

July 28, 2003

DICK DONE IT!

Will we have to wait thirty years to find out what the President knew and when he stopped knowing it? This question was prompted by the disclosure over the weekend that Jeb McGruder, a member of the appropriately named CREEP, Committee to Reelect the President, President Nixon that is, has just summoned up the courage to reveal that, yes, the Watergater in chief had personally ordered the break-in at Democratic Headquarters thirty years ago. It has taken us three decades to get confirmation of who was behind that dirty deed. McGruder spills these beans in a documentary to air on PBS on Wednesday.

He now says he heard a phone conversation that he forgot he heard for all these years. He says he recalls “Nixon’s voice on a telephone as the president instructed then-Attorney General John N. Mitchell to go ahead with the break-in. ‘John ... you need to do that.’”

There even seems to be salacious link between what happened way back then and what is going on in front of our eyes this very morning in far-away Iraq. Just a tidbit – but a tantalizing one. It was strongly rumored and leaked at the time of the illegal entry into Democratic Party HQ that that klutzy break-in team was looking for a connection between the Democrats and a call girl ring. That fed a suspicion in the paranoid mind of King Richard. He thought its disclosure was going to embarrass and derail the campaign against

him. Part of the bugging was initiated literally to find some Dems with their pants down.

JOKE ON FOX: “THE RISE AND FALL” OF THE SADDAM SONS

THIS morning we had CNN and Fox sniggering about some Viagra and condoms allegedly found (planted?) in the personal effects of the late Hussein boys. Castigating them as perverts – which they may or may not have been – is an old CIA dirty trick. Anyone remember the pornography supposedly found in the desk of Salvadore Allende, the Chilean President who took his own life when the coup makers assaulted the Presidential Palace in Santiago back in 1973? Assassinating demonized enemies physically is apparently never enough; their characters have to be assassinated as well. Interesting isn’t it, that the very villa they were hiding out in – physical evidence of the attack – is being quickly demolished by US forces?

Mark Mackinnon of the Boston Globe reports on the tension between US soldiers and Iraqi citizens: “Since then, the roles have reversed. The average Iraqi is no longer in awe of the American military machine. They walk right up to soldiers, sometimes to chat, more often to complain. Occasionally to shoot or lob a grenade. There have been 44 recorded American deaths in Iraq since U.S. President George W. Bush declared the war here over on May 1, including five since the Hussein brothers were killed. The Americans are now

the nervous ones. They are gambling that their victories over the Husseins will help quell the attacks. But they are unclear on the actual origins of the hostilities, or if there is any central command at all. Most important, they haven't yet figured out how to simultaneously make friends and occupy people."

THE KILLINGS CAN STILL BACKFIRE

BBC is reporting that 'Washington's decision to release photographs of the bodies it says are Saddam Hussein's sons provoked mixed reaction in the world's media. Several commentators in the Middle East accuse the US of hypocrisy, recalling the outrage that greeted the appearance of US prisoners of war on Iraqi TV. Al-Jazeera correspondent in Iraq said that there is an exaggerated media fuss over this issue and it sounds like an attempt to establish it as a crossroads between two eras. The correspondent also added the reality is that if occupation continues, resistance will continue. In Europe two dailies warn that the pictures could become symbols of Iraqi resistance. "Did it not occur to the military photographers that... the picture of the bearded Qusay, vaguely reminiscent of the dead Che Guevara, might risk becoming a similar kind of icon for Arab youth?" said a commentator of Swiss daily *Le Temps*.

Just how many US soldiers have been killed in "post war" Iraq? Writing on YellowTimes.org, columnist Matthew Riemer reveals:

"Media outlets have been spinning the information on U.S. casualties in a most curious way. Instead of regularly updating viewers and listeners concerning the number of killed and injured U.S. servicemen and women since the beginning of the war in Iraq, an insidious and disingenuous dis-

inction is being emphasized more than ever: that of the "combat deaths" and the "non-combat deaths."

"Phrases like "hostile fire," "friendly fire," and "in-action deaths" are now commonplace in Washington's and the media's handbook of propaganda and euphemisms.

