

Jack Anderson and the Eagleton Case

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When the wrongs of government are perpetrated by a Hitler—or even a Roosevelt—it is hard for decent men to find the roots of those wrongs in themselves. This is why we embarked on our Moral Myopia series about the sins of people we on the whole admire. The first two were about The New York Review of Books and the staff of the Senate Watergate committee. This one is about Jack Anderson, a man whom both we and our author, Brit Hume, believe is one of the truly outstanding reporters in America. But he is also capable of making some serious errors. One was his arrangement with J. Edgar Hoover, as we once reported in *Tidbits and Outrages*, whereby he agreed to write “blue things” about the FBI director in exchange for access to the Bureau’s file. Brit Hume’s story explores the reasons behind another of Anderson’s mistakes.

On Tuesday, July 25, Senator Thomas Eagleton of Missouri, the man selected by Senator George McGovern as his running mate on the Democratic presidential ticket, held a news conference at a resort lodge in the Black Hills of South Dakota where McGovern had been resting before the campaign. Two reporters for the *Washington Post*, Robert Boyd and George Felt, had established that

Anderson is a former associate of Jack Kennedy. His article is adapted from his book Inside Story, to be published in 1975 by Doubleday.

Eagleton had three times been hospitalized for mental disorders.

With the Knight papers poised to break the story, Eagleton and McGovern decided to make a public confession immediately. Eagleton’s statement to a roomful of stunned reporters contained assurances that he was fully recovered, that his problem had been “nervous exhaustion” and that he had learned to “pace” himself so that he would not have the problem again. Nevertheless, he acknowledged that he had undergone electric-shock treatment on two of the occasions when he had been hospitalized. There could be no doubt that it was a devastating development for the Democratic ticket. Eagleton was an attractive and articulate man, considered a remarkably talented politician by his colleagues. But would the public place a man with a history of mental illness a heartbeat from the presidency? Most people doubted it. The headlines the next morning were very large.

I stopped in Jack’s office the next day before going to my own. He had just done his morning radio show and was going through some papers at his desk.

“It seems to me,” I said, “that this Eagleton press conference left some questions unanswered.”

“Oh?” said Jack.

“Well, in a separate interview with the Knight papers, he said something about still taking some ‘little blue

pins. I wonder if they are barbiturates and, if so, what kind. That raises questions about when they were prescribed and if they were prescribed by a psychiatrist. And that makes me wonder if he isn't still seeing a psychiatrist. You can't tell how the press will react. They may decide to drop the subject. They might press it all the harder. But if they drop it, there might be an additional story there.

"Well," said Jack. "I think you're right. Why don't you go after it."

I called Eagleton's office and was told the Senator could be reached at the Century Plaza Hotel in Los Angeles. I called the hotel and left a message for the press secretary. I never heard from him.

About three o'clock that afternoon, Jack crossed the hall into my office. "I just talked to True Davis," he said. "I don't know why I didn't think of it before. He says Eagleton was arrested 11 times for drunk driving in Missouri."

"Has he got proof?" I asked.
"No, but I've seen photostats of the citations," Jack said.

"Has he still got them?"
"No, but he says if you reach the prosecutor in the county just north of Jefferson City in 1968, he will know all about it."

"That's a hell of a story," I said.
"Eagleton has denied over and over that he's ever had a drink problem."

"That has never misled me before," Jack said. "I've got to go out and get home straight home later, so why don't you try to reach the prosecutor and call me at home tonight about it. I'm afraid this won't keep for the column, but we might be able to do something on radio."

A Man of Property

True Davis had been ambassador to Switzerland and Undersecretary of the Treasury during the Johnson Administration. He and Jack had become friends during Davis' years in Washington. In 1968 Davis ran in the Demo-

cratic primary for the Senate from the home state of Mississippi, which he had accumulated a large fortune in business before deciding to go into government. Davis finished third in the primary behind Thomas Eagleton and the incumbent senator Edward Long. Now he was president of the National Mine Workers of Washington, which was elected by the United Mine Workers as the UMW's most corrupt vote-buyer under Tony Boyk. Jack had ascertained Davis' personal affairs and he thought his present job was something to keep him in Washington while he waited another election for a political post.

Jack and I went to the Washington office of the Washington Post. Jack wanted to get confidential information from the Post for a story we were working on. According to plan I sought to get Davis up with polite but pointed questions about his role with the union and the bank. Jack then intervened with praise for Davis and remarks about what old and new friends they were. Then came the pitch for the information. The next day, Davis came through. His information turned out to be absolutely accurate, and it made an excellent story. Since then I had seen Davis except in the society pages of the newspapers. A Washington Post columnist lavishly and often in his home in Washington, D.C. district. Davis was a colorless, somewhat uninteresting man. It seemed strange that he should emerge as a leading light.

