

APR 1 1976

NYTimes

The 'Flimflam' in the Pumpkin

By I. F. Stone

WASHINGTON—I have a new scrap of evidence to contribute to the renewed controversy over the Hiss case. But first I would like to explain how I came across it.

On March 28, The Washington Star reprinted Prof. Allen Weinstein's attack on Alger Hiss in The New York Review of Books in which Weinstein accused Hiss of lying about his relations with Whittaker Chambers. But The Star did what few if any other papers have done. Alongside the Weinstein article, it printed the text of Hiss's reply, and a photostat of a document to which Hiss tried to call public attention. That document has been overlooked, though it represents a tantalizing loose thread. Firmly pulled, it might unravel the melodramatic web woven a quarter century ago around the notorious pumpkin papers.

The pumpkin papers, as everyone knows, were the centerpiece and symbol of the postwar witch hunt. They turned up in a masterly bit of choreography one dark December night in 1948. Chambers, an ex-Communist, led House Un-American Activities Committee investigators across his Maryland farm to a hollow pumpkin. From it he extracted five rolls of microfilm.

These were said to contain copies of secret State War and Navy Department documents. Chambers claimed he had obtained them as a Soviet espionage agent.

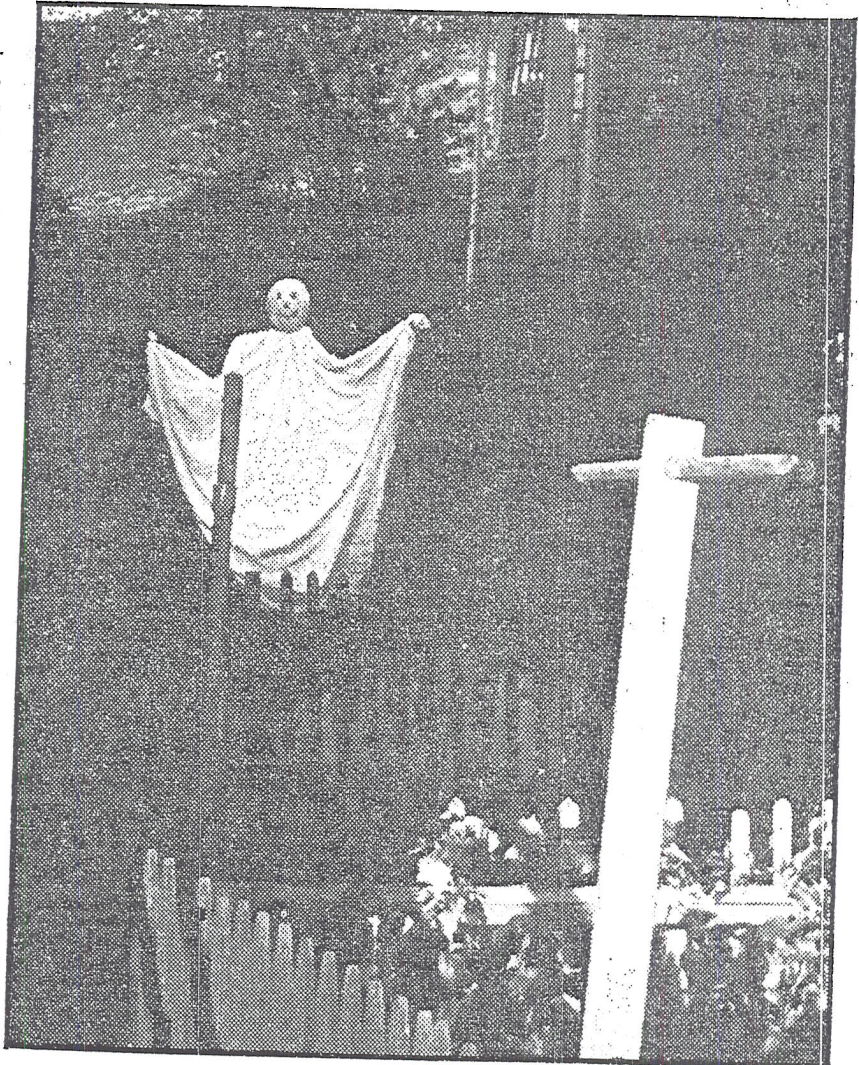
This was the bombshell of the famous Hiss case. Chambers had accused Hiss, a State Department official, before the committee of having been a member of the Communist "apparatus" in Washington. Hiss denied it and filed a \$75,000 slander suit against Chambers.

Chambers produced documents he claimed had been turned over to him by Hiss. He did so first at a pre-trial deposition hearing in Baltimore and then, more dramatically, two weeks later from the pumpkin.

Richard M. Nixon, then a leading member of the committee, haled the microfilms, with a hyperbole to which the whole country was to grow familiar, as "conclusive proof of the greatest treason conspiracy in this nation's history."

It now appears that there were surprises of quite another sort to be found on two of those five rolls of microfilm had they been made available at the time.

