

Why Plumbers Harassed Columnist

By Jack Anderson

It has been reported on the front pages that President Nixon's Keystone Kops, otherwise known as the plumbers, sought in late 1971 to plug our White House leaks.

We have endured innumerable indignities, it's true, from the grim men charged with safeguarding Mr. Nixon's secrets.

As early as 1970, his chief Prussian guard, H. R. Halderman, ordered White House gumshoe Jack Caulfield to investigate us. Thereafter, the FBI and the Pentagon's security force joined in the search for our sources. They grabbed the wrong man, who was exonerated by a grand jury in early 1971.

Later that year, the plumbers were unleashed upon us. They used lie detectors, tapped telephones and staked out suspected sources. They learned little about our operation, but they discovered the Joint Chiefs were spying on Henry Kissinger.

Still the intrepid plumbers never let up. They inscribed my name, according to The New York Times, on a wall board in their basement sanctum.

This inspired the two most celebrated plumbers, presumably, to set forth on a mini-Mission Impossible in early 1972 to counteract our ITT stories. G. Gordon Liddy, according to

sworn Watergate testimony, spirited ITT's Dita Beard off to Denver. E. Howard Hunt, wearing a preposterous reddish wig, paid a subsequent midnight call upon Mrs. Beard in a Denver hospital and gave her instructions what her sworn testimony should be.

Robert Mardian, then the Assistant Attorney General in charge of internal security, also got into the act. He placed my house under surveillance and ordered his gumshoes to tail me until my nine children located the stake-out spots and chased the agents away with cameras.

Finally, the White House sent word to the Justice Department to make a criminal case against us. The law-and-order boys obligingly cast about for a crime to pin on us. They decided to try to nail us for conspiring with the Indian militants, who had stolen government documents.

The FBI learned from an informant that I was supposed to pick up some documents from the Indians. A trap was laid, and eight FBI men waited to pounce upon me. But instead, my associate Les Whitten walked into the trap. Unimpressed, a grand jury refused to indict anyone.

If the foregoing seems like comic opera, it has its ominous overtones. The White House

went to extreme lengths, however slapstick the results may have been, to obstruct our investigative reporting. These excesses were authorized in the name of national security.

Insiders have now listed for us the stories that most upset the White House. We'll let you judge whether these stories endangered national security:

We reported on March 24, 1971, that the Pentagon had prepared detailed plans for bombing North Vietnam and mining Haiphong harbors. This was at a time when the White House claimed to be winding down the Vietnam war.

• Six days later, in the face of official denials that American ground troops were operating inside Cambodia and Laos, we cited secret messages giving the exact number of Americans who had been killed during the incursions.

• On Aug. 6, 1971, we revealed that a \$100,000 cash contribution had been delivered by billionaire Howard Hughes' aide, Richard Danner, to President Nixon's pal, Bebe Rebozo.

• We published a number of stories, beginning on Feb. 16, 1972, tying the President's nephew, Donald A. Nixon, with the slippery international financier Robert Vesco.

• We linked ex-Attorney General John Mitchell to the Watergate case for the first time, dis-

puting his claim that he had no advance knowledge of the Watergate espionage.

• On Oct. 3, 1972, we broke the first story that public funds had been used to improve President Nixon's San Clemente estate, including \$13,500 for a new heating system.

• We revealed on Jan. 15, 1973, that the four Cubans who broke into the Watergate were offered regular \$1,000-a-month payments if they would plead guilty and keep their mouths shut.

• We published the first direct documentation of the Watergate charges on April 2, 1973. This was Watergate wire-tapper James McCord's secret memo to the Senate Watergate Committee.

• We began publishing on April 16, 1973, excerpts from the secret transcripts of the Watergate grand jury. At this time, President Nixon still hoped to bottle up the scandal inside the grand jury, which was under the jurisdiction of then-Attorney General Richard Kleindienst.

We wrote many more columns, most notably the India-Pakistan and ITT stories, which upset the White House mightily. But the President's real concern, we suggest, was over his political security, not national security.

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