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Dwight Chapin: 'Mr. Nice Guy'

By Myra MacPherson

It is impossible to tell the story of Dwight Lee Chapin without talking about Harry Robins (Bob) Haldeman.

Haldeman, the President's powerful chief of staff has said—according to Richard Whalen's book, "Catch the Falling Flag,"—"every President needs an S.O.B.—and I'm Nixon's."

On the other hand, Haldeman's "Mr. Nice Guy" is Chapin, the President's 31-year-old appointments secretary who has taken orders from Haldeman for 10 years—through the days when Haldeman was his boss at J. Walter Thompson advertising agency and now in the cloistered world of the White House.

As one acquaintance said of Chapin—now linked to reports of GOP espionage and sabotage against the Democrats—"He's not the guy who sees that Nixon's coat never touches the floor, but the guy who sees tht Haldeman's coat never touches the floor."

In Whalen's book, the former Nixon speechwriter describes the Haldeman-Chapin relationship. Of Haldeman, he writes: "With his tight crewcut, mechanical smile and brusque manner, he looks the part he plays; absolute disciplinarian of the movement of people and paper between the President's office and the rest of government." In Chapin's "closed domain," Whalen writes, "nobody is important unless Haldeman says so."

A Washington lawyer and former Nixon aide says, "everybody realized, when I was there, that Dwight didn't do a thing without Haldeman's authority or approval." This had its advantages for Chapin, the lawyer said, because no one got angry or blamed Chapin for any "orders he relayed." In fact, the man said, "of those people in the Haldeman group, Chapin was one of the most personable."

Chapin is consistently described by more than a dozen people who know him from his earliest days in Wichita, Kan., to today—in terms of Boy Scout virtuousness: pleasant, courteous, thoughtful, bright, self-effacing, charming, good-natured, friendly, loyal. Above all, loyal.



Associated Press

H. R. (Bob) Haldeman

"He's a super loyalist and super dedicated," said one White House aide. "He genuinely believes President Nixon will go down in history as the greatest living President."

Daniel Patrick (Pat) Moynihan, a Kennedy-Johnson adviser who stayed for some months in Nixon's administration and who is now a Harvard professor says: "He had absolute devotion to Richard Nixon. The first man I met in the Hotel Pierre in those days was Dwight Chapin, getting me coffee, treating me as a vastly more important person than I was, profusely apologizing for the President being 10 minutes late. He's one of the sweetest men I've ever met—a perfect gentleman."

"An unusually self-effacing man,

See CHAPIN, B3, Col. 1

really," said Moynihan, who added that unlike Kennedy's appointments secretary, Kenny O'Donnell, who was "very much a policy man in his own right, Chapin never aspired to that position." He was content, Moynihan said, to be a "perfectly neutral executor."

The people who speak of Chapin find it, as one man said, "hard to believe" that such a nice guy could get involved in sabotage or espionage. Last Sunday, The Washington Post quoted a friend of Donald H. Segretti as saying that Segretti "reported to Chapin" on alleged acts of political sabotage against the Democrats. Segretti was quoted as saying Chapin was one of his "contacts." Yesterday, the New York Times reported that several calls were made to Chapin's home by Segretti, a former USC classmate of Chapin's.

One former White House aide said, "The only plausible circumstance in which I can conceive of Chapin doing it, is if he were told to. He wouldn't run anything like that. But it makes no sense that they would be so stupid to do anything so directly tied to the White House." Another man, expressing the same view, joked, "unless that was their cover."

Chapin is universally liked for his sense of humor, which has surfaced in the wake of the current publicity. When Chapin returned to the White House after dinner Tuesday night, the guard recognized him and Chapin cracked that it was because of all the pictures in newspapers.