I live in Washington and was not at Alger Hiss's news conference of March 18 in New York. Hiss held it to answer Professor Weinstein's article, an attack on Hiss that made



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page 1 headlines. Hiss told the press that no one had ever had a chance to examine three of the five microfilms until "the Government turned them over to me last summer, under the Freedom of Information Act."

One roll was blank and the other two were almost illegible. But Hiss asserted, "I've now obtained copies of the original documents" photographed on the two rolls, on which some markings were visible. According to a Hiss lawyer, he went back to the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the F.B.I. was able from these markings to identify the original documents. Copies were then obtained from the Navy under the Freedom of Information Act.

The only newspaper I saw that referred at all to Hiss's revelations about these two microfilms was The New York Times, but its reference was so condensed and murky that I missed their significance until I was able to read for myself the text of Hiss's statement at his news conference and examine the photostat reproduced in The Washington Star. If what Hiss said is true—and I have

in part verified it—then the pumpkin-papers affair had distinct elements of stage-managed fraud.

Hiss said that three of the five microfilms were never produced at his trial, for perjury. He said that it now turns out that one of these was blank and that all of the documents on the other two were technical memos of little consequence. All were written in December 1937 and January 1938 by Rear Adm. A. B. Cook, then head of the Navy's Bureau of Aeronautics.

The document reproduced by The Star says only that while carbon dioxide fire extinguishers had uniformly been painted aluminum color, in the future portable fire extinguishers were to be painted red.

Hiss said that one of the newly released 15,376 pages of F.B.I. files on his case that he has received from the Justice Department throws new light on these supposedly sensitive Navy Department documents. Hiss said it "shows that the F.B.I. knew before I went on trial" that these documents were available at the time on the

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NAVY DEPARTMENT
Bureau of Aeronautics
Washington

7/1/58
bu by T-C 19-48
Approved for release
5 January, 1958.

TECHNICAL ORDER NO. 2-58.

PORTABLE CARBON DIOXIDE FIRE EXTINGUISHERS - PAINTING OF.

Reference: (a) BuAer Technical Order 57-37 dated 18 September, 1937 "Carbon Dioxide Equipment, Instructions for Handling and Use."

1. Inasmuch as it is the policy of the Navy Department to paint all portable carbon dioxide fire extinguishers red, it is directed that the paragraph captioned "Identification" on page two of reference (a) be changed to read as follows:

"Identification - All cylinders containing carbon dioxide regardless of size, except those used for portable fire extinguishers, shall be painted aluminum color. Portable carbon dioxide fire extinguishers shall be painted red. Special markings indicating the type of siphon tube installed as required by reference (c) shall be replaced if cylinders are repainted."

A. B. COOK,
Rear Admiral, U.S.N.,
Chief of Bureau.

open shelves at the Bureau of Standards library to any member of the public.

I think these new revelations are too important to be lost sight of, and deserve full investigation. I took the first and obvious steps the day after I saw the photostat in *The Star*. I phoned the press office of the Bureau of Standards.

I read to William E. Small, the information chief, the text of the memo by Admiral Cook, and gave him the number on that memorandum and the number of an earlier order it was amending. I asked him if, with those numbers, he could find out for me whether these memos were then available to the public on the open shelves of the Bureau of Standards library.

Mr. Small returned my call within a few hours. He said that the records showed both documents had been catalogued into the library at the time they were first issued by Admiral Cook and that access to them was unrestricted. As to whether they were available on open shelves, he would

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say only that "nobody remembers just how they were displayed."

The Bureau of Standards information chief explained that copies of such technical memorandums were and are commonly sent to the bureau's library from military and civilian departments alike for the guidance of technicians and contractors.

I then phoned the Navy and later the Justice Department. The Navy confirmed that it had supplied the documents to Hiss's lawyers and that all were unclassified memos by Admiral Cook. But I was not able to get the Justice Department to confirm or deny Hiss's assertion that a newly disclosed F.B.I. document shows the F.B.I. knew even before Hiss went to trial what was on those two microfilms. The claim that secret Navy Department documents were on them now turns out a quarter-century later to be false.

Why, then, were the pumpkin papers padded out with such flimflam? Had the contents been made public then, it would have put the laugh on Nixon and the Un-American Activities Committee.

While the Justice Department is investigating the past misdeeds of the F.B.I. to prevent their recurrence, surely this is worth a full-scale inquiry.

It is instructive in the light of the Cook documents to look back at the record. I quote here from the contemporary week-to-week accounts in *Facts on File*, a news archive for libraries.

The House committee dramatized its findings for the news photographers by piling up a three-foot-high stack of letter-sized reproductions from the microfilm the first day after the papers came out of the pumpkin. But *Facts on File* noted that "few details" about their actual contents were released.

A week later when the committee did release 12 documents they turned out to be rather unexciting and anticlimactic. "Obviously, those documents not published for security reasons," *Facts on File* speculated, "were more interesting."

Certainly the Navy documents, had they been released at the time, would have been "more interesting" though in the other direction. When Harry S. Truman a week after the midnight scene at the pumpkin dared to call the committee's inquiry "a red herring," its chairman, Karl Mundt, challenged the President "to authorize publication of all the documentary evidence the committee had." It is a pity now that Truman did not accept the dare.

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