

News Digests for Nixon Cover

By Jules Loh
Associated Press

From the day of the Watergate break-in a year ago, news summaries placed daily on President Nixon's desk have spelled out allegations reported in the press on all aspects of the scandal.

The Associated Press has seen summaries covering every major development in the burglary and related cases, about 50 digests in all, a three-inch stack of pages devoted primarily to the Watergate affair.

Summaries for the first full week of the Senate Watergate hearings, for example, totaled 218 pages, of which 145 dealt with Watergate. One of the summaries, for May 22, devoted 11 pages to Watergate and only 6 to the news of the rest of the world.

The summaries are placed on the President's desk in a blue, loose-leaf binder at 8 a.m. each day. They have not spared him embarrassing details or critical comments.

For example, as far back as Nov. 2, five days before Mr. Nixon's re-election, the summary quoted Rep. Wilbur Mills as saying that if the burglary had happened 20 years ago "the people would have demanded impeachment."

And as recently as two weeks ago a summary with 15 of its 25 single-spaced typewritten pages devoted to Watergate matters reported this comment by Eric Sevarcid on White House staff changes:

"There'll be improvement in (WH) atmosphere as well as easing of government mechanism, but to restore public confidence, policy changes will be in order along with determination of how deeply RN is involved in the shady campaign practices."

The digest affects a cryptic, abbreviated style with initials substituted for familiar names. It refers to the President as RN, for example.

The Washington Post and The New York Times, two papers responsible for many Watergate disclosures, are not summarized but instead, according to a White House aide, are slipped under the President's bedroom

door each morning by his valet, Manolo Sanchez.

The Post and Times are mentioned in the summaries when their stories are cited by news services or other publications.

"We know the President reads the summaries," said Patrick Buchanan, the White House assistant in charge of preparing them. "Sometimes he writes comments in the margins, and I know of staff people who get memos from him quoting the summaries."

The digest for last Nov. 25 was returned to Buchanan with this commendation from the President:

"I am constantly amazed at the brilliant work done in preparing the news summary. It is invaluable for all of us."

Apart from occasionally identifying a news story as "positive," meaning favorable to the administration, or characterizing a TV report as the correspondent's "wise remarks," the digest has an over-all flavor of dry objectivity.

Buchanan's staff summarizes the daily output of The Associated Press and United Press International, 35 daily newspapers, 50 magazines and journals, plus news and commentary on all three major television networks.

"Anyone who claims this President is isolated from the news doesn't know the facts," Buchanan said.

The summaries give prominence to televised news. "That is where most people, for better or worse, get most of their news," said Lyndon Mort Allin, who handles the main editing.

Here is a typical segment of a four-page Watergate summary dealing with the press disclosure last Octo-

ber that California lawyer Donald Segretti had been hired to sabotage Democratic campaigns:

"ABC led by saying the Time and Post stories have added to talk that GOP had plan to create havoc among Dems and such is purposed for which RN's appointments secy reportedly hired Segretti. . . . Schorr said JDE refused to answer CBS questions after ABC show and Dan claimed WH is getting worried and concerned as the stories boil up more and

Watergate in

more, even now throwing into question RN's statement that no present WH employees were involved in Watergate."

Schorr is CBS correspondent Daniel Schorr and JDE is former presidential assistant John D. Ehrlichman.

Here are excerpts from the Oct. 16, 1972, summary covering a report in The Washington Post that presidential chief of staff H. R. Haldeman controlled funds used for political espionage and sabotage:

"AP leads: 'The WH accused the Post of engaging in "character assassination" and "a vicious abuse of the journalistic process" in reporting on alleged political sabotage by the GOP.'

"One of closest WH assistants is reported by Post to be 1 of several w control of secret fund, some of which went to breakin, led Chancellor who noted the number of exclusives paper has run tying the story to WH. WH denied in strongest terms and denounced Post. . . . Chancellor noted that til now RZ has been non-communicative on subject but now comes a vehement denial. Flat denial that HRH (Haldeman) was ever queried by FBI and that any security fund ever existed. And, said Valeriani, there was a 'long, vehement denunciation of Post' for, shabby journalism, abuse of journalistic process, political motives, well conceived and well timed effort.

