

A WATERGATE COVER

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UP BY THE MEDIA

Accuracy in Media (AIM)

(I.M. Report)

A recently published book reveals that there is evidence that officials of the Democratic National Committee and gossip columnist Jack Anderson were among those who had knowledge of the Watergate bugging many weeks before the break-in of June 17, 1972.

The book is *At That Point in Time* and the author is Fred D. Thompson, Chief Minority Counsel of the Ervin Committee, the special committee created to investigate the Watergate scandal.

Thompson devotes an entire chapter to the intriguing evidence that the victims of the Watergate bugging were warned several weeks in advance of what was planned. This evidence was developed by the minority staff of the Ervin Committee. Sworn testimony was taken in executive session from three officials of the Democratic National Committee, columnist Jack Anderson, and the two individuals who gave the warning, A.J. Woolston-Smith, a New York private detective, and William F. Haddad, a former official in the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations.

The staff prepared a summary of its findings, but it was never included in the final report of the Ervin Committee. The majority did not think the findings were sufficiently conclusive. We have learned that a copy of the summary fell into the hands of a reporter for CBS News, but that news organization chose not to divulge the story.

The transcripts of the secret testimony became available to the public, and AIM acquired a set, but the major media showed no interest in them and the story they contained. We have discussed the story with many people, including a number of reporters. The reaction is always one of astonishment and interest. But with one or two exceptions the reporters have failed to probe the evidence and inform the public about it.

Who Was in the Know?

We will give you the story in some detail so that you may judge its newsworthiness for yourself.

First, we must point out that those who dug into this matter were frustrated by witnesses who contradicted themselves and each other, who had incredible lapses of memory, who claimed to have kept no records or poor records of important matters, and who misplaced important documents. But it is precisely the obvious effort to conceal and confuse on the part of the witnesses that strengthens the conclusion that there was some real fire beneath the clouds of smoke that some of the witnesses were blowing.

If investigative reporters had devoted a fraction of the time

they spent on other aspects of Watergate to investigating how the Democrats and Jack Anderson found out about the bugging in advance, it is conceivable that they might have uncovered either a double agent, some counter-bugging, or even an unindicted co-conspirator.

Here is the story, partly as told by Fred Thompson, but supplemented by our own analysis of the once-secret testimony.

A private detective in New York named A.J. Woolston-Smith apparently became aware of the Republican plans to bug the Democrats as early as December 1971 or January 1972. He conveyed this information to William F. Haddad, publisher of a small New York weekly, the Manhattan Tribune, who had previously given Woolston-Smith assignments to detect suspected wiretapping. Haddad had held high positions in both the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations. Satisfied that Woolston-Smith had reliable information, Haddad sent this letter to his friend Lawrence O'Brien, then Chairman of the Democratic National Committee, on March 23, 1972:

I am hearing some very disturbing stories about GOP sophisticated surveillance techniques now being used for campaign purposes and of an interesting group here in New York where some of this "intelligence" activity is centered. The information comes from a counter-wire tapper who helped me once in a very difficult situation in Michigan and who had come to me highly recommended from two lawyers, Gallagon (sic) and Shapiro.

Can you have someone call me so you can get the info first hand and take whatever actions you deem necessary. If you want, I will go a little deeper into the situation, but I would prefer that you evaluate the same information I have received, and from the same source, before taking further steps.

O'Brien turned the matter over to a member of his staff, John Stewart, the DNC's director of communications, appending this note to Haddad's letter: "Could you follow up on the attached and put in a call to Bill?"

Stewart had phone conversations with both Haddad and Woolston-Smith. A meeting with them was arranged in Haddad's New York office on April 26, 1972. It was attended by Stewart, Haddad, Woolston-Smith, and Ben Winter, the vice president of a New York bank who was a friend of Haddad's. Haddad said Winter had nothing to do with the matter. He just happened to be in his office, and he invited him to sit in on the meeting "to hear something fascinating."

