

CPYRGHT

The Mollenhoff Cocktail

The story was right out of TV's spy-spoofing *Get Smart!* When a top CIA man named Hans V. Tofte advertised his Washington basement apartment for rent, another CIA man named Kenneth Slocum answered the ad and then grimly snatched that he had spied classified documents lying around Tofte's pad. In turn, Tofte grimly complained at the office that he had just been doing some homework on the papers—and then mentioned that \$19,000 worth of his wife's jewelry had vanished after Slocum's visit.

Predictably, the CIA looked daggers and spread its cloak over all. But a sniff of something escaped, and that was all Reporter Clark Mollenhoff needed. Last week, after piecing the details together and talking with Tofte, Mollenhoff spread the story over his papers, the Minneapolis Star and Tribune and the Des Moines Register and Tribune.

If there is one thing Clark Mollenhoff, 45, cannot stand it is a secret. His automatic response to the merest hint of secrecy has made him one of Washington's most feared as well as respected investigative reporters. Because he cannot resist lid-lifting, Mollenhoff has at one time or another outraged, embarrassed or exasperated Dwight Eisenhower, Sherman Adams, Ezra Taft Benson, John Kennedy, Everett Dirksen, Jimmy Hoffa, George Meany, Lyndon Johnson, Bobby Baker and Robert McNamara, to name just a few.

Second-Story Man. A massive (6 ft. 4 in., 245 lbs.), mellow Midwesterner, Mollenhoff displays none of the mulish tenacity in private that characterizes him in public, where he never takes "uh" for an answer. Last March his sniping finally got to McNamara. Angrily, the Defense Secretary asked Mollenhoff to leave a press conference, noting that he had already asked three questions. "You dodged three times," replied the uncowed Mollenhoff. "You seem to dodge everything, Mr. Secretary." Exploded McNamara: "I unfortunately haven't been able to dodge all the rocks you have thrown at me for five years."

Three days later McNamara was off on a Swiss skiing vacation, by presidential order. Muttered L.B.J. to aides: "He ought to know better than to tackle that s.o.b."

As Mollenhoff sees it, of course, it is just the other way round. Though many of his colleagues as well as his targets share Johnson's view, Mollenhoff figures that the s.o.b.s are the ones he is after. To him, there are no holds barred when he is digging. He once hounded a locked-door session of a board of supervisors in his home state of Iowa by climbing onto the second-story ledge of the courthouse and later wriggling

through a corralfield to eavesdrop on his prey in a farmhouse; they felt so harassed that they finally abandoned closed meetings.

When the Sherman Adams scandal broke, Mollenhoff adopted the relatively simple strategy of bracing Mrs. Adams at home. After a bit of chitchat, he calmly asked, "Could I see the rug?" a reference to the Oriental rug that Adams was rumored to have improperly accepted. "No, I hadn't better show it to you," replied the innocent Mrs. Adams, thereby confirming its existence. Mollenhoff said a polite goodbye and soon splashed the whole story of the gifts across his papers.

Ruffling the Hoodlumry. Despite his reportorial zeal, Mollenhoff is no editor's dream. The rewrite desk cringes when his copious copy begins pouring over the wire. Though his Drake University law school training gave him much of his investigative skill, it hardly helped his writing. And he has the disconcerting habit of not attributing statements. But once others whip his copy into shape, Mollenhoff wins awards, 30 over the years, including a 1958 Pulitzer. His three published books include the hard-hitting *Tentacles of Power*, which studied Jimmy Hoffa in fascinating detail. It was Mollenhoff's earlier investigation that set Bobby Kennedy snapping on the teamster's trail.

Throughout his 20 years of investigative reporting, Mollenhoff has never been sued for libel. In fact, he has had only one really close shave. Back in 1943, before he left for Washington permanently, Mollenhoff was taken for a ride after rubbing the hides of some local Des Moines hoodlums. Advised to lay off, he told the hoods that they should not be mad at him but at the police official who had been giving him all his information. Blurted the top hood: "That sonofabitch has got guts after the dough he's taken from us." Result: another scoop for the man L.B.J. now calls "the Mollenhoff cocktail."



MOLLENHOFF
 Never "uh" for an answer.