"Post's Bradlee said he rechecked sources and stands by the story. The Post serves no man — no cause, we're motivated only by the truth."

The principals mentioned include John Chancellor and Richard Valeriani of NBC, White House press secretary Ronald Ziegler and Washington Post Executive Editor Benjamin Bradlee.

An excerpt from the March 26 summary:

"McCord letter bannered in all Sat. papers w 'To Lift Lid,' 'Blows Whistle' among heads, and his subsequent meeting w Ervin counsel Dash at which LA Times says he named

Dean and Magruder as 'involved in preparations for the bugging.' WH has denied."

McCord is convicted Watergate conspirator James McCord Jr., Jeb Magruder is the former No. 2 man in the Nixon re-election campaign and John Dean II is the presidential counsel ousted last month. Sen. Sam Ervin (D-N.C.) heads the Senate committee investigating Watergate and Sam Dash is the committee chief counsel.

From the March 27 summary:

"WH moved swiftly to defend Dean, said ABC, and

(Bill) Gill said RN stood firm that Dean had done nothing wrong. . . . Robert Pierpoint said from moment WH learned of story it tried to discourage publication and warned the paper that story was 3rd hand. But by Mon. am., said CBS man, RN decided to call Dean to discuss it. RN call noted by RZ on film clips and ABC noted Dean is considering possible libel actions. . . .

"NBC-CBS noted that when asked if he'd deny Magruder had prior knowledge, RZ said he couldn't speak 'for those not on WH staff.'

"Kleindienst said by NBC to be convinced Dean and Magruder weren't involved."

Pierpoint works for CBS; Richard Kleindienst is the former attorney general.

The news summary of April 19, two days after Nixon said he had learned of "major developments" in a new investigation, contained 14 pages of Watergate material, including these excerpts:

"Sevarcid said truth must come out if RN is to maintain his credibility and practical authority to act in leading the U.S.

"Pierpoint on CBS AM said RN's statement 'raised more questions than it answered. . . . What happens to

Detail

Dean? Who was responsible for 1st WH in mission that 'appears no. to have been, at best, incomplete?' What are the serious charges and major developments and 'how did they come to RN's attention?' Pierpoint noted when press brought 'serious charges of its own.' WH denied them and 'insulted' reporter who made them and RZ has 'repeatedly echoed' RN's statement no one in WH involved."

The April 23 summary quotes R.W. Apple Jr. of The New York Times:

"There's no way for RN to escape from accusation he

surrounded himself with untrustworthy people—and, perhaps more damaging, took 10 months to find them out..."

It also quotes Harry Reasoner of ABC as referring to White House and re-election committee officials as "crewcut Rasputins, incompetent Machiavellis and fumbling amateurs."

On Monday, April 23, the President also received a "digest of weekend comment." One excerpt:

"Broder (David Broder of The Washington Post) leads analysis: 'This weekend, for the 1st time, RN confr the possibility Watergate-

may become his 7th crisis, a crisis of presidential authority.' The gloomy piece notes unless Mitchell, Stans, HRH, Dean etc., are exonerated, which Broder says 'seems increasingly unlikely,' RN 'is likely to be dragged ever deeper into the case.'"

Mitchell is former Attorney General and campaign chief John Mitchell; Maurice Stans is the former Commerce Secretary and campaign fund-raiser.

The April 28 summary quotes the Rev. Billy Graham as saying he's "mystified, confused and sick" over the Watergate.

It also includes this item

referring to the President's daughter, Julie Eisenhower:

"Julie says RN is 'in an agonizing position' because of Watergate which is hurting Admin. At one point, she got this question from a joking reporter: 'Did you plan the Watergate?' AP says the laughter that followed was quickly cut off when Julie replied: 'I don't think that is really even funny. I know that was supposed to be flip...'"

After one rash of Watergate news, the summary for May 7 began:

"For a change, there were no new Watergate developments Sunday..."