

## BATTLES BETWEEN PRESS, BUREAUCRATS ARE COMMON

By Joe McGowan

A lot is reported these days about battles between the press and government bureaucrats or the administration in Washington. None of this is new. It has gone on for generations, but gets reported a bit more these days because of talk radio and cable TV.

Early in my career, I was editor of the twice-weekly Torrington (WY) Telegram. One day I learned a prominent businessman involved in a custody dispute had kidnapped his own young son. I reported the story despite threats from the district attorney, a friend of the businessman. The DA later became governor of Wyoming.

One interesting run-in with the bureaucracy happened on Thanksgiving Day, 1967 when I was based in New Delhi. I had managed to find a rather scrawny turkey and our cook was preparing a hearty meal under close instruction from my wife.

As I recall, we had even obtained a can of cranberry from a diplomat family that could import such luxuries.

Shortly before dinner was to be served, the U.S. Embassy information officer, a guy named John W. (Jock) Shirley, called and said they had an important announcement to make and I should report right away to his office at the embassy.

The cook was asked to try to hold the dinner until I could get back.

I arrived at the embassy and soon the bureau chiefs of UPI, New York Times, Reuters and Time magazine were all assembled.

Shirley said he had to check something and we must all remain in his office. To be sure we didn't stray, he had a member of the embassy Marine guard posted at the door.

We cooled our heels for nearly two hours as Shirley came and went, explaining things weren't quite ready.

Finally, as we were all ready to storm the door and get back to our families, Shirley showed up and told us the announcement was ready.

It turned out to be a very good story. Svetlana Stalin, daughter of Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin, had been visiting a friend in New Delhi when she decided to defect to the west. She had gone to the U.S. Embassy requesting asylum and transport out of India.

It was quite a coup for the United States and was page one news around the world.

The reason Shirley had kept us cooped up in his office was that Svetlana was on her way to Palam International Airport in a heavily-guarded embassy car. Embassy officials did not want one word of this to get out until she was safely aboard a U.S. Air Force plane headed for the United States.

The plane had been summoned from Thailand, but had been delayed arriving. Shirley, under instructions from Ambassador Chester Bowles, kept the

reporters locked up in his office until Svetlana was on board the C-141 and out of Indian air space.

All of the conniving on the part of the embassy and Mr. Shirley was unnecessary. All of the reporters would have been at home enjoying Thanksgiving and he could have safely issued the statement once Svetlana was gone!

Collectively, as we screamed at him, we told him the least he could have done was to allow us to interview Svetlana and take some pictures of her. Then, they could have kept us locked up until she was safely gone.

By tricking us, he turned over the best of the story to reporters in the United States, who got to interview Svetlana when she arrived.

Inn the weeks ahead we told Shirley his deceit had been unnecessary and none of us could ever trust him again. He never apologized and never said he wouldn't deceive the press again.

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