I began to try to find out the name of the prosecutor whom I had spoken. There were just a few counties side by side with Jefferson City. I spoke to a member of the bar who I spoke to and he remembered one case, in which Eagleton had been arrested for speeding in a radar zone.

Gene Hamilton, the present prosecutor in Calloway County, told me that other reporters had asked about the drunk-driving reports. He said he had never heard of any such thing. So eager was Hamilton to convince me that the 1962 case was actually speeding and not a reduced charge stemming from a drunk-driving arrest, that he dug out the ticket itself from the county records and read the details to me over the phone. Eagleton had been driving 85 in a 65-mile-per-hour zone, had been pulled over at 8:45 p.m.



MEL CHARNOVITZ

Jack Anderson

March 11, 1962, on State Highway 40, a two-lane road, near the town of Fulton.

Soon after I finished talking to Hamilton, a newsman with a Washington television station called to ask me if we had heard the drunk-driving rumors. I said I had. He told me that all he and other reporters digging into Eagleton's past had found was a 1962 speeding arrest. I told him that was all I had found. More calls turned up no information on drunk driving. After

reached all the present and former prosecutors in the two counties in question. But this story just didn't feel like one that was likely to pan out.

Late in the afternoon, Mike Kiernan came into my office. Mike was a young reporter who had recently joined the staff. Bright, energetic, and resourceful, he took over a variety of tasks, and performed them well and reliably.

"I'm looking for something on Eagleton for radio tomorrow," he said. "Can you help?"

I told him what I knew. He seemed glad to get what little I had.

"That will be fine," he said. "I want to be able to write an item that will have Jack sitting here in Washington giving the inside dope on what all these other reporters out in Missouri are trying to get. The story will be that reporters are swarming all over Missouri checking out these rumors of drunk driving, but all they have found is this speeding arrest. That doesn't make a bad little item."

I kept trying after Mike left but still hadn't turned up a thing to support the drunk-driving story. After dinner, I got on the phone again but made little progress. I finally called Jack and asked him to get back to Davis for more details. He agreed to, but at first was unable to reach him. When he called back later, he seemed to have less than he had before.

"True can't remember exactly how many photostats he received," Jack said, "but he had a stack of them and the figure 11 sticks in his mind. He said it could possibly have been as few as six. A couple of them were definitely drunk driving. They were given to him by a state trooper. The reason he didn't give me the state trooper's name is that he didn't know him. True never showed the photostats to any member of his staff. He agonized over what to do with them, whether to use them in the campaign or not and finally decided to tear them up. He isn't sure what county is the one, but

two hours, through 1st, had not
he said there is a person not Democrat

who owns the largest funeral home in
Fulton who would probably know
something about this."

Who owns the largest funeral home in

I told Jack I still had not reached all the prosecutors who might be the one Davis was talking about. But so far, I said, I had turned up nothing to substantiate the drunk-driving report. Jack sounded as if he was unsure I was giving it my best. (He has since told me he was a little irritated by what seemed to him a half-hearted effort.) But I was doing the best I could. For example, I tried to reach one prosecutor through his home telephone listing. His daughter, who sounded like a young teenager, told me, though, that he no longer lived there. I pressed her, and reluctantly she told me he now lived with another woman in St. Louis. Even more reluctantly, she gave me the woman's name. I couldn't find such a person listed with information in St. Louis, so I called the young girl back to find out where her mother, who was not home, might be reached. She gave me the name of a local night club, "Mr. B's." I called there, hoping the mother would know how to reach her husband—or ex-husband, I couldn't be sure. The man who answered said over the noise and laughter that he had no way of paging anyone, but if I could tell him what the woman looked like, he would try to find her. I called the daughter again. She told me her mother was wearing black slacks, white sandals, a white and black long-sleeved cotton blouse. She had jet black hair with gray streaks. She was in her mid-thirties. I called the night club again. The man looked, then returned to the phone to tell me she had just left. I would have to wait until morning, when I could reach the man himself at his office in St. Louis.