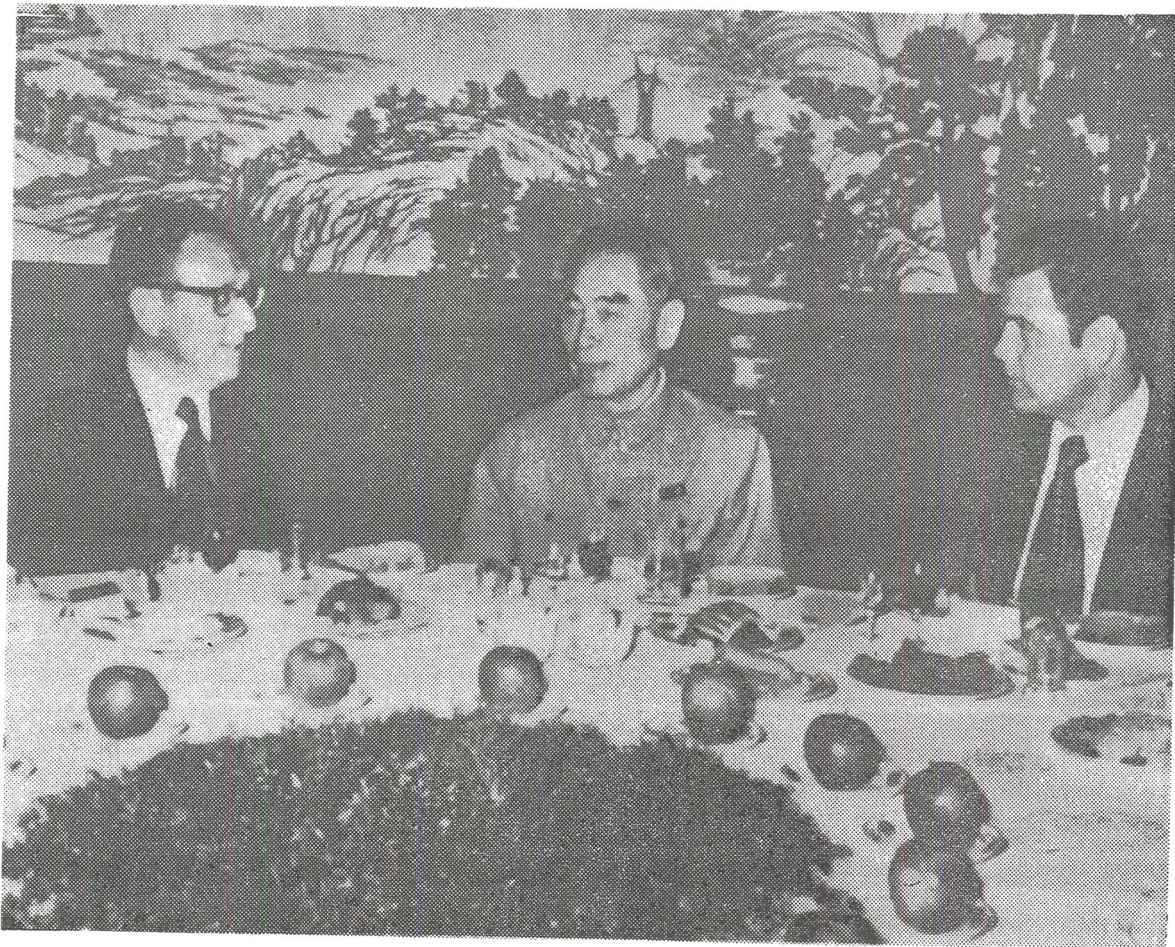
"I don't have problems of identity with the guards any more—they used to make me show my pass," he joked to a friend.

In fact, all his qualities are described as "likeable"; in a world populated by power-hungry egomaniacs, people speak protectively of him. The only criticism—out of the beware-of-someone-who-doesn't-have-enemies school of skepticism—came from a former White House aide now working for a West Coast research institute. "Some people used to say they thought he was too nice. There's something about a man who is always neat, never a hair out of place, always smiling . . ."

Chapin is good looking in that flawless way of Hollywood heroes of a few decades ago—the perfect nose, dark brown eyes, ears that don't stick out at all from his well-clipped dark hair, a ready smile.

Approached by a reporter the other night at the preview of "Young Winston," he smiled, talked pleasantly for a few minutes, declined to say anything about the stories of his alleged involvement and didn't exactly say "no" to an interview. Instead, he said, "You'll have to check that out and clear that with Ron Zeigler."

