

JAN 29 1976

WXPost Taking Issue With Daniel Schorr

Daniel Schorr's reply, January 17, to Tom Braden's article is a strange combination of nonsense and a view of at least one reporter's ideas of the responsibility, or lack thereof, for checking a story before running with it.

As to the nonsense: Mr. Schorr says "It was not I who revealed that Alexander Butterfield had all along been a CIA agent, it was Colonel Prouty who stated it on the CBS morning news." Next, Mr. Schorr says "it was not said that Butterfield had been an agent, but the CIA's contact—a distinction that an old CIA hand will surely understand."

First, when a seasoned TV reporter introduces a supposed authority on a network news program and asks him a leading question and gets a foreknown answer, you know the reporter only has the source present for authentication. There may be those who believe that Mortimer Snerd was the voice and Edgar Bergen the dummy—but not many. Mr. Dooley once asked Hennessy: "D'ye think tis the mill that makes the water run?"

As to the characterization of Butterfield's relationship with CIA: I have the transcript of that news broadcast. It would stretch imagination beyond belief to accept Mr. Schorr's statement that Butterfield was labeled only as a CIA contact. Each of Mr. Schorr's questions and Prouty's replies was calculated to produce

an image of Butterfield as a CIA agent in the White House.

Finally, Mr. Schorr relates all the efforts to correct the original impression given on CBS morning news. If Mr. Schorr had taken the trouble in advance of the original broadcast to check out Prouty's credentials, he would have found that Prouty was a minor Defense Department officer with no qualifications to speak on CIA operations beyond a very limited sphere. Anyone who has read his book, "The Secret Team," knows that he is given to blowing his own horn and that against increasing his own self-importance, the truth has little value.

The obligation for accuracy is clearly greater in the electronic media because it is nearly impossible for the average listener to know exactly what was said. There is no way easy way to read it over and analyze words.

It seems to me that the point Mr. Braden made regarding Mr. Schorr is a valid one. Mr. Schorr is a serious, responsible journalist. He has a vast audience. One should be able to hope that when a reporter with Mr. Schorr's credentials has broadcast a bad story he would realize it and admit it.

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