I wasn't ready to give up on this story, but I wasn't optimistic about it. From those I had spoken to, I had gotten virtually unanimous recollection of the one speeding charge and unanimous ignorance of any drunk-driving charges, although several people said there had been persistent

rumors that Eagleton had a drink problem. At the time of the supposed arrests Eagleton was attorney general, then lieutenant governor, of the state. It wasn't hard to believe that he could have been stopped for offenses which were promptly and thoroughly covered up because of his office. But plausibility and provability are not the same. Jack, though, had a different feeling about the story.

"I'm inclined to go ahead with something about this on radio," he said. "When a guy like Les Davis says he saw those photostats, there's obviously something to it. Someone's going to get this story, so I'm inclined to move ahead with something sooner than later."

I ~~did~~ disagree. True Davis ~~was~~ been a reliable source and Jack ~~was~~ me he gave ~~his~~ information ~~was~~ reluctantly. Although he had been a political opponent of Eagleton's, he was now supporting him and Eagleton was working for Eagleton. Davis was certainly not one of our heroes, but he seemed like a solid citizen to fabricate a story of this kind and feed to a reporter whose friendship he clearly valued. I ~~was~~ hedged, Davis' information ~~was~~ legitimate story.

'A Pretty Good Source'

When I got to the office the next morning, Jack and Les Whitten, senior assistant, had not yet returned from taping the radio show at the Mutual Studios farther downtown. Shortly after I sat down at my desk, one of Mutual's correspondents called me.

"Listen," he said, "I just heard Jack's report that he has located the photostats on Eagleton's drunk-driving arrests. Some of my sources in the Senate have told me the same thing. I'm sure it's true and I think it's great that Jack's got the documents. Are you going to make them public?"

"Well," I said, "I don't think he's actually located them. He's learned

about them from a pretty good source."

Moments later, an NBC radio reporter called. It seemed the word was out all over town that Jack had the goods on Eagleton's drunk-driving record. I put the NBC man off with a promise that Jack would return his call.

Just after I got off the phone, I heard Jack and Les come in the front door of the office. I walked out to the reception room. The morning's radio scripts were lying on the desk. The Eagleton item was on the top of the stack. It began as Mike Kiernan had indicated it would, telling how reporters were "streaming into Missouri" to check out "rumors" of Eagleton's being nabbed for drunk driving. Mike had gone on to say that the reporters had found nothing but one speeding violation. But Jack had drawn a line through that with a black felt-tipped pen. I suppressed a gasp when I saw what he had written in its place. The Mutual man had not been paraphrasing when he told me Jack had said he had "located" the photostats. That is exactly what Jack had just recorded for broadcast on the largest radio network in the nation.

"Hey," I said, "you can't say you've 'located' the photostats, can you?"

"I don't know," Jack said. "Les and I were just talking about that."

"I don't think that's the word you want. Don't you want to say you've 'traced' them or 'traced their existence'?"

"Traced!" said Les. "That's the word we want."

"You're right," Jack said. "I'll go and phone in a correction."

The correction Jack phoned to Mutual might have been enough to soften the impact of the story if he had made it before the taping. But Mutual had been calling all over town to say that Jack Anderson, their new star attraction, had the documents on Eagleton's drinking. It was the lead item on the hourly network radio news broadcasts. The fact that Jack

was now saying that he had "traced" the documents instead of "located" them was not enough to quell the interest, even though Jack's correction made it clear that he had not seen the photostats himself. The correction attributed the story to a "former high official from Missouri whose reliability is beyond question."

What's more, Jack seemed to have no doubt that the story would be vindicated, even if he had exaggerated it originally. He was not the least reluctant to be interviewed by television or the newspapers. He gave each interviewer the most ringing assurances of the reliability of his source.

Truth Will Out

Eagleton, who was by now in Honolulu, quickly called a news conference to denounce the story as a "damnable lie." Les seemed surprised when he heard that. Later in the afternoon, Jack stepped across the hall to get a glass of water, between interviews.

"Are you worried about this?" I asked.

"No problem," he said, smiling. "Look, True Davis is a reliable guy. If he says he saw the photostats, then they existed. In a situation like this, the truth has a way of coming out. So I'm not worried about it. Besides, this shows we're willing to go after liberal Democrats." In Missouri, though, the drunk-driving report was getting no substantiation. E. I. Hockaday, the State Police Superintendent, said the files of his department revealed no drunk-driving arrests of Thomas Eagleton. I finally got through to all the other people I had planned to call and some others as well. They all had heard of the speeding charge, even state troopers who worked in other parts of the state. But no one knew anything about drunk driving.

One of the last interviews Jack held that day was with Channel 5, the local Metromedia station where he taped his television commentaries. Asked if he should have waited until

he had the proof in his hands before going ahead with the story. Jack conceded that he probably should have. It was the first sign that he was becoming a bit uncertain about the story.