What Was Known

Woolston-Smith testified that Haddad did most of the talking. Haddad testified under oath that the discussion included plans of the Republicans to bug the Watergate offices of the DNC, the involvement of Cubans, ways in which the funding of the espionage operation might be traced, and a Republican organization in New York called the November Group that had some connection with G. Gordon Liddy. He also said that the name of former Attorney-General John Mitchell had been mentioned.

Woolston-Smith's sworn testimony also indicated that these were among the matters discussed, but he did not mention John Mitchell's name being brought up. He did, however, say that James McCord, who participated in the Watergate burglary, had been mentioned at the meeting. Woolston-Smith claimed that nearly everything discussed by Haddad was based on his information except for the Cuban involvement. He thought that information could have come from Haddad's friend, Jack Anderson.

Ben Winter, the banker, recalled that Woolston-Smith had displayed a "sophisticated bug" at the meeting and had handed it to Stewart and Haddad. Winter thought

Woolston-Smith's information appeared to be hard evidence of surveillance, not just a theory. Woolston-Smith himself tried very hard to put the investigators off with an incredible story that he had presented nothing but a theory. He changed his tune when interrogated a second time, but the staff never felt that he had given them a true statement about the source of his information. He insisted that he did only "defensive wiretapping," i.e., detection of bugging. The bug he exhibited at the meeting, he said, was only a fake model intended to show the type of equipment available in the market.

Two days after this meeting, Haddad addressed a letter to John Stewart, saying that Woolston-Smith had "good information" and that it was his judgment "that the story is true and explosive." Seeming to answer a question from Stewart about whether Woolston-Smith wanted to be paid for continuing his investigation, Haddad wrote: "Yes, he did want to cover expenses..." Haddad said: "Instead of pursuing this with money, I decided to see what a good investigative reporting operation could do with it now. So I went ahead along these lines. If they draw a blank, I'll be back to you on how to proceed, and I'll keep you informed."

Haddad testified that he made copies of all the material in his file and sent it to columnist Jack Anderson with a covering letter. Strangely, neither Anderson nor Haddad could locate any copies of the material Haddad sent or of the letter. It had all mysteriously vanished. Haddad says he sent Anderson his "file," everything he had. Anderson said all he received was a one-page letter.

What Was Done

Having been warned that there were plans afoot to bug their offices, did the Democrats notify the police, have the office swept for bugs, hire a night watchman, or even ask the staff to take precautions?

The answer is that they did none of these. Officials have given various explanations for the seeming total lack of reaction to the warning. Stanley Grieg, then Deputy Chairman of the National Committee, said that John Stewart had told him that Woolston-Smith had warned that there might be electronic surveillance and possibly breaking and entering, but that what he said was very fragmentary. Grieg said he told Stewart that he could not conceive of the opposition conducting that type of campaign. He said he told him that they did not have money to hire guards or buy sophisticated security equipment.

They took great pains to create the impression that they did not really take the warning too seriously, and that they could not afford protective measures. No one seems to have asked why they did not complain to the authorities, but the answer would probably have been that they lacked hard evidence of any crime. However, the fact was that they did have evidence of crimes. Mr. Grieg testified that the office

had been broken into and documents and checks stolen in the first week of May. On another occasion there had been an unsuccessful attempt to force the locks. Under these circumstances, total inaction with regard to the bugging warning would be strange. No one has admitted it, but it is conceivable that a search was made for bugs and that one was found in Larry O'Brien's office. The break-in on June 17 was made because that bug was not functioning properly. Perhaps it did not die a natural death.

Elation After Break-In

Woolston-Smith testified that the DNC's interest in his information continued right up to the time of the June 17 break-in. He said he was in regular telephone contact with John Stewart — once or twice a week. He said his last discussion before the break-in was along the line of "something is about to happen." He also said that after the break-in Stewart called him and was "elated." Asked what he was elated about, Woolston-Smith said: "Elated that we had more or less called it the way it happened."

