

Vesco Evidence Not Authentic, Anderson Says

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By Charles R. Babcock
and Fred Barbash

Washington Post Staff Writers

Syndicated columnist Jack Anderson said yesterday that the key evidence he used to link two top presidential advisers with fugitive financier Robert Vesco was not authentic.

In a column distributed for use today, Anderson said his sources now claim they lost, and then "reconstructed" from memory, letters implicating presidential aide Hamilton Jordan and advisor Charles Kirbo in an attempted scheme to fix Vesco's legal problems.

Meanwhile, Kirbo offered reporters the results of his own intensive investigation which he said shows the documents to be false. Kirbo said he has hotel records, plane logs and comparisons of typewritten letters that he says rebut the Anderson allegations.

Anderson said in a phone interview that his new findings "weaken badly" the authenticity of the critical documentation on which he based his original columns.

But the columnist refused to concede that the key evidence may have been totally manufactured by R.L. Herring, an Albany, Ga., businessman who dealt with Vesco. "My sources insist that they [the documents] were not fabrications, but reconstructions," Anderson said.

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VESCO, From A1

The letters were re-created about Aug. 1 in Panama City, Fla., by Herring, his brother and brother-in-law and their wives, Anderson reported his sources said. He did not say in his latest column that this was one week after Herring was indicted on federal fraud and racketeering charges.

Anderson revised his original column linking Jordan and Kirbo to an attempted Vesco "political fix." But even the softer version was greeted by heated denials by Jordan, President Carter's closest White House aide, and Kirbo, the Atlanta attorney who is another confidant.

Kirbo even started his own investigation into the matter and said his research showed Herring and his associates were not even in Georgia on the dates the damaging letters allegedly were written.

Kirbo suggested yesterday in a phone interview that Anderson's own reexamination of the documents was spurred because "he probably found out what we've done in our own investigation."

Anderson said he discovered the "reconstructed" documents last week when he received more material from his Georgia sources and became suspicious about one of the papers.

"We went back to our sources and subjected them to sharp cross-examination," he said. "One of the wives finally broke down. She said they [the documents] were all authentic, but were reconstructed because some of the originals were missing."

Anderson said that his sources told him phone messages that mention calls from Jordan were "copied over" from originals that were too dim to read. The originals were then thrown

away, the columnist reported his sources said.

Anderson's findings raise questions about the sworn testimony of Gerolyn Hobbs, Herring's former secretary, who said she remembered typing and mailing the letters and writing the phone messages.

"We'd have never used the letters and other documents if she hadn't authenticated them," Anderson said. "We talked to her for a month . . . And she claims she took part in no reconstruction."

He quoted Hobbs in his new column as saying the letters "are similar to the ones I typed."

"I did the best I could to authenticate those documents," Anderson said. In his first column, he said that "independent sources" including Hobbs "have attested to their authenticity."

Meanwhile yesterday, Kirbo disclosed details of his own investigation into the documents. It showed "clear as a bell," he said, that many of them were false.

After checking plane logs and hotel records, Kirbo found that Herring and his associates were not in Albany, Ga., at the time Anderson contended they sat in Herring's Albany office writing the incriminating letters.

They were either in Costa Rica or airborne on the way to or from Costa Rica at the time, Kirbo said.

Kirbo also found gross discrepancies between the letters in question and other, unrelated letters typed by the same secretary in the same office. Formats were different, signatures were different and the typing was different, Kirbo said.

For example, on the unrelated, routine business letters, Herring's secretary put her initials after her boss's initials, as is the standard form. On

the incriminating letters to Jordan and Kirbo, her initials appear first.

"Any number of things were different," said Chet Tisdale, a Kirbo associate. The same secretary who typed the routine letters in a "competent and efficient" manner violated all the rules of business letterwriting in the Kirbo-Jordan letters, he said.

"It wasn't even a gray area," said Kirbo. The discrepancies "were clear as a bell."

Herring went on trial yesterday for the unrelated fraud and racketeering charges growing out of his dealings in the coal industry.

Spencer Lee IV, the boyhood friend of Jordan, who Herring hired to approach the Carter administration, has testified that Herring told him he was

making a case to discredit the Carter administration.

The Justice Department has been conducting an investigation into the allegations that Herring and Lee tried to influence administration treatment of Vesco's legal problems.

Vesco fled to Costa Rica and more recently to the Bahamas to escape U.S. charges that he looted a large conglomerate and then tried to buy his way out of trouble with a \$200,000 gift to the Nixon campaign in 1972.

Anderson said yesterday that his sources have agreed to talk with the FBI about the "reconstructed" documents.

