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Detailed Probe Clears Ford

Nomination

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Some time during banking hours on Friday, Oct. 26, two men entered the Manufacturers Hanover Trust Co. branch at 11th Street and Broadway in downtown New York. They walked to the safe-deposit box area and one, a rotund reddish-haired man of about 46, removed a stack of papers from his vault.

For about an hour and a half, the men stayed in the bank while the second man studied the papers, discarding some and carefully putting others aside for further study. When they left, the second man proceeded to the federal office building at 26 Federal Plaza in New York, the courthouse area, where he entered, identified himself and made copies of the papers on a duplicating machine.

The rotund reddish-haired man was Robert N. Winter-Berger, ex lobbyist, self-styled "influence peddler," author of the controversial book "Washington Pay-Off" and source of the most serious accusations of payoff and corruption posed against Rep. Gerald R. Ford (R-Mich.), the man whom President Nixon had nom-

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inated two weeks earlier to be Vice President of the United States.

The second man was Richard Casad, 45, a former naval intelligence investigator currently employed by the Senate Permanent Investigations Subcommittee but on loan to the Senate Rules Committee for its investigations of the life, times and public and private record of the nominee.

The visit to Winter-Berger's bank was an attempt by Casad, acting under the directions of Rules Committee Chairman Howard Cannon (D-Nev.) and staff director William M. Cochrane, to obtain documents which Winter-Berger said would back up his charges against Ford.

In the opinion of the Rules Committee, the documents brought back by Casad were so vague that they failed to establish even a suspicion of guilt on Ford's part. But Casad, aided by two General Accounting Office investigators also on loan to the Rules Committee, Joseph Farinella and Dennis Matteotti, did bring back a lot of other information which tended to discredit Winter-Berger's story or impeach his credibility. Winter-Berger's story or impeach his credibility.

The two GAO investigators, for example, interviewed New York psychotherapist Arnold Hutschnecker, who denied absolutely that he had ever

treated Ford for any purpose, as Winter-Berger had alleged.

From "court and police records" in New York and "informants I know," Casad and his associates discovered that Winter-Berger in 1960 had been ordered by a New York court to cease and desist from peddling stock in a nonexistent company; that Winter-Berger had apparently offered to give information against an associate the late Nathan Voloshen, who pleaded guilty to perjury and conspiracy charges in 1970 arising from allegations he used the office of former House Speaker John W. McCormack (D-Mass.) for influence peddling; and that a man named Robert Winter-Berger with the same birth date as the author had been fined \$25 in 1952 for exposing himself.

The investigations conducted for the Rules Committee by Casad, aided by Farinella, Matteotti and another GAO investigator on loan Richard Lager helped to clear Ford of by far the most serious charges leveled against him during the Senate Nomination proceedings.

However, the Casad operation was only part of a massive information-gathering network set up by the Rules Committee and the House Judiciary Committee, which cooperated closely in an effort to turn up anything unfavorable about Ford that ought to be known before the two chambers approve the nomination of a man who is in line for the Presidency.

The broad scope of the investigation, plus the thousands of man-hours used, the numerous federal agencies brought into the act, the thousands of pages of documents gathered for the use of the two committees, may well justify Senate rules Chairman Howard W. Cannon (D-Nev.) in his assertion that the Ford probe is "the most exhaustive investigation of a nominee ever undertaken."

One staff member who isn't particularly friendly to Ford and doesn't think he'd make a good President, conceded in an interview, "This was no half- investigation. Ford is clean. I'm convinced of it."

If there was any flaw in the investigation, it arose from the fact that some 1,700 pages of FBI "raw reports" on Ford, covering interviews all over the country with persons who knew

and dealt with Ford, were made available to only a few of the Senate and House committee members.

Under the principle that unevaluated raw reports shouldn't be widely spread around where unproven damaging allegations could be "leaked," the Justice Department insisted that it would make the 1,700 pages available only to each committee's chairman and senior Republican, to be read by them alone in the presence of FBI agents. The Senate committee accepted this stipulation. The House Judiciary Committee balked and the Justice Department finally agreed that eight of that committee's 38 members could read the raw reports.

