

Buckley Admits 'Secrets' Hoax; Many in News Media Taken In

NYTimes

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William F. Buckley Jr., the publisher of National Review, acknowledged yesterday that the magazine's published collection of "highly classified documents" was a hoax. It had fooled a large segment of the American news media.

The disclosure that "The Secret Papers" on Vietnam were in fact an intricate spoof was made by Mr. Buckley at an afternoon news conference.

"We admit we proceeded in something of an ethical vacuum," Mr. Buckley said while conceding that the magazine's editors had composed the "documents" in their office.

But, smiling broadly, he said that one reason for this hoax had been to demonstrate—in the aftermath of The New York Times's publication of a series based on a Pentagon study of the Vietnam war—that forged documents would be widely accepted as genuine provided

their content was inherently plausible."

Many major newspapers gave prominent display on Tuesday and yesterday to articles about the National Review "documents." The two major news agencies—United Press International and The Associated Press—also distributed lengthy dispatches quoting from the "highly classified documents," as National Review described them.

The Associated Press bulletin

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noting Mr. Buckley's disclosure of the hoax yesterday afternoon interrupted a straightforward A.P. dispatch about the 14 pages of "documents."

They dealt with "strategy and counterstrategy" in Vietnam between 1962 and 1966, according to National Review. The general impression conveyed by the material was of United States officials, both civilian and military, seeking to avoid a long-term involvement in Southeast Asia.

The "documents" included "memoranda" from Pentagon officials, a "private letter" attributed to a former Ambassador to South Vietnam, several alleged Central Intelligence Agency reports and a "handwritten note" by Dean Rusk, who was then Secretary of State.

They were all, Mr. Buckley said on his arrival at Kennedy International Airport from Vancouver, British Columbia, "in fact composed last week, ex nihilo, in the offices of National Review."

Public Statements Used

At least some of the "documents," however, were not composed ex nihilo—out of nothing—but ex New York Times and the public statements and writings of some of those given credit of authorship in the magazine.

The first two memorandums quoted in National Review were in fact excerpted from actual memorandums printed by The Times in its series in June and July about the secret Pentagon study of the American role in Vietnam.

The dates and attribution of several other "memoranda" match the dates of other actual documents also printed by The Times in its series. Throughout the documents, there are both quoted phrases and close paraphrases of material from the Pentagon papers.

Only a few minutes before Mr. Buckley's 5 P.M. news conference, Daniel Z. Henkin, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, asked whether the department had reached a decision concerning the National Review documents, said: "All I can say is we're still looking into it."

A Dual Investigation

Both the Pentagon and the Justice Department were investigating the documents, Mr. Henkin said, but "I don't have a reading for you at the moment." Earlier, a Justice Department spokesman said that the material was being reviewed by the internal security division "just as we reviewed the articles in The New York Times, The Washington Post, The St. Louis Post-Dispatch, The Boston Globe, and The Los Angeles Times, to determine what they are and whether they are classified."

One of those identified by National Review as having written a document was Prof. Frank N. Trager of New York University, who was described as the co-author, with Douglas Pike, of a "confidential memorandum" on "The Structure and the Objectives of the National Liberation Front" for William P. Bundy, then an Assistant Secretary of State, in 1964.

Dr. Trager, first asked about the "memorandum" by The Times on Tuesday, said he could not be sure whether he and Mr. Pike might have written such a study. Yesterday, however, after reading it himself, he said: "I'm certain that's pieced together" from writings and speeches of his own and Mr. Pike.

An Uncertain Envoy

One paragraph says that an element of the National Liberation Force's army is sometimes referred to "as the 'hard hats' (because of the fiberboard Vietnam helmets worn)." Before Mr. Buckley's admission, Dr. Trager said: "I'm absolutely convinced" that it was a spoof.

Several of those credited with authorship seemed uncertain early yesterday whether they had, indeed, written the letters and memorandums. Elbridge Durbrow, the United States Ambassador to South Vietnam from 1957 to 1961, said he could not verify—or deny—that he had written the "private letter" to Mr. Rusk, dated

Aug. 10, 1966, printed in National Review.