Clearing up the authenticity of the alleged letters and messages about

Jordan and Kirbo, however, still will not explain the note the White House said President Carter sent Attorney General Griffin B. Bell last year after being told by an aide about the Vesco plan.

Lee has acknowledged he came to Washington last February to approach Jordan on Vesco's behalf. But he has testified he backed out of the deal on the advice of another Georgia friend and White House aide, Richard Harden.

The White House disclosed last week that Harden told President Carter that Lee would get "a large sum of money" to arrange a meeting with Jordan for Vesco representatives.

But the only action Carter took was

to send a cryptic hand-written note to Bell saying: "Please see Spencer Lee from Albany when he requests an appointment."

That was the first announcement that Carter had been informed about the Georgia group's efforts. The White House had not given any indication in early briefings on the controversy that Carter was aware of the Vesco case.

Press secretary Jody Powell said the administration had not been asked that specific question. But he added the answer then would have been "no" because Harden didn't mention his meeting with the president until after Anderson's first column appeared.

Vesco Case Papers 'Reconstructions'

In a strange twist to an unusual case, we have determined that the controversial documents linking White House intimates Hamilton Jordan and Charles Kirbo to the Robert Vesco influence scandal were "reconstructions."

Under intensive cross-examination, some of the principals admitted to us that the original documents were lost and were reconstructed from memory. "We were trying to reconstruct what really happened," explained one source.

This casts a cloud, nevertheless, on the authenticity of the allegations that Jordan and Kirbo were involved with the Georgia influence peddlers. The latter allegedly collected \$10 million worth of Vesco's prime stock to help the international swindler with his Washington extradition problems.

Jordan's boyhood buddy, Spencer Lee IV, now an Albany, Ga., attorney, acknowledged that he had accepted \$10,000 to intervene with Jordan in Vesco's behalf. But both Jordan and Lee insisted that the approach was never made.

Lee said he backed out of the venture after a heart-to-heart talk with another White House friend, Richard Harden, on Feb. 8 last year. As both recalled the conversation, Lee confessed that he had been offered "a large sum of money" to arrange a meeting with Jordan. But both agreed that Lee should drop the idea, they said.

Seven days later, Harden reported the plot to buy White House influence to President Carter. Strangely, the president did not inform the Justice Department directly of this. Nor did

he ask Harden to report on it to law enforcement officials. Instead, the president wrote a terse note to Attorney General Griffin Bell, urging: "Please see Spencer Lee from Albany when he requests an appointment."

According to spokesmen, the president has no recollection of the incident, Bell never saw the note and Lee never requested the appointment.

Kirbo also told us he cannot recall any contacts with the influence seekers, although his office records show that on Jan. 13 last year he met with Lee and the instigator of the plot, R.L. Herring. The next day, the pair flew to Costa Rica to discuss the \$10 million with Vesco.

We have authenticated a number of the details of the tale. But we are convinced that the crucial letters and telephone messages, implicating Jordan and Kirbo, were duplicated from recollections and flight logs.

Our sources insist that the original documents actually existed but were lost. We have verified some of the telephone messages by checking with the callers. But the fact that the documents were reconstructed damages their reliability.

The documents were authenticated for us by Herring's former secretary, Gerolyn Hobbs, who described in detail how she had typed and mailed the controversial letters. We checked her out with friends and neighbors who described her as truthful and reliable. She also impressed us as a guileless young person.

Under oath in federal court, she stuck to her story. But we have reason to believe the documents she identi-

fied on the witness stand were not copies but reconstructions.

On the eve of her testimony, however, we were told she was distraught. We, therefore, telephoned her. In a broken voice, she told our associate Les Whitten: "It was all a mistake! It was all a mistake!" He asked whether she wanted to change her story. But she just repeated: "It was all a mistake!"

Nevertheless, she testified before a federal judge that she had typed and mailed the disputed letters to Jordan and Kirbo. We have now informed her of our new findings and have asked whether she wants to retract her testimony. She backed down only slightly. "[The Jordan-Kirbo] letters are similar to the ones I typed," she said. She denied that she had reconstructed any documents.

We had assured White House press secretary Jody Powell, meanwhile, that we sought only the truth about the Vesco scandal and would try as hard to disprove as prove the allegations.

We became suspicious last week after examining a new batch of documents from our sources. One simply didn't look right. We checked it out and concluded it was not authentic.

We immediately began cross-examining our sources until one finally admitted that some of the documents had been recreated. Then we confronted other sources who confirmed what had happened. We had to promise not to identify them in public, but we persuaded them to repeat their statements to the FBI. We have now put FBI agents in touch with them.