

Taking a Bush Secret to the Grave

The National Archives approved Robert Parry's appeal on a 30-year-old secret: the address where George H.W. Bush supposedly went on an October 1980 weekend – when several witnesses put Bush in Paris meeting with Iranians, Parry reported on 9/27 2011.

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A three-decade-old mystery has finally been solved who was George H.W. Bush's unidentified "alibi witness" on Oct. 19, 1980, when other witnesses allege the then-Republican vice presidential candidate took a secret flight to Paris for meetings with Iranians. But the mystery's answer only raises new questions.

After 20 years of rejecting requests from various investigators for the identity of the "alibi witness," the U.S. government finally released enough information from Secret Service files in response to an appeal that I filed with the National Archives to ascertain the person's identity.

The person who perhaps could have verified where Bush was or wasn't on that day was Richard A. Moore, a Bush family friend best known for his role in the Watergate scandal as a special counsel to President Richard Nixon. In 1973, Moore was Nixon's point man in attacking the credibility of fired White House counsel John Dean after Dean turned whistleblower.

In 1980, Moore, who somehow managed to escape indictment for his Watergate role, and his wife, Jane Swift Moore, were living in an exclusive tree-lined neighborhood in Northwest Washington about one mile from the home of George H.W. and Barbara Bush.

According to Secret Service records that I found in the files of Bush's White House counsel C. Boyden Gray – and which have now been more fully released – Bush's Secret Service detail left the Bush family home at 4429 Lowell St. N.W. at 1:35 p.m. on Oct. 19, 1980, and arrived at "Moore Residence, 4917 Rockwood Pkwy." at 1:40 p.m.

By checking Washington D.C. real estate records, I discovered that Richard A. Moore owned the house at 4917 Rockwood Parkway in 1980.

If George H.W. Bush actually made the visit to Moore's house with his wife Barbara Bush on that afternoon – rather than Barbara possibly going alone – that would make Bush's alleged trip to Paris virtually impossible. So it would have seemed to be in Bush's interests to release this information to investigators and have them interview Moore, if Moore would confirm that Bush dropped by that day.

In the early 1990s, Moore also was Bush's ambassador to Ireland and thus presumably inclined to help both his boss and his friend. However, when investigators were trying to determine whether Bush had traveled to Paris – and were looking for evidence to prove that he hadn't – the Bush administration whited-out Moore's address before releasing redacted versions of the Secret Service records.

Moore died on Jan. 27, 1995. So, if George H.W. Bush's

purpose in delaying release of Moore's identity was to ensure that no one could check with Moore about Bush's alibi for Oct. 19, 1980, Bush achieved his goal.

Though most of us who were examining this mystery two decades ago gave great weight to the Secret Service records seeming to place Bush in Washington, not Paris, there was the question of whether Bush, a former CIA director, might have convinced some friendly Secret Service supervisor to cook up some alibi to cover the flight to Paris.

Those suspicions deepened with the Bush administration's continued refusal to provide seemingly innocuous information, like Moore's address.

Justifying a Secret

In 1991-92, President George H.W. Bush's administration continued to insist on keeping the "Moore Residence" destination secret even after Congress authorized an investigation into the so-called October Surprise case: whether Republicans in 1980 had contacted Iranians behind President Jimmy Carter's back to frustrate his efforts to free 52 American hostages.

Carter's failure to gain release of the hostages made him look weak and inept, setting the stage for Ronald Reagan's landslide victory, an election which dramatically changed the course of the nation. The Iranians released the American hostages immediately after Reagan was sworn in on Jan. 20, 1981, further making Reagan appear to be an imposing world figure.

Though there were early rumors about a secret Republican

deal with Iran, the October Surprise mystery didn't gain much traction until the exposure of secret Iran-Contra arms shipments approved by Reagan to Iran in 1985-86. Suddenly, the notion that Reagan and his Vice President George H.W. Bush would lie about covert dealings with Iran didn't seem so preposterous.

Essentially, the October Surprise question was whether Reagan's secret contacts with Iran dated back to Campaign 1980, as a growing number of witnesses – from inside the governments of Iran, Israel, France and the United States – were alleging.

However, when Congress finally agreed to look into the October Surprise case in 1991-92, Republicans were determined to circle the wagons around the then-sitting President George H.W. Bush, who was facing a tough reelection fight against Democrat Bill Clinton.

Rather than welcome any truth-seeking, the Republicans and their media allies went on the attack claiming that the October Surprise case was a baseless “conspiracy theory.”

At the time, the Republicans also suggested several reasons why the alibi witness for Oct. 19, 1980, should remain secret. One was that Bush might have been off on a romantic rendezvous and that Democrats simply wanted to pry into the visit as a way to neutralize accounts of Bill Clinton's womanizing.

However, that “tryst” rationale fell apart when I obtained the Secret Service records for Barbara Bush and they showed her on the same trip, with the destination again whited-out.

Then, there was the suggestion that the unidentified Bush family friends were very private people who shouldn't be dragged into the middle of a political controversy. (As it turned out, the Moores were very much public figures, both having worked in the Nixon White House and Richard A. Moore serving as U.S. ambassador to Ireland during the first Bush administration.)