Both Jack and Les, however, were elated about one development. *The New York Times* had asked to interview Jack's source, with the promise that the name would not be revealed. Jack felt that Davis would inspire confidence and the result would be a story tending to support him. He talked Davis into it. The interview was to be held the next morning.

The Phantom Trooper

I got into the office later than usual that Friday morning, but I phoned Jack at the office earlier. *The New York Times* interview with Davis, he said, had gone badly. Although Davis repeated everything he had told Jack, he acknowledged under questioning that he had not authenticated the traffic citations himself and, what's more, the state trooper who had handed them to him at a political rally was not in uniform and he could not prove that he really was a trooper. Jack thought the *Times* reporters had been antagonistic toward him. He did not expect the *Times* story to be favorable.

"They were asking things like, 'Do you think this kind of reporting is worthy of a Pulitzer Prize winner?'" Jack told me ruefully.

"I've been thinking about it," I said, trying to be as tactful as possible. "And it occurred to me that the best thing to do might be to apologize to Eagleton. That way, you'd be out of this thing clean."

"Maybe so," Jack said. "We can talk about it when you come in."

When I got to the office, I sat down at my typewriter and drafted a statement. It took the tack that the report was based upon limited evidence and was intended for only **limited** use. But instead, it had created a **sensation** and done an injustice to

Eagleton. It ended in an apology.

I personally felt that an outright apology as succinct and complete as possible would have been preferable, but I doubted I could get it to Jack. He believed the citations had existed and that Eagleton was lying. I thought he might be willing to go along with an apology that fell short of being an assertion that the story was absolutely false. And I felt that the impact of



Adams Studio

Davis would be the same, and Jack Anderson would have apologized. Eagleton would say he was violated. End of it. If the story later turned out to be true, Jack might appear foolish, but not irresponsible.

It was 11:30 noon by now, and the first edition of *The Washington Star* was on the streets. On the front page was a story on Bob Walters under the headline "Anderson Backs Off." It quoted Jack's remarks on the interview on Channel 5 the night before, which the rest of the press had missed. The office was immediately beset with calls from newsmen wanting to know if Jack really was backing off.

Jack took the statement I drafted, then turned to Bob Walters and began to fashion his own. About 30 minutes later, it was ready. It ran about a page and a half double-spaced. I thought it was long, too

full of explanations and defenses. But it ended with an apology to Senator Eagleton for not waiting until the story was fully verified before using it. I thought it was probably enough to extricate Jack from this worsening jam. I sensed that he was in for some severe criticism for this story. An apology, no matter how hedged with explanation and defense, would take the sting out of any outraged comment. Jack would stay ahead of reaction, apologizing before he was forced to.

Jack called the staff into the office and read the statement. Opal Ginn, Jack's secretary, was strongly in favor of the apology.

"I just don't want you to act like Drew [Pearson] used to," she said. "He refused to ever apologize, even if he was wrong."

I agreed, and so did Joe Spear, another staff writer. But Les, who wasn't aware that I had tried hard and without success to confirm the story, thought it was likely to pan out at any time. He thought Jack ought to ride out the storm.

"Why do you have to make any statement at all," he said. "Why don't you act like the Russians did when Napoleon was advancing. Just sit tight and let them wear themselves out."

"That option is foreclosed," I said. "The *Star's* out with a story saying Jack's backing off. The entire press corps has been on the phone wanting to know if it's true. Jack has to give an answer."

Playing For Time

A heated argument ensued. It was typical of the office. A roiling squabble over substance, with no hard feelings. Jack listened to everyone, but I could tell he was finding Les persuasive. The reason was not that Les was giving the best argument, but because Les was saying what Jack, at this point, wanted to hear. Jack didn't want to back off when he thought the story might be vindicated at any moment. After an extraordinary

streak of major stories, Jack didn't want the humiliation of announcing he had blundered when events might still bail him out.

Les argued that Jack had done something any reporter might have done—gone out fast with a story to stay ahead of the competition. The press, he said, would understand that.

I argued that that was the worst possible justification, but to no avail. Jack had made up his mind. The statement would be rewritten and the apology would go.

One of the reasons I was so eager for Jack to back down was that I suspected the rest of the press, which had also been hearing reports of drunk driving by Eagleton, was beginning to doubt that those reports were true. For example, I had received a call from Paul Duke of NBC News, who said he was appalled that Jack had gone with the Eagleton story without the documents in hand.