When asked to elaborate further, Woolston-Smith said: "This enthusiasm seemed to have been, well, we may not have this election, but boy, we have got them in real great position." He said this was because Stewart thought there was definite involvement of the Committee to Re-elect the President. He added: "They are expecting the newspapers to develop it."

John Stewart painted a very different picture. According to his testimony, his contact with Woolston-Smith was extremely limited, and he really obtained no definitive information from him. He indicated that he had only one telephone conversation with him before Watergate. He could not remember any meeting with him prior to June 17. It was only when he was told that the others had testified that Stewart had met with Haddad, Woolston-Smith and Winter prior to Watergate that he would admit that and then only as a possibility. Stewart also had trouble remembering the letter Haddad had sent to him dated April 28, right after the meeting in New York. The letter characterized Woolston-Smith's story as "true and explosive," but Stewart had no recollection of ever having seen it, even though he was sure that he must have.

Stewart insisted repeatedly that his only meeting with Woolston-Smith was after Watergate. He claims to have forgotten about him, but after the burglary he recalled his warning. He had his assistant find his name and number and give him a call. He arranged to meet him in New York, together with Haddad.

While Haddad and Woolston-Smith frequently gave the impression of being fuzzy and less than candid in their testimony, Stewart seemed to go to unusual lengths to downplay his meetings and conversations with Haddad and Woolston-Smith. His testimony was so lacking in credibility that one is bound to wonder what he was afraid of. Would an admission that they took the advance warning seriously be so damaging?

The answer is probably yes. If they took the warning seriously, they would have had to have known more about the source of the information. No one has been willing to come up with a credible story about how Haddad and Woolston-Smith managed to assemble such accurate information in advance. Thompson and his staff were strongly inclined to suspect some leak from the CIA. Or did they have access to information obtained by electronic surveillance? Or was there a double agent within the ranks of the CRP group? Suspicions have fallen on McCord, who bungled the break-in, confessed to Judge Sirica and ended up serving very little time in jail. They have fallen on another member of his team, Alfred Baldwin, the lookout man, who was never prosecuted. Baldwin was a flop as a lookout, and he was also the source of extensive information about the Watergate operation that provided the

basis for a press conference by Larry O'Brien on September 7, 1972, according to Fred Thompson's book. Thompson was inclined to doubt that Baldwin was a double agent only because he had done so many things that risked compromising the operation.

Finally, if the DNC took the warning seriously, it would be harder to explain why no obvious defensive measures were taken. Woolston-Smith did not accept the idea that there was no money for security. He pointed out that field force meters could have been acquired to detect bugs at little cost. He noted that while the committee was saying it could not afford money for security, it was spending \$45,000 for a motor launch as a gift. His conclusion was that they had a plan to let the bugging take place and capitalize on it.

The Anderson Angle

Haddad, as we noted above, says he turned his file on the bugging plans over to Jack Anderson, expecting that he would be able to develop more detailed information. Anderson admitted that he received some information from Haddad in an article he published in *Parade* magazine July 22, 1973, a little more than a year after the break-in. He also mentioned it in a book he wrote.

Anderson claimed that he was not able to develop any information on the basis of what Haddad had given him. He claimed he ran into a stone wall and just dropped the matter. Unfortunately neither Anderson nor Haddad produced the documents that Haddad says he sent to Anderson. Haddad says that he would have given him everything he had. That would have included the name of McCord. It would have included information about Cuban involvement, if, indeed, that information had not originated with Anderson, as Woolston-Smith seemed to think.