"It's what I think," Mr. Durbrow said. "I wrote lots of letters to lots of people."

Tuesday night, Mr. Rusk also indicated uncertainty about an ostensible "handwritten memo" of February, 1965, attributed to him, about the possibility of declaring war on North Vietnam or the National Liberation Front—the Vietcong.

Another of the "authors" was Dr. Daniel J. Boorstin, the social historian who is director of the National Museum of History and Technology. Dr. Boorstin was credited with a "draft memorandum" written in 1963, entitled "Protracted Conflict and American Historical and Societal Character," dealing with a meeting of the "Committee of Historians and Cultural Anthropologists."

In an interview with The Times Tuesday, Dr. Boorstin denied having written the "draft memorandum," but said laughingly that he believed its author to be "Professor X" the "author" of a 1970 sociological spoof by Dr. Boorstin, "The Sociology of the Absurd or: The Application of Professor X."

Dr. Boorstin and others were called by The Times on Tuesday. James L. Greenfield, foreign editor of The Times, said yesterday: "From the moment we saw the magazine we believed its 'documents' were a hoax. So we avoided describing the contents in our story and tried to check with the so-called authors."

Denial in Late Editions

The article in the late editions of The Times yesterday quoted Dr. Boorstin's "denial," his attribution of the memo to "Professor X" and the assumption, since verified, that he was Professor X. It also quoted Dr. Trager as having expressed uncertainty about his confidential memorandum and noting that nothing in it was classified information.

The article also quoted Mr.

Buckley, who could not be reached directly, as having said through a spokesman that he was "hiding out where Daniel Ellsberg is." In fact, Mr. Buckley, and his wife were visiting her mother in Vancouver.

Priscilla Buckley, the managing editor of the magazine, earlier denied that the "memoranda" were a parody but had referred all questions to Mr. Buckley.

Officials of most of the news-gathering organizations conceded that they had accepted the "secret papers" at face value, with little or no attempt to check their authenticity.

Ben Bagdikian, national editor of The Washington Post, which published an article by a staff writer, Don Oberdorfer, about the National Review "documents" on its front page, said that The Post had first seen the news on the wire services. Unable to find a copy of National Review at two local newsstands, Mr. Bagdikian said, The Post obtained a Xerox duplicate of the copy in Senator James L. Buckley's office. The Senator is a brother of William and Priscilla Buckley.

'Went With What We Had'

Inquiries to National Review's office, Mr. Bagdikian said, were met with the reply that only Mr. Buckley could answer questions, and he was unavailable. "We checked our own documents and had none that seemed to be reflected in National Review," Mr. Bagdikian said.

The newspaper then "made a pass at checking" the material with several of the purported authors and "then we went with what we had," he said.

Robert Healy, executive editor of The Boston Globe, which published the Washington Post-Los Angeles Times News Service version of Mr. Oberdorfer's article on its front page yesterday morning, said his paper, too, had checked National Review's documents against its own Pentagon papers and went

ahead when "nothing corresponded."

Ben Bassett, the foreign editor of The Associated Press, said, "Frankly, it just came in and was picked up. Washington tried to make some checks but didn't seem to be getting anywhere. We ordinarily take these things on faith."

William Landrey, the foreign editor of United Press International, said a check had been made with the Justice Department and with National Review, which, he continued, had said that the documents were genuine. The time factor, he said, had prevented the wire service from holding the article until further checks could be made.

Officials at both the Columbia Broadcasting System and the National Broadcasting Company said the wire-service reports had been used without any independent checking by the networks.

'Larger Purpose' Cited

Asked about the deliberate deception, Mr. Buckley said he felt the magazine's "larger purposes" excused the duplicity "at least as much" as the purposes that justified the publication of secret government documents by The New York Times.

The Times, he said, "has instructed us that it is permissible to traffic in stolen documents, but they have not yet instructed us on whether it is permissible to traffic in forged documents."

He said that he was certain "these papers are merely paraphrases of documents that reside in government archives." One of the aims of National Review, he said was to demonstrate "that the Pentagon and the C.I.A. are not composed of incompetents—the unwarranted conclusion to which many were led by the fragmentary revelations of The New York Times and The Washington Post."