The Washington Post that morning reported that one day before Jack went on the air with his report, it had gotten a strikingly similar tip. "*The Washington Post*," the story said, "received a report from a former Missouri official that a highway patrolman approached him at a 1968 political rally with a sheaf of traffic citations allegedly issued to Eagleton. Repeated checks with authorities in Missouri did not substantiate the report."

Jack's statement began just as Les had urged: "For competitive reasons, we went out fast yesterday with a story that Senator Tom Eagleton has been cited for drunken and reckless driving. The story was based on the recollections of a competent source, who personally saw photostats of the traffic citations. We also discussed the story with other responsible sources who had been told of Eagleton's traffic violations."

The statement went on to explain how newsmen are accustomed to relying on confidential sources. As an example, he said, *The Washington Post* quoted an unidentified former

Missouri official as saying, 'that a highway patrolman approached him at a 1968 political rally with a sheaf of traffic citations allegedly issued to Eagleton.'" That, of course, was a quote from the *Post* story mentioned earlier, which had gone on to say that no substantiation had been found for the report. It was not a good example for Jack to cite.

The statement said, in closing, "In retrospect, I believe I broadcast the story prematurely and should have waited until I could authenticate the traffic citations personally. Nevertheless, I have faith in my sources and stand by the story. If this faith should ever turn out to be unwarranted, I will issue a full retraction and apology."

I thought the statement was not likely to get Jack off the hook, but I hoped that it would. Everyone in the office continued to follow leads in an effort to find the elusive proof that Eagleton had been caught driving drunk. But at the end of the day, no proof had been uncovered.

Taking a Pasting from the *Post*

Meanwhile, Eagleton was counter-attacking hard. In the ironic way things often work in politics, Jack's story was helping Eagleton, not hurting him. As long as no proof of drunk driving was forthcoming, Eagleton appeared to have been wronged by Jack. He now had an issue to get himself off the defensive. "I'm not going to let a lie drive me off the ticket," he told cheering crowds upon his return from Hawaii.

I was still asleep when the phone rang at 8:30 the next morning. It was Opal.

"You might as well get up, it's worse than ever," she said. "You should see the *Post*. I thought everything was fine when I read the *Post*'s story on Eagleton. Then I turned to the editorial page. And now Jack's agreed to go on 'Face the Nation' with Eagleton tomorrow."

"Let me look at the *Post* and I'll call you back," I said.

It could hardly have been worse. A large portion of the editorial page was taken up with a piece by Maxine Cheshire, the *Post*'s redoubtable society columnist, whose reputation for accuracy was roughly equal to Drew Pearson's. The article was headed: "Anderson on Eagleton: A Charge That Didn't Stand Up." It began as follows:

"Columnist Jack Anderson does not reveal his sources and I don't reveal mine. So we will probably neither of us ever know for sure whether we both received from the same individual, almost simultaneously this week, the same piece of gossip about alleged drunken driving incidents involving Sen. Thomas Eagleton. This city being the giant rumor mill that it is, it is entirely possible that our sources were not the same.

"What is clear, however, is that the information we both received was remarkably similar, down to quite specific details. What also is clear is that it did not stand up under the sort of examination that any responsible news reporter would be obliged to give it before making it public.

"The Anderson charges, in short, are a classic example of precisely the sort of reporting practices that have brought the news business under increasing attack. . . ."

Cheshire went on to set forth in considerable detail her own efforts to check out the drunk-driving report, which undoubtedly had come from True Davis—someone she would know well from covering the city social scene. Her chronicle was almost an exact copy of the steps I had taken in trying to verify Davis' information. She had spoken to virtually the same officials and the same state troopers. And she had achieved the same results—nothing. At the end of the piece, she wrote:

"Meanwhile, Anderson yesterday was still holding press conferences and issuing statements and making headlines, defending himself and the 'veracity' of his source on the one hand, and conceding on the other

hand that he 'probably should have withheld' the original report until he had checked it out. . . . By way of added justification for what he had done, he said *The Washington Post*, in a dispatch in last Friday's editions, had quoted an unidentified former Missouri official as saying that a highway patrolman had approached him at a 1968 political rally with a sheaf of traffic citations allegedly issued to Senator Eagleton. Anderson apparently did not think it necessary to add that the *Post* went on to say, in the same dispatch, that 'repeated checks with authorities in Missouri did not substantiate the report.' "

Whew. And Cheshire's piece was accompanied by an equally scathing editorial. "Mr. Anderson," it said, "aired the story without supporting evidence, managed to do an incredible disservice to Senator Eagleton, and now seems to be backing off with a series of lame excuses. Metaphorically speaking, it is Mr. Anderson, not Senator Eagleton who should be charged with reckless driving at this point."