Zeigler did not return a half-dozen phone calls. Attempts to reach Chapin directly ran into a persistent White House switchboard intercept. The chief operator insisted no one was there al-



Associated Press

Dwight Chapin, right, with premier Chau En-lai and presidential adviser Henry Kissinger in the Great Hall of the People last October.

though Chapin was later discovered to have been at work an hour after the last call was placed.

In the end, Zeigler called back first to say, "I told Dwight the interview was up to him," and again, after another go with the automatic intercept to Chapin's White House number, to report that Chapin "just didn't feel he could do it."

Chapin, to some still carries the caddy image from his 1966 campaigning days with Nixon. A 1971 National Journal article says, "He was responsible for getting the candidate up in the morning, putting him to bed at night and looking after his wardrobe, meals and schedule."

There are others, however, who feel he has developed beyond that in recent months and now makes some independent decisions about such things as Mr. Nixon's China trip.

"He is extremely competent and handled all the advance work on that trip beautifully. He has an amazing grasp for detail," said one White House aide. "He got the Chinese to accept an unbelievable schedule." Dick Moore, an older White House lawyer who said "If I had a son, I'd like him to be just like Dwight," added: "I understand he went out there against their propaganda minister and negotiated to get all the press

over there." Another aide on that trip said "He was very much involved in getting unprecedented coverage, including live TV, over there."

His ability to handle the countless details of such a trip diplomatically impressed Chou En-lai.

A witness to the exchange related that at one stage, Chou En-lai said, "Mr. Chapin, you seem quite young." Chapin: "I am 30." Chou En-lai: "So, I admire you greatly. In this aspect we Chinese have still to catch up with you Americans because you dare to use young people." Chapin: "Thank you."

One friend said, "This guy just couldn't be involved in any nutty sabotage scheme. Hell, he spent three weeks to a month before each trip on those painstaking details—then went on those trips to China and Russia—to the meeting with the German chancellor in Key Biscayne—with the Japanese in San Clemente. Hell, there just wasn't any time!"

If Chapin ever lost his temper, over some niggling detail no one can recall it. "The most I ever saw was that he might be bothered—in a very controlled way," said Dan Moss, a roommate at the University of Southern California in the early '60s.

Another former roommate, Michael Guhin, now a staff member of the National Security Council, recalls, "That

guy was the greatest popcorn maker! I never saw him lose his temper unless the popcorn went wrong. He almost measured out the kernels down to the number that would perform correctly."

His father, Norman Spencer Chapin, a vice president of Garrett Corporation, a Los Angeles aerospace manufacturing firm, often refers to Chapin as "The boy" and says "He is very devoted to anything he gets on to."

In Chapin's early adolescence—from 10 or 14—the family lived on a 150-acre farm, just outside Wichita, where his father, then a salesman for Garrett, was based. "I remember he went through the 4-H club business, with his raising and showing a calf and coming in third and crying because it wasn't first. You remember, I'm talking about a 10-year-old.

"He'd get up at 5:30 a.m. to do his chores, feed about 15 cattle. He worked hard. When you see 'em come back in on a winter's morning with icicles on the nose, you know what I mean."

Norman Chapin says his son was "never a good ballplayer, and he wasn't exactly an A student from my viewpoint." His polite thoughtfulness, "came about in part from my business. We always had lots of people from the company—older people—at the house

and both he and his sister, Linda (now 25) were taught to be polite. He handled himself real well."

His father recalls that "We never had any problems with the boy. He once skipped school for one day—but that was because it was snowing—in southern California of all things—and I don't blame him for that. He was sent back to school, by the way."

The one subject his father said "I have no comment on" were the stories of his son's alleged activities with Segretti.

The family moved to southern California and, in high school, Chapin became president of the student body. "He was always pretty active in politics, but his mother and I never were." Asked if they were always Republicans, his father said, "We're from Kansas. I think that answers that." He then chuckled and said, "Yes."

