

Carter asks Jordan's response

WASHINGTON — The White House brought top aide Hamilton Jordan and press secretary Jody Powell down from the Camp David summit last weekend to respond to our columns about the attempt to fix fugitive financier Robert Vesco's legal problems in Washington.

Apparently, the two aides gave reporters a high-powered White House briefing, complete with witnesses and documents, to refute our columns. We must rely on the Washington Post's account of all this, because we were excluded from the briefing despite a request to attend.

We also offered to go over our documentation, point by point, with the White House staff and the Justice Department. The White House ignored our offer, preferring to give out its own version of events to reporters. But Attorney General Griffin Bell, Deputy Attorney General Benjamin Civiletti and

other Justice Department officials spent more than two hours reviewing our evidence.

The White House account, as nearly as we can discern from the Washington Post, raises more questions than it answers. For example, the Post carries a statement from Jordan's longtime hometown friend, Spencer Lee IV. He admitted to us of accepting a \$10,000 retainer to use his influence with Jordan to help Vesco.

According to the Post, Lee said he had come to Washington with the idea of talking to his friend Hamilton Jordan about "getting someone in the Carter administration to sit down and talk to Vesco about his problems." Lee said he dropped the idea upon the advice of another White House aide, Richard Harden, who cautioned him about Vesco's reputation.

This meeting occurred on Feb. 8, 1977, at the Washington Hilton Hotel. Not only Lee but Harden also admitted to us that they had discussed the Vesco caper. Recalled Harden: "Spencer said he would get a large sum of money if the thing got worked out."

Yet Harden failed to report to the Justice Department that an international swindler, who was on the lam, had offered money to get his legal problems settled. Harden's failure to disclose this startling bribe attempt, officials acknowledge, could itself be a crime.

On the day of Lee's return to his hometown of Albany, Ga., a telephone message was left for Gerolyn Hobbs. "Spencer wants to dictate letter to Hamilton," the message states. "Get letter off today w/rest of mail."

Several other telephone slips in the same message book have been authenticated. No less than the attorney general authenticated one of them. Gerolyn Hobbs has also given us an affidavit, attesting that she typed a letter from Spencer Lee and personally put the letter in the mail to the White House.

It's a "Dear Hamilton" letter from Spencer Lee IV. It reads, in part: "Regarding our conversation, it looks as the PRL matter will take eight to 12 months to complete. The time frame is well within our agreement with Mr. Herring and the Costa Rican gentleman. I forgot to mention to you when we talked that the necessary arrangements have been made to protect our interest in Nassau."

PRL was the name of the stock that Vesco had promised the Georgia fixers. R.L. Herring was the ringleader of the fix attempt. Vesco then resided in Costa Rica. A few days earlier, Lee had helped to set up a corporation in Nassau

allegedly to launder the money from the Vesco stock.

Both Jordan and Lee vehemently deny any knowledge of the letter. There is no evidence that Jordan ever intervened to help Vesco. The White House aide swears he was never even approached about aiding Vesco.

The attorney general told us that his former law partner, Charles Kirbo, had checked his records and had discovered that Jerry Dorminey, a member of the Georgia cabal, had set up a meeting in his office in January 1977. The telephone record book contains this message from Dorminey to Herring dated Jan. 4, 1977: "Meeting has been set up with Kirbo."

Kirbo says he has no recollection of the meeting. Both Lee and Herring remember meeting with Kirbo in his Atlanta law office. The office records show the meeting took place on Jan. 13, 1977, Bell told us. Lee claims that Kirbo refused to become involved in the Vesco

project. Herring says that Kirbo agreed to review the deal.

The next day, Herring left another message for Gerolyn to "stay at office, have letter to be typed and mailed." In her affidavit, she swears that Lee gave her another letter that day to be typed and mailed. This was one addressed to Kirbo.

According to her affidavit, she also recalls taking dictation from Vesco on the phone. She has identified a seven-point memo, outlining what Vesco wanted in return for \$12 million worth of his stock, as the memo Vesco dictated. She enclosed it in the envelope she mailed to Kirbo.

Here is the letter she claims to have typed and mailed for Lee. "Dear Charlie: Enclosed is a copy of how the Costa Rican gentleman wishes to have his matter resolved. I had a long talk with him and I feel that the plan we discussed will be successful and also fruitful.

"It is very hard for me to contact Hamilton because of his busy schedule, but he told me last week that he would condone any decision that I had made along the lines that we had previously discussed."

Both Lee and Kirbo claim emphatically that they have never seen this letter. But the day after it was allegedly mailed, Lee flew with Herring to Costa Rica for discussions with Vesco.

Of course, it is possible that Jordan and Kirbo were victimized by their fellow Georgians and that the same fixers took Vesco for a huge share of his prime stock.