Soft Facts and Hard Truth

The New York Times story, carried on page one, was as unfavorable as Jack had feared. It emphasized that Jack's source had never verified the authenticity of the citations. And the *Times*, too, ran a sharply critical editorial.

I called Opal back to commiserate. She was worried about Jack's going on "Face the Nation" the next day with Eagleton. He had told her that morning that he planned to really "go after" Eagleton. The assumption was that they would both be guests. She thought the panel of reporters would chop Jack to pieces. I agreed. But it occurred to me that Jack might yet redeem himself with an apology to Eagleton on the show. It would be dramatic, occurring live on national television, and it would make Eagleton and the panel seem churlish if they were rough on Jack after his

contrition.

The worst thing about this episode now, it seemed to me, was that the longer it continued without some acknowledgment of major error on Jack's part, the more it would look as if he didn't know when a story was proved and when it wasn't. Far from being America's number one investigative reporter, Jack would appear a dimwit with no conscience and no recognition of the distinction between a soft fact and a hard one.

I went out to Jack's house to urge him to use the "Face the Nation" as an opportunity for a dramatic apology and not a chance to clobber Eagleton again. Jack was finishing breakfast in the kitchen when I arrived. In the years I had known him, I had never seen him as tense. He was wearing the seedy, threadbare bathrobe he often wore around the house and which was a symbol to us in the office of his easygoing, unpretentious ways. But there was nothing relaxed about him that Saturday morning. He looked drawn and the muscles in the back of his jaw were working visibly as he sat listening to my entreaties, his mouth a tight line. His hands shook, not much, but noticeably. I could see he was having a hard time taking my pitch for going on the air with an apology. He had heard a lot of noisy advice from me in the past days, and it hadn't been what he wanted to hear. He was close to losing patience, and it was hard to blame him. Then I managed to make things worse by seeming incredulous when he told me he had all along possessed evidence besides the say-so of True Davis that the Eagleton story was true. Two state troopers, one retired, the other still on the force, had told him confidentially that Eagleton had gotten the tickets, that the arresting officers had kept their own copies and the others had been quietly disposed of.

"You mean," I said, "that you had this before you broadcast the story?"

"Of course!" he snapped.

There was a period of silence. Jack looked at the newspaper and I just sat

there. I didn't know what to say. I had worked on this story with him. I could recall no case where he hadn't filled me in completely on a story we were doing together. What's more, I couldn't think of anything in his public statements that indicated the existence of any source besides True Davis. Yet Jack was indignant that I had questioned him about it. The worst thing was that I wasn't sure I believed him. My impulse was to cross-examine him, but I knew that would never do. The important thing was to try to persuade him to use the Sunday television appearance to get out of this jam.

I went into the den and called Opal. I told her about Jack's mood and said I was afraid he might go on the air and blast Eagleton.

"Suppose I threaten to quit if he doesn't apologize," I suggested.

"No, that wouldn't work. It would just make him mad."

"Well, look," I said, "why don't you come over here?"

She agreed to come. I then called Joe Spear and Les and urged them to come over so the whole staff could discuss the matter.

Played False by True

Soon, they began arriving. Opal came with George Clifford, a veteran Washington newspaperman who had helped Jack with books and was a close friend. Then Joe and Les arrived. Jack was visibly touched at seeing his staff rally around at a time of crisis. We all sat in his living room.

"First let me say," he began, "how much I appreciate your coming. It means a lot."

I jumped in with my argument for an apology, dramatic and gracious, at the beginning of the show. Opal, as I knew she would, agreed. George Clifford thought it might be a good idea to duck the appearance, but Jack was unwilling. He interrupted to explain all the reasons he was reluctant to back away from the story completely.

Everyone else was as ignorant as I had been about Jack's conversations with the two state troopers. He had also spoken to ex-Senator Edward Long, who said he remembered someone on his campaign staff being given some photostats, but the Senator couldn't remember which staff member and had never seen the photostats, according to Jack.

"I'm being criticized for talking to only one source," Jack said. "But that isn't all I did. I've talked to these other sources. They won't let me use their names, but their stories all add up to the same thing. If we can't quote competent sources, we'll go out of business. The other papers are doing it, but we're the only ones who are catching hell for it. The story we had was technically true."

