

FBI's Investigators Strike Again . . .

By Jack Anderson

We are beginning to feel that the Nixon administration has nothing to do but investigate us. Once again, we have caught the President's heavy-handed Keystone Kops grabbing our personal phone records and snooping into our private lives in an attempt to put a stop to stories that embarrass the White House.

This time, his sleuths made off with five different batches of our toll calls so they could check out the numbers and find out who we've been speaking with.

As so often happens when a corrupt government tramples on private rights, the FBI men unleashed on us by the administration badly wronged the innocents. One of those whose records were seized committed the unpardonable sin of bearing the same name as one of our reporters.

With no check whatsoever, the FBI grabbed his records along with those of almost everyone on our staff. They even investigated one of our newsmen's 18-year-old son.

One would think all this unconstitutional folderol had to do with a life-and-death matter of national security. Quite the contrary. The hordes of FBI men were directed to sniff out the source of a humorous story about the drunken hijinks of a Nixon appointee in Africa.

The errant diplomat was Bert Tollefson, a former corn lobbyist, honored for his loyalty to the

Republican Party with the top foreign aid job in Kenya. He had been there but a few weeks when then-Vice President Agnew stopped by for an official visit and traveled with his entourage to a fancy jungle lodge called "Treetops."

Tollefson was not invited to the Vice President's party, but he went anyhow. The raucous scene he created still has the striped pants set in a twitter.

The American ambassador to Kenya, Robinson McIlvaine, described the incident in a series of blistering, "eyes only" wires to Tollefson's boss, Dr. John Hannah, then head of the Agency for International Development.

"I regret to inform you," Ambassador McIlvaine cabled, "that Bert Tollefson blotted his copy book so badly during the Vice President's visit (that) you may be hearing from the Vice-President directly on the matter."

"The problem started with Bert's well-known pushiness and general lack of sensitivity and culminated in his getting sloshed at Treetops, making passes at the Vice President's secretary and trying to drag her down the steps to meet an elephant at ground level . . ."

Tollefson capped his performance, the ambassador continued, by talking a native Kenyan out of a room at the lodge, oversleeping the next morning, then making off with "the remaining Secret Service car" leaving the

government agents "stranded and furious."

Our associate Joseph Spear reached AID chief Hannah, whose main concern was not how Tollefson had shamed the U.S. in Africa, but how Spear had gotten a cable which had come to him "highly restricted, hand-carried and sealed." Spear, of course, declined to reveal his sources.

The outraged Hannah forthwith ordered all AID photocopyers moved to "secured areas" where they could be guarded all day and made "inoperable . . . during non-working hours."

Not content with these steps, the administration ordered the FBI to invade the State Department to administer lie detector tests, grill distinguished officials and generally terrify the timid.

Still unsuccessful in finding who tattled on Tollefson, the government ordered a federal grand jury to issue subpoenas for all phone toll calls made from our office and from the homes of our reporters during the entire month of July, 1971.

The Bell System, whom we—not the White House—pay for our costly long distance charges, gave the FBI all our records without a whimper. By the time Ma Bell had stopped giving away our secrets to the FBI, the administration had the toll records for our office, Spear, Brit Hume, Les Whitten, and Whitten's 18-year-old son, Les Whitten III.

They also seized the records of a Kensington Md. technical

writer named Charles Elliott. His crime, it seems, was to carry the same name as an intrepid

young reporter then on our staff, Chuck Elliott.

The administration's goof on Charles Elliott of Kensington was compounded because Chuck Elliott, our reporter, was already well known to the FBI. He was the man we dispatched to sort through J. Edgar Hoover's garbage, as Hoover's agents had done so often to those he investigated.

Despite their dossier on Chuck, the G-men still got the wrong Elliott.

After all, the Nixon administration has used lie detectors, tapped phones, invoked grand juries, set up stake-outs, and followed us in unmarked cars to try to inhibit our reporting. They arrested Les Whitten on a phony charge of possessing stolen Indian documents—a charge later thrown out by a grand jury and the Justice Department.

Footnote: Through the hard work of the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, we, the St. Louis Post-Dispatch and Knight Newspapers learned of the seizure of our toll bills. In defense of the FBI, however, they took the dirty case only when ordered to and they frankly admitted to us the goof in the Elliott seizure. This heartening evidence that the new FBI director, Clarence Kelley, means what he says about running a more open shop.