 column inches on the front page plus a jump. Radio calls have included the CBS net and individual stations as far away as Honolulu, again for the first time. These combine to tell me that attitudes and the situation are changing. Aside from what this can mean to the current book, I think it is a promising forecast of the possibilities the other one I discussed with you.

I don't mind if everything is negative. But I would appreciate knowing it.

Sincerely,

Harold Weisberg

RETURN TO HIM

David Obst: Ramparts Purchase Negotiations

By Maxine Cheshire

David Obst, literary agent for Ramsey Clark, and Daniel Ellsberg and one of the men who made the My Lai massacre story public, is reportedly in California negotiating to buy the muckraking magazine, Ramparts.

If Obst's mission is successful, sources close to him say that he intends to move the financially imperiled magazine from San Francisco to Washington.

He has already lined up one byline, columnist Jack Anderson's youthful associate, Brit Hume.

Hume became nationally known last spring as the reporter to whom lobbyist Dita Beard first confirmed authorship of the controversial memo in which ITT pledged \$400,000 to the Republican National Convention while antitrust suits against the conglomerate were pending in the courts.

Hume is giving up his full-time job with Anderson this week to freelance, but will continue to work for him on a part-time basis.

Obst, reached at the Ramparts office in California last week, was reluctant to talk about the deal at this stage. He confirmed that negotiations were going on, but said at that moment he was "just sitting back smoking a cigar."

Ramparts, which lost \$4 million and was reorganized

V I P

"Sources close to him say that he intends to move the financially imperiled magazine from San Francisco to Washington."

several years ago under the Federal Bankruptcy Act, now has a circulation of 100,000 and is "breaking even."

Obst, 26, intends to shift the magazine from its doctrinaire liberal focus, aiming for more investigative reporting by writers like Hume and a broader national appeal.

Obst, at 23, first became known outside radical circles as the agent who marketed the My Lai massacre story, which ultimately won the Pulitzer Prize for reporter Seymour M. Hersh.

More recently, Obst surfaced as the representative who set up Attorney General Ramsey Clark's press confer-

ences here and in California after Clark returned from Hanoi.

Potpourri

Washingtonians answering a recent "House For Sale" ad in the classifieds discovered that the Georgetown dwelling was owned by Abigail McCarthy. But she is merely getting rid of the place as a real estate investment, she says, and has no plans to move away from Washington. Both she and former Sen. Eugene McCarthy, from whom she has been separated since 1969, are busy writing new books and both say they have no plans at the moment to file for divorce. . . . There's a long line of agents, magazine and book editors eager to get Martha Mitchell's memoirs under contract. Someone who called her at the Essex House in New York last week discovered that there were 30 people who had gotten there first. . . . Lyndon and Lady Bird Johnson were just sitting there at the ranch, having breakfast and watching the "Today" show last week when someone mentioned on the air that it was Barbara Walters' birthday. So the former President got on the telephone. He didn't sing "Happy Birthday," but he did have some nice things to say.

© 1972, The Washington Post and Chicago Tribune-New York News Syndicate, Inc.