"No it wasn't, Jack," I said. "You said you'd located the documents when you hadn't located them."

"I was out with a correction of that within ten minutes," he said.

"I know, but the correction didn't do the job," I said. "On the news that night, everyone was saying simply that you had reported that Eagleton had been arrested for drunk driving."

"I can't be responsible for that," Jack said. "If they don't report what we say accurately, it's not my fault."

And so it went, for the better part of an hour. Everyone, Jack included, seemed to agree that an apology was in order. Beyond that, there were differences.

Les was eager for Jack to outline all the steps Jack said he had taken to check the story. I argued that this was all "mumbo-jumbo" that added up to a chronicle of how we had failed to get a story. The public wouldn't be interested in such details. I said. But Les, himself the most careful reporter of us all, didn't agree. There was no way for me to signal to him my doubts about Jack's version of what had happened. Jack said he thought it was still worth trying to confirm the story. George agreed to go to Missouri to see what he could come up with.

The meeting broke up with Jack

...expressing his gratitude to every-
one for coming. But there was no
...of what he would do.

...that afternoon, True Davis
...something very peculiar. He went
...the CBS studios in downtown
...Washington and made a public state-
...that he was Jack's source. Davis
...he had "very reluctantly come to



Reni Photos

Thomas Eagleton

the conclusion" that he was the
source. He said that he had "discussed
some of the things that went on in
politics" with Jack back during the
1968 campaigning and, at that time,
had shown Jack the photostats of the
drunk-driving citations "without
realizing it might be made public
without verification."

Jack also went to the studio and
confirmed that Davis was the source.
He said also that he apologized to
Eagleton and "to the American
people" for making the story public
without further checking.

Davis was lying, of course. How
could he "reluctantly come to the
conclusion" that Jack was now using
some four-year-old information when
he had discussed it with Jack two days
earlier? Davis interviewed about the
matter by the *New York Times* only
the day before. What's more, he was
now saying that Jack had seen the
photostats in 1968, though Jack
confessed to having no such recollec-
tion. Of course Jack, having sworn by
his veracity, was in no shape to

start calling him a liar. He had to go
along.

The "Face the Nation" appearance
now took on ever greater importance
since Davis had emerged as the source
and claimed that Jack was using infor-
mation imparted four years earlier.
The show was to be broadcast at noon
but was taped 90 minutes earlier.
Shortly after eleven, Opal called.

"Jack apologized to Eagleton," she
said. "And he accepted it graciously
and praised Jack for his 'moral charac-
ter.'"

"That's great," I said. "But how do
you know?"

"I just heard a slice of it on the
CBS radio news at eleven," she said.
"It sounded great."

When my wife, Clare, and I tuned
in at noon, we were expecting to
watch some very favorable develop-
ments. And the show began much as
the radio report had indicated. Jack
asked Eagleton some other questions,
then began the following exchange:

"This is the first time I've had a
chance to face you," he said, "and I
do owe you an apology. I've always
told my reporters, Senator, that a fact
doesn't become a fact for our column
until we can prove it. Now I violated
my own rule, and I want you and the
nation to know that I violated it."

Jack went on with some explana-
tory remarks about how he had gotten
the story, but he concluded by saying,
"I went ahead with a story that I
should not have gone ahead with and
that was unfair to you, and you have
my apology."

"Well," responded Eagleton, "let
me say, Mr. Anderson, that the true
test of moral character is, I guess, to
admit when one makes a mistake. . . .
It takes quite a man to go on nation-
wide television to say he made a
mistake and I commend you for your
courage."

Clare and I were shaking our heads
in relief and elation. It could not have
gone better. A humble apology and a
gracious acceptance.

But the next thing we knew, the
subject had been raised again and Jack

was talking.

"I wish I could retract completely the story and say there's nothing to it. I can't—I cannot in good conscience do that."

I had repeatedly urged Jack to say nothing about retraction, just to apologize and let that speak for itself. But he had raised it and he was giving Eagleton a lengthy explanation of why he couldn't "retract the story completely."

"I cannot do that yet," he said. "My conscience won't allow me to..."

Eagleton, incredulous, began to question Jack about why he could not retract, and Jack responded with reasons why he still thought there were unanswered questions raised by information he had obtained from sources.

"... they have given me specific incidents which I would like to go over with you. In addition, *The St. Louis Post-Dispatch* has quoted a former Missouri official as saying that he personally stopped you three times—"

"Nothing to do with drunken driving," Eagleton protested. "That was never mentioned."