"News agencies are constantly making the above distinction, reporting the number of U.S. soldiers killed by "hostile fire" as well as those killed in other ways but only keeping a running tabulation of those who have lost their lives in combat. Updates are almost unheard of regarding the number of casualties resulting from non-fatal injuries. As of July 21st, 233 U.S. soldiers have died and over 1000 have been injured since Operation Iraqi Freedom began. Yet the media focuses only on those killed by "hostile fire" as if those killed in other ways or those simply injured are less important."

HUNTING FOR SADDAM

THE hunt for Saddam is the big cable news story today just as the failed hunt for Osama was the big story yesterday. Task Force 20 is on the case for the USA. But will they, like Canadian Mounties, get their man? At least three Iraqi civilians were killed in Baghdad during the pursuit. Five more US soldiers are dead. So far, no Saddam. Yesterday, *The Observer* ran an excerpt from a new book by Jason Burke on Al Qaeda which says we still don't understand who they are and what they are not.

"Little that had previously been published helped. It was clear to me that profound misconceptions were widespread. Foremost among them was the idea that bin Laden led a cohesive and structured terrorist organisation called "al-

Qaeda”. Every piece of evidence I came across in my own work contradicted this notion of al-Qaeda as an “Evil Empire” with an omnipotent mastermind at its head. Such an idea was undoubtedly comforting – destroy the man and his henchmen and the problem goes away – but it was clearly deeply flawed. As a result the debate over the prosecution of the ongoing “war on terror” had been skewed.

“Instead of there being a reasoned and honest look at the root causes of resurgent Islamic radicalism the discussion of strategies in the war against terror had been almost entirely dominated by the language of high-tech weaponry, militarism and eradication.”

MUTINY IN MANILA

IN the Phillipines meanwhile, a mutiny of soldiers was ended over the weekend. It looks like an advisor to a former president may have been involved. Of larger international interest is the charge by the soldiers, supposedly to be investigated, that military units there staged attacks which were blamed on communist and Islamic guerillas so that the military – many of whose members claim to be underpaid – could get financial help from the Pentagon as part of the war on terror. Let’s see how much follow up there is on this story.

BBC-BLAIR FEUD RAGES ON

FORMER Minister in the Blair Cabinet Clare Short is blaming an “abuse of power” by the government for the death of scientist David Kelly, the source of a BBC reporter who criticized a government dossier. The debate in Britain between the government and the BBC continues to simmer and grow nastier. Ian Bell writes in the Sunday

Herald of Glasgow: “It seems the government is determined to cover up its lies at any cost . . . even if that means destroying the BBC in the process,” writes Ian Bell. “It was Jorge Luis Borges who said that watching the Falklands War was like watching two bald men fighting over a comb. Had he lived, and had he cared, the poet might have added that watching journalists and politicians trade blows over the truth is a bit like watching two bankrupts argue over the cost of living. Bystanders can be forgiven for nodding off.

“There is, for all that, something out of the ordinary about the trench warfare that has broken out between Downing Street and the BBC. On the face of it we have a parochial argument over who said what to whom in the run-up to war with Iraq, an argument that looks desperately petty set beside the fighting and its aftermath. Did the government test honesty to the limit in its efforts to persuade the public? Did Andrew Gilligan, a Today reporter, expose official deceit – or did he bend a few facts in his eagerness for a story? None of this should matter much. Yet matter it does.

“It matters most because of a charge that no-one will put explicitly into words: that the government simply lied, not once but time and again, over the threat posed by Saddam Hussein. It matters too because the journalism contradicting the official version – or at least the journalism that angered the government most – emanated from the BBC, the world’s most respected broadcaster. And it matters because, realistically, there can only be one winner: someone will pay a heavy price when this argument is settled.”

FLAGS ARE FOR SALUTING, NOT SIGNING

THE Drudge Report reports “ George W. Bush

MEDIA DIARY DANNY SCHECHTER

has hit controversy as a picture has surfaced showing the president signing a well-wisher's hand-held American flag – a direct violation of the Federal Flag Code.

“According to the law, “[t]he flag should never have placed upon it, nor on any part of it, nor

attached to it any mark, insignia, letter, word, figure, design, picture, or drawing of any nature.”

“The President was meeting and greeting supporters on July 23, 2003 at Beaver Aerospace and Defense in Livonia, Michigan where the alleged incident took place.”

