

The Spy at Sen. Muskie's Headquarters

By Jack Anderson

The Nixon campaign committee recruited a taxicab driver in 1971, turned him into a \$1,000-a-month spy and planted him inside Sen. Ed Muskie's campaign headquarters.

The driver, Elmer Wyatt, sneaked memos, schedules, brochures and other material out of Muskie's offices and delivered them to Nixon campaign aides.

The spying operation against Muskie, according to Watergate sources, was conceived by President Nixon's deputy campaign chief Jeb Magruder. He later helped run the "Gemstone" operation, which wound up with the Watergate break-in. In September, 1971, our sources say, Magruder approached another campaign aide, Kenneth Rietz, and asked him whether he had ever placed a spy in a political opponent's camp. Although he had engineered the rough-and-tumble victory of Sen. Bill Brock (R-Tenn.) over incumbent Sen. Albert Gore (D-Tenn.), Rietz replied to Magruder's question with an astonished "No!"

Magruder persisted, and

Rietz agreed to look for an undercoverman. He sounded out an ex-FBI agent named John "Fat Jack" Buckley, who had once worked across the hall from him. In those days, Rietz had been an eager young assistant to Rep. William Steiger (R-Wis.) and Buckley had been the chief Republican investigator for the House Labor Committee.

The aristocratic Rietz and the paunchy gumshoe hit it off well and remained in touch. Buckley, though on civil service status with the anti-poverty agency, obligingly recruited Wyatt, a taxi-driving acquaintance, for \$500 a month.

Muskie aides remember the cabbie as a willing volunteer who made the dreary 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. mail runs between Muskie's campaign headquarters and his Senate office. But unknown to the Muskie camp, their cheerful mailman was snapping up documents which he delivered to Buckley. The anti-poverty official then rushed the material to Magruder and, on one occasion, to another Nixon aide, Hugh Porter.

When Rietz was assigned to other duties, the hacker-spy was given two new bosses, G. Gordon

Liddy and E. Howard Hunt, who later plotted the Watergate caper. The Nixon forces, meanwhile, were so delighted with Wyatt's espionage that they doubled his salary.

The documents that Wyatt swiped from Muskie headquarters wound up in the hands of Nixon tacticians who used them to undercut Muskie. This may have been one reason Muskie, who had led the pack of Democratic presidential prospects, began to slip in the popularity polls. The Muskie spying was dropped in the Spring of 1972 after Muskie's star faded.

Footnote: Republican sources, while confirming that Rietz has admitted his role to Watergate investigators in both the Senate and Justice Department, emphasize that he gave strict orders against opening mail or violating other federal laws. Neither Rietz nor Buckley could be reached for comment. My associate Les Whitten located Wyatt who confirmed Buckley had recruited him to procure the Muskie documents but swore he avoided any criminal acts.

Agnew's Anguish—In his historic appeal to the House to

judge his alleged crimes, Vice President Spiro Agnew told Speaker Carl Albert bluntly that he wanted the impeachment hearings to be wide open.

Agnew said he was prepared to look the TV cameras in the eye, if the House wanted to permit the networks to televise the hearings, and give sworn testimony about his conduct.

Sources privy to the secret Agnew-Albert talks say the Vice President was bitter over the Justice Department's handling of the criminal charges against him. He told Albert that he would rather be judged by his political peers than endure the "trial by leak" now going on.

The Agnew who Aug. 6 told of his "confidence in the criminal justice system of the United States" has completely changed his attitude. He complained to Albert about the "selective information" that is fed to a grand jury and leaked out to the press.

He wanted to assert his constitutional prerogatives not to hide the facts but to bring them out into the open, Agnew argued. He found Albert compassionate but noncommittal.

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