

The 'Whip-His-Ass' Story, or The Gang That Couldn't Leak Straight

by Eleanor Randolph

For those advisers of Jimmy Carter who had been praying for a transmigrational miracle six months before the first presidential primaries, there was a special significance to the night of June 11. That was the pivotal evening in American history when big John Wayne closed his eyes in a California hospital and galloped into the final sunset, while at about the same time in Washington, President Carter suddenly drew himself up to his full five-foot seven-inch height at a White House dinner and announced to those around him: "If Kennedy runs, I'll whip his ass."

It was supposed to be the surfacing of the new spirit of Jimmy Carter, a carefully-planned sign that he was a tough, strong, mountain of a man, not the presidential pipsqueak a lot of people imagined. Nobody planned it that way, of course, but if big John was dead, then long live big Jimmy. Unfortunately, the way his staff dressed him up in a cowboy suit, he ended up reminding people of Gabby Hayes.

The early signal that this new Carter would be stepping all over his lasso was the difficulty he had leaking his message to the press, the public, and the Kennedys. In a city where a person in power can whisper confidences to his mate at night and read them in the paper the next morning, suddenly

Carter kept finding people who kept a secret.

His first try at telling the world he would whip Teddy in 1980, as *The New York Times* so demurely put it, had come the previous week when he told a group of Georgians, mostly from that state's congressional delegation, of his threat. Carter dropped the word and waited for the ground to shake on Capitol Hill. Instead, not a peep. The Georgians quietly tucked the information away and went back to work. As one person who was at the meeting said later, "Frankly, I just forgot about it."

By the beginning of the next week, Carter was determined to try his new maxim on the less forgetful and the more disloyal. So he sprung it, at the June 11 White House dinner, on Rep. Toby Moffett, Rep. William Brodhead, and Rep. Thomas Downey. But even these congressmen were prepared to be diplomatic about the matter and dismiss it.

As the congressmen recalled afterward, one asked the President what he planned to do about the groundswell of support for Senator Kennedy. Carter replied that he felt great and that "if Kennedy runs, I'll whip his ass."

"Excuse me, Mr. President, what did you say?" Rep. Brodhead asked a little incredulously.

"I don't think the President wants to repeat what he said," interjected Moffett, obviously trying to save Carter any embarrassment.

However, at that point, perhaps worried that even this group would not do his unspoken bidding, the President

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piped up, "Yes, I do. If Kennedy runs, I'll whip his ass."

The next 24 hours were the Carter administration's most recent example of a kind of watermelon-through-a-sieve school of leaking, the previous example being the time that Press Secretary Jody Powell was trying to spread a little dirt on Senator Charles Percy. Powell told former *Chicago Sun-Times* bureau chief Loye Miller that Percy had used a corporate plane illegally during his last campaign. The trouble with that leak was, first, that Powell forgot to make the leak off-the-record, so the *Sun-Times* carefully said that Powell was the one who offered the information. Second, the information turned out to be wrong.

The "whip-his-ass" quote first slipped into the public domain June 12 when Brodhead's administrative aide called William Mitchell, Washington correspondent for *The Detroit Free Press*. Mitchell wrote it for the next day's paper, and the *Free Press* played it cautiously on page 15.

In the meantime, Frank Moore, Carter's thick-of-thumb congressional liaison, called Downey and said, according to Downey: "Don't be surprised if you get some calls later tonight. We've given your name as someone seated at the President's table, and we'd like you to confirm the story." Then, Moore passed out Downey's unlisted telephone number to several inquiring reporters. When the reporters called Downey, however, they found that he was not only willing to confirm the quote, he was also willing to confirm to at least a few of them that Frank Moore had asked him to do it.