This meant that only a handful of lawmakers would have the right to decide whether something suspicious in the reports existed which needed follow-up. While nobody questioned the integrity and ability of the senators and congressmen involved, it was clear that they would be required to make hundreds of on-the-

spot judgments as to what to follow up, and that other members would obtain information only second hand.

Whether the handful, confronted with the enormous task of reading 1,700 pages and taking down by hand anything they deemed needed further probing, may have missed or overlooked a point here or there can't be known. Most of the other seven members of the Rules Committee appeared confident that Cannon and Marlow Cook of Kentucky, the senior Republican, would catch anything major.

Ford was nominated as Vice President on Oct. 12, two days after Vice President Agnew quit after being sentenced to a \$10,000 fine and placed on probation for tax evasion. The circumstances under which Agnew left, clouded with suspicions

of corruption, dictated a thorough investigation of Ford before he was confirmed.

On Oct. 13 the FBI, at the request of the Rules Committee, ordered a full field investigation of Ford. Within a day, 80 FBI agents descended on the little city of Grand Rapids, Mich., Ford's home area, and began a massive series of interviews with everyone who had known Ford, done business with him, helped him in his campaigns, or done business

with him or the Ford Paint and Varnish Co., which used to be owned by his family and in which he retains a \$9,000 stock interest.

Other FBI agents began fanning out all over the country to pick up Ford's tracks. "They went to the schools he went to. They talked to his teachers. They

got his report cards. They went to Michigan University (where he played football from 1932 to 1934). They went to Yale law school. They went back to Nebraska where he was born. They talked to his teammates and coaches. They talked to the people he worked for in odd jobs," said an aide to a Republican senator.

"They talked to Republican state officials in Kent and Ionia counties, where his district is. Democrats, too," the staff member added.

By the time the FBI was finished, it had employed more than 350 agents in 33 field offices to interview 1,000 people on Ford, Sen. Cannon said. "Altogether, the FBI advised me that this has been the single biggest investigation it has ever conducted of a candidate for

public office," said Cannon.

The Rules Committee also asked the congressional Joint Committee on the Library to order a waiver of the standing rule that the Library of Congress is forbidden to provide information about members of Congress. This was agreed to by Ford, and the library then began producing thousands of pages, from its voluminous files, of Ford's speeches, voting records, insertions in the Congressional Record, attendance record and the like.

At the same time, the Rules Committee began building up a file of newspaper articles, which reached mountainous proportions.

Meanwhile, at the committee's request, Ford released or personally turned over to the committee such documents as his complete tax

returns for the past seven years. (An Internal Revenue Service audit, done at the committee's request, disallowed a deduction of \$871.44 Ford had claimed for new clothes to wear as chairman of the 1972 GOP convention in Miami Beach on Nov. 9 he reluctantly anted up \$435.77 in taxes to cover this disallowed deduction).

The tax records show that Ford had earned \$454,667.07 over the seven-year period, mainly from his congressional salary, speech honorariums and the sale of a book on Lee Harvey Oswald (Ford served on the Warren Commission that investigated the 1963 assassination of President Kennedy). An audited statement showed his net worth at present to be \$256,378.

Ford's campaign fund filings, both in Michigan and

in the House, for a number of years back were made available to the committee and were gone over by James Duffy, staff director of the Senate Rules Subcommittee on Elections and Privileges.

Duffy worked with House Clerk W. Pat Jennings and was aided by Gary Lawson, a GAO specialist detailed to the Rules Committee for this purpose. Duffy also went over Ford's House payroll records and accounts.

"Ford also gave us medical records and we got medical reports from doctors," said Cochrane, "and we really went into the psychological things. There was no lead to suggest that he had ever been to a psychiatrist."

Cochrane, a soft-spoken man of 56 who came to the Senate staff from the faculty of the University of

North Carolina Institute of Government in 1954, said the Senate and House committees agreed to supply each other with information. He said House Judiciary Committee investigators obtained Ford's Navy records and checked them out.

Throughout the investigation, Ford readily supplied documentary materials to the Rules Committee. Joseph O'Leary, a former Army colonel who is senior Republican staff member on the committee, usually was the one who sought out Ford and aides to obtain such papers.

The Senate is to begin debate on Ford's nomination Monday, with a vote expected Tuesday. In the House, the nominee bases at least one more Judiciary Committee hearing.