By strange coincidence, Anderson had a very close friend in the Cuban community who knew a great deal about the Watergate matter. He was Frank Sturgis, a member of the burglary team who was caught in the Watergate on June 17. Anderson went personally to the Washington, D.C. jail to see Sturgis as soon as he heard of the Watergate arrests. In fact he got there before the jailers even had Sturgis's correct name. He was still booked under the alias he used, Anderson testified, and he had a hard time finding him. Anderson said he learned of Sturgis's arrest from the papers, and this would suggest that the press had printed his correct name before the jailers became aware of it.

Anderson tried to get Sturgis released to his custody, but he did not succeed. He visited him at his home in Miami while Sturgis was out on bail, and he also testified that he had telephone contacts with him during that period. On the eve of Sturgis's trial, Anderson was at the Arlington Towers Apartment one night while the Cubans were discussing whether they should plead guilty or not guilty. Anderson testified that he did not participate in that discussion, but from time to time one of the participants would emerge and report to him on what was happening. He offered to bring Sturgis's wife to Washington and have her stay in his home. He visited Sturgis twice in the Rockville, Md. jail. He stayed in contact with Sturgis's attorney after Sturgis was sent to prison in Danbury, Conn. All of this is based on Anderson's sworn testimony.

Why this intense interest in Frank Sturgis? Anderson said he was trying to get an exclusive story. He was trying to find out what Sturgis was up to at the Watergate.

But actually Jack Anderson published very little in his column about Watergate. Despite his unique connection with Frank Sturgis, he seems to have contributed nothing to the breaking of the Watergate story. Indeed, the first column that he wrote on the subject that we were able to find was not published until August 25, 1972, more than two months after the break-in. It dealt with funds used to finance the bugging having been traced to a Minnesota businessman who had also been a financial backer of Hubert Humphrey. That is not the sort of thing Sturgis would have known about.

In December 1972 and January 1973, Anderson did publish three columns about the pressure on the defendants to plead guilty, and he intimated that they might reveal embarrassing secrets if they did not get more help. This appears to have been the only journalistic harvest Anderson reaped from all his attention to Sturgis.

Did Anderson Miss the Boat?

Anderson's unusual reticence in the treatment of the Watergate story raises an intriguing question. Was he quiet because he knew so little, or was he quiet because he knew so much?

If he had heard in the spring of Cuban involvement in the bugging plans, Sturgis would have been the logical person to whom he would have turned for information. Anderson testified that the first he knew of Sturgis's involvement in the Watergate bugging was when he read his name in the paper after the arrests. But he also testified that he had, by chance, met Sturgis at National Airport in Washington, D.C.

on June 16, 1972, as Sturgis was arriving from Miami to participate in the break-in.

This was an innocent chance encounter, the way he described it. But there was a question about why Mr. Anderson was at the airport. Here is how the testimony went.

Q: And were you at the airport to travel yourself, you were leaving town?

A: Yes, I was on my way to keep an engagement in Cleveland.

Q: A speaking engagement?

A: Yes

Q: Where was that?

A: Cleveland

Q: Where in Cleveland?

A: I do not recall. I have been to Cleveland three or four times to speak. We have a very enterprising paper there, the *Cleveland Press*, and they are always arranging speaking engagements for me.

A spokesman for the *Cleveland Press* denied that it had sponsored or arranged for a speaking engagement for Mr. Anderson in June 1972, or at any other time. A search of their files did reveal that Mr. Anderson had spoken in Cleveland on June 1, 1972, at the Park Synagogue. The *Cleveland Press* had carried a big story about the affair on June 2. But there was no similar evidence of a speech by Mr. Anderson in Cleveland on June 16 or soon thereafter. If Mr. Anderson did not have a speaking engagement in

Cleveland on June 16, why did he say that he did? Why did he say the *Cleveland Press* arranged for the speech? What was he doing at National Airport that day? Those are questions the Ervin Committee investigators did not get around to asking.

The mystery deepens when one notes that *The Washington Post* of June 22, 1972, quoted Anderson as saying that he "happened to bump into Sturgis at the airport just several days before the bugging incident." Asked about this on a Washington television program, Mr. Anderson stuck to the June 16th date for the encounter and denied that he had ever given a different date.

