

Wasn't Much of a Story'

# Surprised at Impact: Shipley

By BILL PREDSTON JR.

Alex B. Shipley Jr., thought there "wasn't much of a story" in the questionable assignment for a Washington bureau concerning a year-old incident dealing with possible political espionage.

"I thought, if anything, it would wind up on the back page — headlined something like 'Interlocking Sideights in the News,'" said Shipley, now an assistant state attorney-general.

BUT THE story, recounting how Donald H. Secretell of Los Angeles had suggested that Shipley — an old Army buddy in Vietnam — engage in political espionage in behalf of President Nixon, was on the front page of many newspapers yesterday.

And it was a shaken Alex Shipley who literally found reporters beailing on his front door Monday night when the story broke.

Red-eyed and exhausted at 1 a.m. Tuesday, Shipley, who had been awake for 23 hours by that time, explained that he never realized he would become a central figure in a potential political scandal.

"LOOK AT it from my point of view," Shipley said, almost pleadingly, "a guy gave me some non-specific instructions about some possible political espionage activities a long time ago.

"I never did anything for him because he never told me to do anything specific. He said it was to benefit (President) Nixon, but I have no evidence that he was — or was not — working for

Nixon or his election committee or anybody at all," Shipley said.

"Sure, I talked to me, and I went along with him but I was trying to get him to tell me something specific, something to do, so I could know the whole on him."

BUT SHIPLEY blew no whistles because, in his words, "I never had anything specific to say he had done. No names, no dates, nothing."

"Maybe he was telling me out, knowing that I'm a Democrat," Shipley said. "Maybe he realized that I wouldn't go along with anything like that. I just don't know."

He did discuss the situation with friends and even went to the effort of meeting with Bill Allen, former administrative assistant to former Sen. Albert Gore.

ALLEN, a man a friend had recommended to Shipley as one "who knows what it's all about in Washington and politics," indicated that what Shipley told him was "nothing new." Shipley recalled, adding that Allen advised him "don't stick your neck out and don't do anything, but keep your ears open."

As time passed, Shipley said, the whole affair became a casual topic of conversation with friends and at parties. Apparently one of his friends, or someone who overheard him at a party, tipped Carl Bernstein, a reporter for the Washington Post, who called Shipley for confirmation of the story.

"I wasn't going to lie to

him," Shipley said. "I told him what I know because I know it was true. I felt I had a moral obligation to tell him the truth."

ALTHOUGH SHIPLEY said later he still placed no great importance on what he was able to tell the reporter, he apparently felt it was important enough to tell to his boss, State Atty. Gen. David Park.

"Gen. Park seemed to take it all in stride," Shipley speculated later. "I mean, after I told him, he came up later — I slipped me on the arm — and said, 'Now I know why President Nixon has been calling to ask who you are.'"

But Shipley was less able to take it in stride two nights later when the story broke in a cacophony of ringing telephone bells, Shipley's ringing telephone and frantic reporters clamoring on his doorstep.

"LOOK AT this," Shipley said some three frantic hours later, pointing to a sheaf of wire articles including his story. "You feed down through these stories and it looks like there is some major, organized plot for espionage around the country."

"What I had to say is right in the middle of these stories," he said, "and that's going to give the impression

that I know about all the rest of it too.

"That's just not true. Why, I don't even know who some of those other people are. I've never heard of them before." And on top of that, it makes it sound like Don (Secretell) approached an assistant attorney general of Tennessee with this scheme. But when it happened, I was a captain in the Army.

"I HADN'T thought about interviewing with Gen. Park then, and to tell you the truth, I probably couldn't even name the attorney general of Tennessee then," Shipley said.

If Shipley was surprised and upset Monday night, as he was, he was even more surprised the following day when calls from media around the country poured into his office and no less than two national television news crews were hovering outside his door.

Shipley faced the media later Tuesday afternoon by reading a prepared statement to a press conference, valiantly hoping that his prepared publicity would end there.

BUT THE story didn't end there as the national press continued digging into the bizarre travels and episodes regardless of Shipley's old

Army buddy. The latest in that series came yesterday when Time magazine reported that it had learned Secretell was linked to two White House aides and allegedly was paid \$50,000 from a Nixon "back fund" by the President's personal attorney.

And in each story appears the name Alex B. Shipley Jr. — the man who told the world about Donald Secretell.

"I will say that I told the truth about what he told me," Shipley said late last week. "I still believe I had a moral obligation to do it. But I had no evidence to reach any conclusions about what he was doing — if anything — or who was paying him — if anybody."

"This whole thing has really been unbelievable," Shipley said with the look of a man who would be very happy just to see his name in print.