Pentagon Had a ‘Plumbers’ Squad

By Jack Anderson

Deep in the bowels of the Pentagon, another "plumbers" squad has been operating in the style of the notorious White House "plumbers."

Its existence was mentioned by Bob Woodward, the star Watergate reporter, in The Washington Post. He wrote about an alleged White House plot to assassinate him in late 1971 or early 1972.

He quoted W. Donald Stewart, a former Pentagon investigator, as saying he had been given "every resource in the book" to stop the leaks to our column. One effort alone, Stewart estimated, cost $100,000.

Stewart claimed he had traced stories in our column to more than 60 classified documents. "Stewart said the leaks to (Jack) Anderson infuriated him, scalding him with obscenities," wrote Woodward.

The former President revealed the details of the secret Vietnam peace negotiations several weeks ahead of schedule, according to Stewart, because "they were afraid Jack Anderson was going to scoop them.

The truth is, of course, that we exposed Nixon's misrepresentations about the Vietnam war, the India-Pakistan conflict and the ITT-Nixon connections. We also revealed in 1971 that the CIA had attempted to assassinate undesirable foreign leaders.

Ironically, our story about the CIA's plot against Cuban Premier Fidel Castro described an attempt to poison him with pellets that would leave no trace. According to Woodward, that was how the White House intended to do away with me. Stewart claimed he had learned of Nixon's role, according to our White House sources, was our revelation that billionaire Howard Hughes had sent two $50,000 cash bundles, one to Key Biscayne, the other to San Clemente, for Nixon's use in between his presidential campaigns. The money was accepted by Nixon's friend, Bebe Rebozo.

It wasn't national security but political security, in other words, that caused the former President to unleash both the White House "plumbers" and the Pentagon "plumbers" upon us.

Stewart headed the Pentagon "plumbers," who operated out of room 3E993 in the Pentagon. In the spring of 1971, they mistakenly fingered a mild, bespectacled civilian employee, named Gene Smith, as one of our sources.

Smith later told us that Stewart had bullied and badgered him, scalding him with obscenities. Stewart swears that his interrogation of Smith was polite and proper.

In the end, Smith was hauled before a grand jury, which concluded that he was innocent of any wrongdoing.

The most graphic account of the Pentagon plumbers' action has been provided by Navy yeoman Charles Radford, who was also suspected of leaking information to us.

Testifying behind closed doors, he told the Senate Armed Services Committee how the Pentagon plumbers had wrongfully accused him of passing information to Jack Anderson...

"He was convinced that I was the one who had passed information to Jack Anderson," Radford said. "He used a lot of words, just a whole string of gutter language that you can't imagine.

"He confessed that he had slipped information from Henry Kissinger's desk and briefcase, not to us, but to the Joint Chiefs of Staff."

"Then they stopped. They let me go home. That is when it ended, after I told them I was passing information to them."

"Then they stopped. Then they let me go home," he said. "You broke down and cried," asked Hughes.

"Yes sir," said the yeoman.

Footnote: Stewart has strenuously denied any abuse of Radford and told us that the entire investigation was conducted by the book.