The June 22nd article discussed a column Anderson had published two days before that had carried highly confidential information about the expense accounts of Lawrence O'Brien, Chairman of the Democratic National Committee. It stated that a spokesman for the Committee said the information in the column could only have come from a file that was missing from the Committee's headquarters at the Watergate. Democratic officials also noted Anderson's close ties to Frank Sturgis. Anderson denied that the information had been provided by Sturgis.

The Press Does Not Press

Fred Thompson titled his chapter on the prior knowledge aspect of Watergate, "Unanswered Questions." Some of the unanswered questions he listed were these:

1. Did McCord deliberately leave the tape on the door?
2. Did someone alert Shoffler (one of the arresting officers who was voluntarily working overtime when the call about the Watergate break-in came over the radio)?
3. Did the information pass from Sturgis to Anderson to Haddad to the DNC, or had the offices of the November Group been bugged, with information from conversations of McCord or Liddy, or both, combined with Haddad's "other sources" to put the story together before June 17?
4. Or was it some combination of these things?
5. And why had Jack Anderson been so mysteriously quiet?

Thompson said: "We agreed that we had come close but that we had fallen short. To borrow still another Watergate expression, we had been unable to find the smoking gun in anyone's hands."

True enough. But the major missing ingredient was the lack of interest on the part of the press. Thompson's small staff was not up to pursuing every lead and forcing a reconcilia-

tion of every contradiction. They let the matter drop, with many intriguing questions unanswered, "and with a gnawing feeling in our stomachs."

The investigative reporters who pursued other Watergate stories so doggedly, showed no interest in probing for the answers to Thompson's questions. Indeed, they had no interest in even reporting the existence of the questions. A reporter for *The Washington Post* told us that he had not pursued the matter because he understood that Senator Howard Baker thought there was nothing to the story. That conflicts with what Fred Thompson says, and he was close to Senator Baker.

An investigative reporter for *The Washington Star* expressed amazement and interest when the story was outlined to him, but he reported back that his editors had dismissed it as "old stuff." He could not say when *The Star* had ever said a word about it.

A reporter for *The New York Times* reacted similarly. He was very excited about the story, especially since he had just written a story about Bill Haddad getting a new job for the New York State Legislature which involved investigating such things as electronic surveillance. But his interest apparently waned quickly. *The New York Times* owns Quadrangle, the publisher of Fred Thompson's book. That gave them access to the galley proofs of the book and the right to a scoop on any news it might contain. Not only has *The Times* not done a news story on the book, but as we go to press it has not even published a review of it. (The same is true of *The Washington Post*).

News is what the editors decide is news. As with Senator Goldwater's story about KGB activities on Capitol Hill, the editors seem to have decided with virtual unanimity that the "prior knowledge" side of Watergate shall not be treated as news. It may be interesting. It may be intriguing. It may be of historical importance. But news it is not. *The Times*, *The Post*, the wire services, the networks and the news magazines have so decreed.

It is an illustration of a point Leopold Tyrmand makes in his provocative article, "Media Shangri-La," in the winter 1975 issue of *American Scholar*. He writes:

"It took the bloody atrocities of the totalitarian movements to enforce the unanimity of their communication system in the name of faith and orthodoxy. The American media achieved like-mindedness by entrenching themselves as a separate power in the name of freedom and variety of opinion. This cartel of solid, preordained thinking is a threat to democracy, all the worse because it occurs in its name, speckled with bogus paraphernalia, democratic in word but not in spirit."

Accuracy in Media (AIM) has bought space to bring this story to your attention because we feel that the failure of the major media to inform you of it constitutes serious news distortion. Your right to know has been abridged. AIM is a non-profit, educational organization that combats error and distortion in news reporting. It depends on contributions from members of the public who see the danger to our society inherent in misleading reporting. We need your help. Support AIM!

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