"Well," said Jack, "I would like to exhaust these. I really would prefer to retract everything right here, but I cannot retract a story that still hasn't

been pursued to a final end..."

I was stunned. Clare and I looked at each other in horror. Jack had seemed to be out of trouble but now he had gone so far to make clear that his apology wasn't a retraction that it sounded as if he had retracted the apology.

The phone rang. It was Jack. "What did you think?" he said.

"Well, it was fine," I stammered. "But I wish you hadn't brought the whole thing up all over again."

"Believe me," he said. "I was tempted not to. That would have been the easiest thing to do. But I think I did the right thing."

There was no use arguing. "Well, I hope so," I said.

What I hoped, of course, was that the apology part of the show would overshadow all the other discussion. And Monday morning's papers seemed to indicate that it might. Jack and Eagleton were shown together in the studio after the show in a front-page picture in *The Washington Post*. The *Post*'s story mentioned the retraction disagreement but placed more emphasis on the apology.

Still, though, a number of other newsmen told me they thought Jack had acted terribly on the show. I had to agree. Invoking conscience as justification for clinging to this discredited story was outrageous.

But on Tuesday, *The Washington Post* criticized Jack as he had never been criticized before. In an editorial entitled "Jack Anderson's 'Apology,'" the *Post* said that Jack had revealed "some very peculiar and unsatisfactory notions concerning journalistic responsibility—and some absolutely bizarre notions concerning 'conscience.'" The editorial went on, "Having first invoked competitive pressures as an excuse for his behavior—which was no excuse at all—Mr. Anderson proceeded... to offer the Senator an apology. Or something." It went on to explain how Jack had apologized and Eagleton had accepted and even praised Jack. "Wherein" or shortly after—Mr. Anderson *ow-*

positively stricken with sorrowism, that he only could retract the story fully. . . . The point, to the point that one was discernible, was that Mr. Anderson's science would not permit him to retract the story (for which he had already apologized) because it might prove true. The logic in all this really devours the editorial continued. "What was Mr. Anderson refusing to retract if not the allegations which, by his own account, it had been irresponsible to broadcast? For part, we believe Senator Eagleton was right on the money when he objected to the distinction and observed that it hardly seemed equitable to him. Sunday's exchange on the television program did nothing to alter our opinion that the Anderson performance has been a reckless and wholly regrettable excursion into the worst kind of journalism."

Biting the Bullet

I found Jack at his desk when I came into the office. I have never seen him looking so depressed. He looked out at me. "Well," he said softly, "your advice was right all along and I wish I had taken it. I want you to know that I appreciate your giving it." There wasn't anything to say, so I left the room. The mail that poured into the office in the days after the Eagleton broadcast was overwhelmingly angry. I don't know how much to count it all, but someone did tally one day's mail and there were 67 letters denouncing me for being misleading and lying in my report on the right track. The reaction among Jack's colleagues, at least among those who spoke to me, was almost wholly negative. That afternoon Jack went to the senator's office to play out the last in a series of questions he had mentioned in "Face the Nation,"

and Eagleton gave his answers - all of them denials, of course. Outside Eagleton's office, Jack walked up to a battery of microphones and television cameras to announce that he was giving a "full retraction" of his story. The next morning, he went on the "Today" show and repeated the retraction in a 30-minute, mea-culpa interview with Frank McGee.

I admired Jack for taking his medicine publicly. But I felt that I hadn't been dealing with the same man I had known the past several years. There was something about his compulsion to come up with a story on Eagleton, about his stubbornness in backing away, and his insensitivity to his own standards that was unfamiliar and unexpected. It seemed that Jack had had an upside-down reaction to his own success. Instead of feeling more secure, he felt more compelled. And once he had slipped, it was more difficult than ever to accept the humiliation of admitting the error.

Certainly, I thought Jack had behaved disgracefully in the Eagleton affair. But in the end, he had faced the facts and taken his lumps - publicly. And Eagleton, whatever he said, did not lose his place on the Democratic ticket because of Jack's unsubstantiated charge. He lost it because of his own misjudgment of the mental-illness issue and the insistence of the Democratic party hierarchy that someone without such a history take his place. Eagleton had not been damaged by Jack's charge for more than 24 hours. Then the allegation became a sympathy factor and actually helped him generate support.

The person damaged by the episode was Jack. He had risen to a position of fame and credibility never before achieved by a muckraking journalist and, almost overnight, he had lost it. He had done hundreds of stories as controversial without a slip. And he would do hundreds more before the stain of the Eagleton case was removed, if indeed, it ever could be.