

False Pretense And Mail Fraud Also Charged

Star 1-25-44
Former Ickes Aide
Has No Comment
On Jury Action

The District grand jury today indicted George W. Briggs, suspended assistant to Secretary of Interior Ickes, on charges that he forged the celebrated "Hopkins letter" last August 17.

The jury also indicted Mr. Briggs on charges of mail fraud and obtaining money under false pretenses in connection with his passing the letter on to C. Nelson Sparks, former Akron (Ohio) Mayor, who published it in his book, "One Man—Wendell Willkie."

District court officials said a bench warrant would be issued for the arrest of Mr. Briggs, who was at his Fairlington (Va.) home when the grand jury reported to Chief Justice Edward C. Eicher. Federal Bureau of Investigation agents had the house under surveillance.

Briggs Has No Comment.

"I'm very busy right now," Mr. Briggs said when newspapermen telephoned him after the indictments were returned. "No comment," he added.

The three indictments contained 11 counts. The maximum penalty



GEORGE W. BRIGGS.

on conviction on all charges would be 53 years' imprisonment and a fine of \$8,000.

Mr. Briggs, 55, has retained James

D. C. Murray of New York as his attorney. Arraignment before Justice Eicher is to follow his arrest, court officials said, but Assistant Attorney General Henry C. Schweinhaut, in charge of the case, declined to forecast the time of arraignment.

The indictments were handed down after the grand jury had heard testimony from Briggs. Mr. Sparks, Harry Hopkins, President Roosevelt's adviser, who branded the letter as a forgery; Mr. Ickes, who Briggs allegedly reported told him about the letter's existence; Dr. Umphrey Lee, president of Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Tex., to whom the letter was addressed, and Frank Phillips, chairman of the Phillips' Petroleum Co., Bartlesville, Okla., who Briggs allegedly said at one time possessed the letter. Mr. Phillips denied that.

Contents of Letter.

The letter, on White House stationery, to which Mr. Hopkins' name was signed and which was the center of the grand jury's investigation, read:

"Dear Umphrey: What has been done about the (ink blot) matter? Will you write me please. What developments in the other situation? Willkie is going to be the man, in my opinion, and I can promise you good co-operation from that quarter if you think it would be helpful. Sincerely yours, Harry Hopkins."

Mr. Sparks, saying he lent Briggs \$40 and gave him \$125 for expenses, declared he obtained the letter from Briggs in good faith that it was an honest original. Mr. Sparks has told reporters he considered the letter valuable documentation of his contention that Mr. Willkie was favored by the New Deal.

The grand jury said Mr. Briggs wrote Mr. Sparks eight letters about the "Hopkins letter," and the indictment alleging mail fraud contained a count for each letter.

The indictments charged that on August 17, 1943, Mr. Briggs, in violation of the District code, "unlawfully, willfully and feloniously and false-

(See LETTER, Page A-2.)

Letter

(Continued From First Page.)

ly made and forged" a letter which he "well knew was a writing which might and could and in fact did operate to the prejudice of C. Nelson Sparks"; that Mr. Briggs used the letter "as the basis of a false pretense for the purpose of obtaining money or other things of value from C. Nelson Sparks and others," and that the letter was of a nature "which might injure * * * Sparks and others in their respective reputations for integrity and veracity."

The second indictment alleged that Mr. Briggs sent the letter through the mails "about December 20, 1943," and another said that Mr. Briggs represented to Mr. Sparks that Dr. Lee, Mr. Phillips and Mr. Ickes "knew of the existence of said

letter and believed it to be genuine and authentic."

"In truth and in fact," said the jury report, "there was not then and there in existence and never had been in existence any such genuine letter from the said Harry Hopkins concerning said Wendell Willkie, nor did the said Frank Phillips nor the said Umphrey Lee or the said Harold L. Ickes know of such letter or believe it to be genuine and authentic."

The third indictment, in eight counts, charges Briggs with use of the United States mails to defraud, in violation of section 338, title 18, United States Code. This statute carries a maximum penalty of \$1,000 fine or imprisonment for five years or both, on each count. Each count in this indictment covers the mailing of a different letter.

"The Hopkins letter affair" developed like this:

Mr. Sparks, an anti-Willkie Republican, late last fall published the book "One Man—Wendell Willkie." Similar in format to the earlier Willkie book "One World," it made grave charges concerning the tactics of Mr. Willkie's backers at the Philadelphia Republican Convention of 1940, where Mr. Willkie won the party's nomination.

Langer Asks Probe.

On the basis of this book, Senator Langer, Republican, of North Dakota asked the Senate to investigate the convention, asserting the question had been raised whether attempts to "buy votes" of delegates had figured in the conclave. Senator Langer said the inquiry should specifically seek to determine if Mr. Hopkins was in any way connected with the proceedings.

Mr. Willkie termed the whole matter absurd and said he would be glad to undergo cross-examination by a Senate committee.

In the furore that followed, Mr. Sparks released to the press photocopies of a letter which he had mentioned in his book.

A notation at the bottom showed it was addressed to Dr. Lee.

Mr. Hopkins promptly termed the letter a forgery, asked an FBI investigation. Dr. Lee said he had never received such a letter.

Mr. Sparks said emphatically at that time he was convinced of the authenticity of the document. Subsequently, he said he had obtained it from Mr. Briggs after the latter had obtained it from his employer, Mr. Ickes.

In some quarters, an old Ickes-Hopkins feud was recalled, but Mr. Ickes after going before the grand jury said he was not "the villain of the piece."

Mr. Briggs stated before testifying

before the jury yesterday that he felt he had been caught in a game of "power politics." He accused Senator Langer, who reviewed the letter case at length in the Senate a week ago, of seizing an opportunity "to crack three men he wants to crack—Ickes, Harry Hopkins and Wendell Willkie." Mr. Briggs said Senator Langer's references to Briggs-Sparks correspondence which preceded publication of the disputed letter was an attempt to throw him "to the wolves."

Said Mr. Briggs: "I shan't be thrown to the wolves."