



Watergate Secret

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ONE WATERGATE SECRET never leaked out during all the investigations that brought down ex-President Richard Nixon. It's the story of how Nixon used the notorious White House plumbers to try to discredit his detractors on Capitol Hill.

The intent was to prove that Nixon's congressional critics were violating national security. The plumbers enlisted the Pentagon's top sleuth, W. Donald Stewart, to investigate security leaks on Capitol Hill.

He found alleged security breaches in the offices of Senators Frank Church, (Dem-Ida.), William Fulbright, (Dem-Ark.), Henry Jackson, (Dem-Wash.), and William Proxmire, (Dem-Wis.). But the investigation also caught the venerable Senator John Stennis, (Dem-Miss.), in an incident of political blackmail.

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THE STERN, stately Stennis not only is a symbol of Senate rectitude, but he is a staunch defender of existing establishments.

He was ready, therefore, to defend the presidency against the ravages of Watergate.

After Stennis became implicated in the plumbers' probe, Nixon suddenly seemed to lose interest in it. The story of the abortive investigation is told by Stewart himself, now head of Stewart Security Services, in his unpublished memoirs.

It's a story that began in May, 1969, with the publication in the Washington

Post of a report about scuttling atomic submarines. The sensitive information apparently came from a document that had been slipped to the Senate Armed Services Committee, which Stennis heads.

Stewart isolated seven military officers who had access to the document. Six of them offered to take lie detector tests. The seventh refused and hired a lawyer.

As Stewart zeroed in on the seventh officer, Stennis' office brought pressure on the Pentagon to halt the investigation. Stewart reported this backstage development to the White House plumbers.

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HE WROTE that Stennis "became quite irritated because the Pentagon undertook (the) investigation." The angry senator threatened to investigate the Pentagon in retaliation. He would drop his investigation of the Pentagon, however, if the Pentagon dropped its investigation of his committee, it was suggested.

As Stewart put it in his memo for the plumbers: "Senator Stennis indicated that he intended to initiate an investigation of the Pentagon because of its investigation in this matter. Informally, we were advised by the Stennis Committee that if we dropped the investigation within the Pentagon that the Stennis Committee would drop its investigation."

Added Stewart curtly: "Our investigation was terminated."