

The Other Side of Watergate Inquiry

Interesting Leads That Led Nowhere

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WASHINGTON, March 2—The Watergate indictments handed up yesterday were the product of a 20-month investigation by three teams of prosecutors and scores of F.B.I. agents that began in Federal District Court and led to such places as Udorn, Thailand.

The focus of the long inquiry has been the grand jury chamber, where the seven members of the Watergate team—one of five staffed by the lawyers under Leon Jaworski, the special prosecutor—elicited hundreds of hours of testimony from dozens of witnesses.

The bulk of the evidence in the cover-up case was developed before a grand jury that is the oldest of three empaneled to consider Watergate-related evidence.

The two other juries, which have not yet returned any major indictments, are concerned with investigations begun by Archibald Cox, Mr. Jaworski's predecessor. These involve the White House "plumbers," campaign contributions, political espionage and the Nixon Administration's relations with the International Telephone & Telegraph Corporation.

Unsolicited 'Help'

Aside from the grand jury's allegations in yesterday's 50-page indictment, there were aspects of the Jaworski investigation that never reached it. In many cases, these stemmed from tips, unsolicited and mostly unproductive, that flowed into the special prosecutor's office over the last few months.

Most of these unsought telephone calls and letters were politely acknowledged and forgotten. Others prompted investigations that used up valuable man-hours and usually led to deadends.

Two of the more interesting tips that led nowhere concerned the White House tape recordings of talks between President Nixon and his aides that were subpoenaed by the prosecutors as an index of Mr. Nixon's involvement, or lack of it, in the alleged Watergate cover-up.

One of these investigations that led nowhere concerned a rumor that a team of Army electronics specialists had been brought to Washington from Fort Devens, Mass., to help "edit" damaging material from the tapes.

A second inquiry was prompted by a letter containing a newspaper obituary noting the unexpected death of a White House secretary who had worked for Stephen Bull, a major figure in the investigation of the disappearance of 18½

minutes of one of the recordings.

The tip concerning the "Fort Devens Eight," as the technicians were jocularly known around the Jaworski office, came to the prosecutor's third-hand, from a source who said he had gotten it from an Army sergeant who supposedly heard it from a member of the unit.

The trail led first to Udorn, Thailand, where S/Sgt. John A. Burch Jr., the alleged intermediary, had been transferred from Fort Devens. Sergeant Burch, in an interview with military intelligence officers requested by the special prosecutor and, later, with The New York Times, denied knowing the source of the tip, Timothy Hooper, a former Army intelligence agent, or anything at all about the Watergate tapes.

He was "fed up with being pestered about this allegation," Sergeant Burch told The Times. Yet elements of Mr. Hooper's story checked out.

Transfer of Devens Team

Eight members of a special psychological warfare unit at Fort Devens—including four electronics specialists and two linguists—were indeed transferred last July from Massachusetts to the Army security agency at the White House.

They arrived in Washington on July 1, however, more than two weeks before Alexander Butterfield's startling testimony before the Senate Watergate committee first disclosed the existence of a White House recording setup and made the Presidential tapes—and their possible alteration—a Watergate issue.

The soldiers were stationed in the Executive Office Building, near the inexpensive Japanese-made machines that the White House has said were used to record President Nixon's conversations and telephone calls.

But, although the Fort Devens group was given a sophisticated Swiss recording system to work with, they maintained to investigators that their only task was to oversee the recording of Mr. Nixon's remarks at news conferences and other official functions.

Denial by Soldiers

All of the Fort Devens men said they had never touched the President's personal tapes. But Sergeant Burch's insistence that he had never known Mr. Hooper left unclear the source of the latter's information about the unit's movements.

The thoroughness with which the prosecutors approached their work is evidenced by their cautious inquiries into an even more improbable, and far more sensitive, matter.

Shortly after lunch on Thursday, Dec. 20, 1973, Beverly J. Kaye, a petite woman who worked as a senior White House secretary, complained to co-workers of a sudden, intense headache.

Friends helped her to the White House medical office, where she told the deputy White House physician, Dr. William Lukash, that she was experiencing difficulty seeing and a floating sensation—sure signs, to Dr. Lukash, that Mrs. Kaye's brain had suddenly begun to hemorrhage.

Rushed to the nearby George Washington University Hospital, Mrs. Kaye, who was 41 years old, died three hours later—from a congenital weakness in a brain artery, the doctors tentatively decided.

Stunned by Death

Mrs. Kaye's friends and relatives were stunned by her death since their impression, borne out by her medical records, was one of a singularly healthy person with no history of high blood pressure and, indeed, no complaint worse than a sore throat over the last four years.

But the Federal Bureau of Investigation, after checking the hospital pathologist's report, told the prosecutors that the death had been attributed to natural causes.

Described by friends as a "liberal," Mrs. Kaye, who joined the White House during the Johnson Administration, had worked for Stephen Bull, the White House appointments secretary.

One of Mr. Bull's responsibilities, the custody of the White House tapes including the one with the missing 18½ minutes, had first brought him to public prominence—and to Federal court—a month earlier.

But both Mr. Bull, through his lawyer, and a White House spokesman, heatedly denied that Mrs. Kaye had had any access to or responsibility for any of the tapes, or any knowledge of what might have happened to the missing portion. The White House angrily denied any suggestion that her death might have been related to her job.

In a Christmas note to friends written a week before her death, Mrs. Kaye described the last year as "the most horrible" of her life, and said she held out little hope for the future "unless I take myself out of the White House."

She and her colleagues there, she wrote, "are all completely and totally crushed and depressed, but we come in each day and try to keep each other's morale up."