In the end, it all simply looked silly. Kennedy quickly outplayed Carter by replying, "I think what he meant to say was that he was going to whip inflation." *The Miami Herald* editorialized: "Who's whipping whose ass?" Worst of all for Carter, there were the congregations of people below the Bible belt who had thought that born-again Jimmy would not talk that way, at least never again after the *Playboy* interview during the campaign. The Plains

The Quality of Federal Policymaking: Programmed Failure in Public Housing Eugene J. Meehan

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Baptist Church, of which he is still an ex-officio member, considered reprimanding him: their Jimmy was supposed to be a good boy even in the sinful center of American government, an upright imitation of Harry Truman who would go up there to Washington, the nation's capital, and give 'em heck.

In fact, it is not Carter's nature to talk about whipping anybody's ass, especially Kennedy's. The President is the kind of man who may occasionally curse, but he doesn't cuss well. He's always had the manner of a certified public accountant trying to be one of the boys.

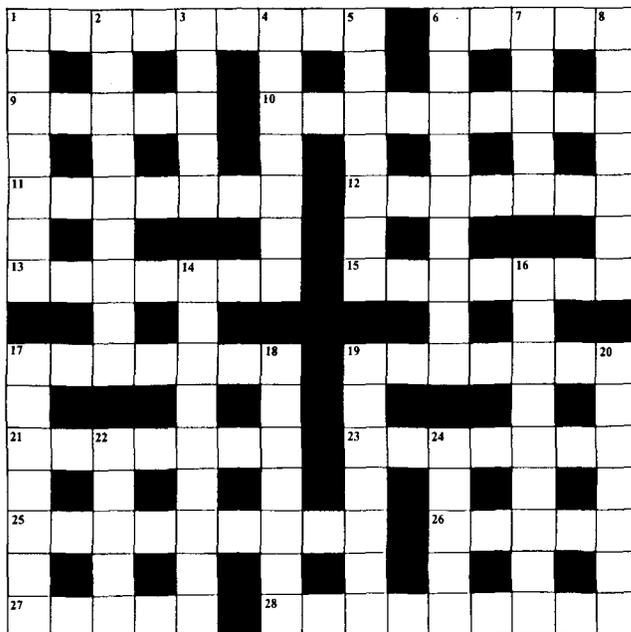
Carter's aides probably should have taken some counsel from the fact that the Georgian congressmen—most of whom wish Carter well—did not let it out that he was trying to throw sand in Teddy's face. It was an act of warning and congressional friendship, and as one former Carter aide offered later: "If your friends won't do your leaking for you, it's not a good idea to trust your enemies." ■

ACROSS

1. In statue a backdrop for Presidential action? (4,5)
6. Fats comes back with Frank's head a winner from 1 Across. (5)
9. Frank makes a sacrifice around 50. (5)
10. Oddball makes rare catch. (9)
11. He can cut the corn somehow. (7)
12. Volume with weird ode in it. (7)
13. Why it's a confused direction. (4,3)
15. Crewmen disturbed by air loss. (7)
17. Little saint poked around working space. (7)
19. Top spot for First Lady's nap. (7)
21. Looked around and made point without you. (7)
23. Benefactor randomly drew one. (7)
25. Pastime in which to use this cleat. (9)
26. Sharpens in a drippy way? (5)
27. Tires but reads strangely. (5)
28. They are superior despite tricky small no-good element. (9)

the political puzzle

by John Barclay



DOWN

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. It can be made into loser at 1 Across. (7) 2. Arrange an unmoist recreation area. (9) 3. This uncle is no real treat! (5) 4. Evil fellow could be good governor? (7) 5. Places to store undergarments? (7) 6. Wild zest alibi to calm things down. (9) | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. From CIA, it involves second stage. (3,2) 8. From 1 Across they start rockets but end careers. (7) 14. Drew beast around fashionable furniture. (9) 16. To crush with point control under over. (9) 17. With internal blemish did throw out. (7) | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 18. Increase in motor knock is window dressing. (7) 19. Writer about New England <i>mores</i>. (7) 20. Makes light and runs not awkwardly. (5,2) 22. Alternative article in conjunction. (5) 24. Pin down in shadow election. (5) |
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The numbers indicate the number of letters and words, e.g., (2,3) means a two-letter word followed by a three-letter word. Groups of letters, e.g., USA, are treated as one word.

Answers to last month's puzzle on page 42.