In high school Chapin met Susan (Suzie) Howland and he married in college. "They met at the church."

Dwight was quite active in the Presbyterian church," said his father. For all of Chapin's good looks, he was no swinger. His father said, "Dwight didn't have any other girl friend ever but Suzie."

Her father, John Howland, is with Santa Barbara's Bank of America, one of the California banks bonded by young radicals in 1970 and 1971. Suzie and Dwight went to USC together and he married her in 1963.

USC in the '50s and early '60s was, as one former student said, "very rah-rah and incredibly Republican" and the only major differences in political attitudes were degrees of Republicanism.

"It was 'sand box politics,' but it was a tough training ground," said the man, now a California lawyer. During the time Dwight was in college, there were secret political organizations that engaged in all kinds of espionage. One year, when Dwight was still a freshman, one guy infiltrated another person's campaign for class president to the extent that he became the opposition guy's campaign manager. Needless to say, nothing ever quite went right.

"I graduated three years ahead of Dwight and have no idea about anything he may have personally engaged in," the lawyer noted.

Chapin, along with Segretti and Guhin belonged to Trojans for a Representative Government, which is described as a group of men from the bigger fraternities who tried to topple another strong group, composed, as one person said, "mostly of minorities and smaller fraternities." Chapin was a member of Sigma Chi.

In his senior year, 1963, Chapin managed the campaign of a student who beat out Chapin's former roommate, Moss, for Student Body President. Moss says he is "certain" he was beaten fair and square. "But it was extremely tough. They were very effective in getting five guys to run against their guy—to split votes."

Asked what Chapin was like in those

days when he wore a Haldeman-type crew-cut, Moss paused and said, "He's not really . . . well, he's an average student who was interested in student government, very, very much.

While he was still an undergraduate majoring in government and politics, Chapin got a job as field manager for Nixon's 1962 gubernatorial campaign.

Nick Ruwe of the State Department protocol office and a longtime Nixon associate who describes himself as loyal enough to be "bomb-throwing friend of the President," says one of the best things he ever did for Nixon was get Chapin into the fold.

"In 1962 I was running the schedule and itinerary and we were short an advance man. I asked who the field man was to handle a political rally and they said, 'The youngest guy in the operation. His name is Dwight Chapin.' I thought, 'I better go out and handle this myself.' Well, here was this damn 7:30 a.m. meeting and here was this child running it. He did a heck of a job."

After that campaign, Chapin linked with Haldeman at J. Walter Thompson, taking leaves to work for Nixon in 1964 and then joining up for good in 1966.

His days now are often 15 hours of work and he doesn't get to see his two young daughters, Tracy "and Kim" very often. White House associates, including his old California friend Ziegler, say no one has time to socialize anymore. He is vague about the off-hours Chapin. "He and Suzie play tennis, I think. When we were young marrieds in California they were a lot of fun to go out with; he's a very humorous guy."

People say to ask his wife about Chapin, but she is not talking to reporters these days.

When a reporter stopped by their two-story white brick suburban Maryland home located off River Road in Westgate, Mrs. Chapin pleasantly let her in but said she would have to check out an interview with her husband. After placing a phone call to him, she came back and said, again pleasantly, "I really can't talk to you."

A small blonde, Mrs. Chapin was cooking chili for dinner. The living room is cozy and small—wall-to-wall shag carpeting, two olive love seats, Van Gogh reproductions and paintings of the children, a bust of Lincoln on the front bay window, a plastic-and-straw flower bouquet. In the driveway of the \$35,000 to \$40,000 home was a green Ford station wagon with the bumper sticker, "President Nixon—Now More Than Ever."

Whatever Chapin's future, one thing most of his acquaintances feel will never happen is his coming out from the back rooms to run for office himself.

His father says, "In college, I don't think he was qualified for office himself, scholastically or otherwise. He started working for others. I think he's somebody who has got to work his heart out for somebody else."



Photos by Matthew Lewis—The Washington Post

Dwight Lee Chapin: "He's not the guy who sees that Nixon's coat never touches the floor, but the guy who sees that Haldeman's coat never touches the floor."