

Fear of Scandal Saves State Dissident

By Jack Anderson

Confidential letters in our hands show that top State Department officers connived to arrange the ouster of an antiwar diplomat at the same time they were feigning grave concern for his constitutional rights.

The ousted foreign service officer, Murray Smith III, has now been hastily reinstated because the department feared discovery of the secret letters and wished to avoid the scandal. But their 11-hour attempt to set things right cannot undo their deeds.

Smith is a member of that supposedly elite corps of diplomacy, the Foreign Service, which is so demanding that men are fired merely for failing to be promoted. Such procedures are designed to assure that all Foreign Service Officers will be "brilliant."

But this has also produced a Foreign Service that is run like an Eastern prep school—stuffy, rigid and ridiculously snobbish.

Naturally, there was horror in the plush suites of the striped-pants set when Murray Smith signed an antiwar advertisement in the Washington Star in 1968. He was the only Foreign Service officer on the list.

Smith's superiors threatened to use this against him by citing it in his promotion file, but the American Civil Li-

berties Union intervened to head this off.

Nevertheless, Smith soon found himself assigned to a distant post in Iran, where he began to circulate an antiwar petition among the American community. The U.S. Ambassador, Douglas MacArthur II, nephew of the famed general, was apoplectic.

'Eyes Only' Message

He fired off a "Confidential—Eyes Only" letter to Washington urging that Smith be shipped elsewhere. But Washington feared any such overt reprisal would get the ACLU after them again. After all, any citizen has a right to dissent among his fellow citizens.

So the Foreign Service's director general, John Burns, conferred with his boss, Deputy Under Secretary William Macomber. The saccharin Macomber had been polishing his image by boasting about the "505 reforms" he had instituted to bring the Foreign Service into the 20th Century.

Here's what Macomber told my associate Brit Hume about his attitude toward the Smith case: "Smith was not undermining the President's policy abroad. His efforts were in-house, within the American Community.

"I didn't want the fact that he disagreed with a certain policy to result in him being thrown out of the service. I

didn't want people to judge him on that score."

But John Burns' reply to MacArthur, written with Macomber's approval, makes it clear that they were all eager to get Smith out of the Service for his antiwar activity, while making it appear that his ouster was for other reasons.

"In the case of Murray Smith, we would like to avoid the confrontation he apparently wants to provoke," the letter said. "We do not want to give Smith an opportunity to contend that his constitutional rights have been violated."

The letter noted that Smith had not been promoted for some time and "if he is not promoted by the selection boards which meet this fall, he will be forced to retire."

The letter included specific recommendations as to how his performance report should be written to assure he was not promoted. This is highly improper because only Smith's immediate superiors are supposed to participate in writing the report.

Further, it said this: "Smith has not been told that he was ranked in the low five per cent of his class by the selection boards this year, nor should he be told because if he fails of promotion next year he will be out . . ."

It is established State Department policy to tell a man if he is in the bottom five per cent so that he will be warned

to improve his performance. Yet Burns, with Macomber's approval, specifically directed that this policy be violated.

MacArthur's reply to Burns, also marked "Confidential—Eyes Only," agreed to Washington's recommendations but contained some whining criticism of such things as Smith's wife's clothing. "She is a mini-mini wearer," the Ambassador declared petulantly.

These disclosures come at a bad time for Macomber and the bigwigs in the Foreign Service. They are already under fire for the grossly unfair treatment of another officer, Charles Thomas, who committed suicide after being kicked out.

Ranchers Rewarded

The same ranchers, who sent gunmen on helicopter hunts for federally protected golden eagles, are grazing their cattle on federal land.

While Fish and Wildlife agents have been despairing over the eagle carnage by the ranchers, other branches of the Interior Department have been passing out permits to these ranchers to graze cattle at bargain rates.

Belatedly, the department is now considering "administrative action" against the permit holders who slay golden or bald eagles. The killings in Wyoming, Texas and elsewhere threaten the proud birds with extinction.

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