

WASHINGTON POST

'Voice' Melodrama

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After a week of clandestine melodrama complete with secret code names (Operation Swordfish and covert working headquarters, Village Voice publisher Clay Felker went to press with a 24-page supplement under the titillating headline:

"THE CIA REPORT THE PRESIDENT DOESN'T WANT YOU TO READ."

By the time the circumstances of the Voice exclusive seeped to the surface there appeared to be some question whether it was more important as a substantive scoop or a journalistic morality play.

Felker, reflecting the secretive mood in the offices of New York magazine, which was the operations center for the Voice leak, said laughing "as far as I know, it landed on the back doorstep in a basket." Both publications are directed by Felker.

But other sources familiar with the hush-hush developments of the story say that CBS correspondent Daniel Schorr, who covered the intelligence committee for his network, was instrumental in transmitting the report to Felker.

It was also learned that a Washington-based organization of journalists, The Reporters Committee for Freedom of The Press, had agreed to accept "passively" any cash proceeds from publication of the report by arrangement with Schorr.

Schorr, who recently displayed the title page of the still-secret House committee report on television as he described some of its contents, said yesterday that he was obliged "to deny on the record that I have a copy of the report."

The CBS correspondent also denied that he had discussed the report with Felker. "I have no knowledge of how The Village Voice acquired its copy. I had no connection with it and I do not mean by that to state that I have a copy."

He added that whatever conclusions viewers might gather from having seen the report's title page on the screen "is something that they are inferring."

Schorr told a fellow CBS reporter on a CBS radio broadcast that he had a copy.

Schorr also acknowledged that in a conversation he had recently with a Washington Post editor he said he possessed the House report. He added, however, that he regarded it as a "business conversation" and off the

record. Both Schorr and Post Assistant Managing Editor Harry M. Rosenfeld agreed that nothing was said about the conversations being off the record.

Schorr denied, on the record, having made any approach to the reporters committee under which he would assign it the proceeds from the report's distribution. The reporters committee agreed, after a telephone poll of its trustees, not to say anything publicly because of the "confidentiality" of its conversations with Schorr.

"God, I'm never going to get involved again with a bunch of reporters," said one trustee of the organization which is dedicated to promoting freedom of the press. "Off the record, it's a—mess."

Schorr, it was learned, first talked with a CBS colleague and member of the reporters group, Fred Graham, about the financial arrangement within the past two weeks. The commentator began considering offering his exclusive copy of the report for paperback publication after it came into his possession two weekends ago.

"Dan proposed that the reporters committee receive whatever profits were generated by the sale," acknowledged one trustee. "...Some of the group didn't want to be associated in print or any way with release of that document (but) we had no objection to a passive role" in accepting funds.

Efforts by the trustees of the reporters committee yesterday to agree on a statement ended in a collective decision to have "no comment."

"We had no objection, however, to passive role," the trustee added. We've accepted proceeds from a variety of sources."

During the discussions with the reporters committee, Schorr consulted a lawyer in New York on his legal position in making the report public. He was advised that there was no immediate criminal liability against him although he might be subject to contempt of Congress proceedings should he refuse to tell a congressional committee the source of his copy.

Schorr conceded that he may have made a mistake in showing the title page of the report to his viewers. "I guess

I was boasting," he said.

Schorr obtained access to the report, according to one authoritative account, after the House intelligence committee voted to refer the document to the House for a publication decision. The New York Times obtained its access earlier. Schorr spent his limited time with the document, Xeroxing rather than reading, according to the account.

He thought he and the Times both had copies until Times columnist William Safire called for help on details in the report concerning CIA involvement with the Kurds. At that point, Schorr confided to an acquaintance, the realization began to dawn upon him that he alone was the possessor of a copy of the House document.

At one point in an on-and-off-the-record conversation, Schorr volunteered, when asked what he intended to do with the proceeds of publication of his copy of the report:

"On the record, I would not have been willing to benefit personally from the sale of the report but would have been willing to sign the proceeds over to a First Amendment-oriented group."

For Felker the first installment of Operation Swordfish, as the report was code-named, began last Thursday when he learned it was available to him and he dispatched a staff worker to Washington to get a copy. Asked yesterday if he was specifically denying or refusing to comment that Schorr made it available to him, Felker chuckled.

"I stand on what I said," he repeated. "It was left on the doorstep."

There was never any debate, Felker said, against running the report. "There was a big split in Congress on what to do . . . We feel, in an election year, this is the time to contribute to that debate."

By coincidence, the 24-page section of excerpts was included in the Voice's first

experimental national edition. It was also the third 160-page issue in the weekly newspaper's history.

When he learned of the publication of the excerpts in the Voice, House intelligence committee chairman Otis Pike (D-N.Y.) said he suspected the material was leaked by the executive department to incriminate Congress.

P-Claiborne, William  
P-Stern, Laurence  
CIA 8H SC - Report  
Soc & Village Voice  
P-Felker, Clay  
P-Schorr, Daniel  
OR 9/18 Reporters Cite For Freedom of the Press  
CIA 4.01 Operation Swordfish  
Pike, Otis