In 1992, as Bush's team continued to stonewall the identity of Bush's "alibi witness," Bush angrily demanded at two news conferences that Congress specifically clear him of the allegations that he had taken a secret trip to Paris in 1980.

Bowing to those pressures in June 1992, Rep. Lee Hamilton, D-Indiana, chairman of the House investigative task force, agreed to a curious bargain in which he and a few senior investigators were shown the destination of Bush's supposed afternoon trip on Oct. 19, 1980, but with the proviso that they never interview anyone who was there or disclose any names.

So, without verifying Bush's alibi, the House task force cleared Bush of going to Paris. When I asked Hamilton about this strange agreement this week, in the wake of the National Archives' release of the "Moore Residence" document, he responded through a spokesman that he was "not able to provide any answers" because he no longer has his official records.

Moore's Silence

Though the Oct. 19, 1980, visit could have involved either Moore or his wife or both, the "alibi witness" being kept

secret in 1992 had to be Moore, since his wife, Jane Swift Moore, died in 1985.

When I contacted one of Moore's sons, Richard A. Moore Jr., he told me that he didn't think that any of the family's five children were still living in the Rockwood Parkway house in 1980. Nor did he think there would likely be any photographs of the visit since the Bushes were "almost neighbors," often popping in.

But the question remains: If Richard A. Moore could have confirmed that Bush was definitely in Washington on Oct. 19, 1980, not on a secret mission to Paris, why wasn't he questioned? Why was the Bush administration so determined to block the House task force from interviewing Moore?

Moore owed a huge debt to Bush, who had lifted Moore from his Watergate-tainted purgatory in 1989 by appointing him to be U.S. Ambassador to Ireland. Moore would seem to be a friendly witness who would happily want to cover for Bush, if possible.

Which is why Moore's silence in 1992 only adds to the mystery. Moore served in Dublin until June 1992, departing the same month as the battle over withholding his identity was playing out in Washington.

Given Moore's close call with a criminal prosecution for his role in the Watergate cover-up he was often in meetings where all the other participants ended up going to jail he understandably might have been very leery about lying to Congress even to protect another U.S. president and a personal friend, if Bush indeed had snuck off to Paris.

Another document released to me under my appeal to the National Archives raises further suspicions about Bush's whereabouts on that Sunday. Undated handwritten notes that I found in the files of one of White House counsel Gray's assistants, Ronald Von Lembke, indicate that some of the Secret Service records for Oct. 19, 1980, were missing.

For that date, the notes say, "*N0 Residence Report. *0000 [midnight] – 0800 missing. 0800-1600 okay. *1600-2400 missing." Stars were used to highlight the references to missing material.

Written in the margin, next to the time references is the name "Potter Stewart," the late Supreme Court Justice who was another Bush family friend. The reference suggests that the White House counsel's office was checking on how to bolster Bush's alibi for Oct. 19, 1980.

The same notes include a check mark next to the name "Buck Tanis," suggesting that the author of the notes had contacted Secret Service supervisor Leonard "Buck" Tanis, who was a Bush favorite from his Secret Service detail. Tanis was one of the supervisors for Bush's Secret Service detail in October 1980.

Tanis was also the only Secret Service agent on Bush's detail for Oct. 19, 1980, who claimed to recall another dubious part of Bush's alibi mentioned in the Secret Service reports, a morning trip to the Chevy Chase Country Club.

When the redacted Secret Service records were first released in the early 1990s, Bush's supposed Chevy Chase visit was cited as slam-dunk evidence that Bush couldn't have gone to Paris.

Relying on Republican sources, friendly journalists reported that Bush had been playing tennis that morning at the club. But the tennis alibi collapsed when it was discovered that rain had prevented tennis that morning.

Then, Tanis came forward with another story, that George H.W. and Barbara Bush had brunch at the club with Justice and Mrs. Potter Stewart. By 1992, however, Justice Stewart was dead and Republicans said Mrs. Stewart was in poor health, suffering senility and couldn't be interviewed.

So, another Bush alibi couldn't be checked out and Tanis's recollection would have to stand unchallenged.

However, I learned that reports of Mrs. Stewart's physical and mental decline were greatly exaggerated. She was going out with a retired CIA official whom I knew. When I called her, she was quite lucid and told me that she and her husband never had brunch with the Bushes at the Chevy Chase club.

Using the Freedom of Information Act, I also obtained redacted reports from Barbara Bush's Secret Service detail and they showed her going to the C&O jogging path that morning, not to the Chevy Chase club.

When I passed on this information to congressional investigators, they interviewed Tanis again and he backed away from his story of the brunch. He joined the other Secret Service agents in saying he had no specific recollection of Bush's travels that day.

The newly released handwritten notes suggest that, at minimum, an official from Bush's counsel's office discussed

the Potter Stewart alibi with Tanis, thus raising questions about whether Tanis's initial testimony about the alleged brunch was tainted.

Bush's Curious Actions

With Tanis and his brunch alibi discredited, investigative attention in 1992 turned to the afternoon trip on Oct. 19, 1980. But there again Bush's alibi proved curious, especially with his "alibi witness," who we now know was Ambassador to Ireland Richard A. Moore, kept away from the congressional task force.

All this strange behavior piqued the suspicions of House Foreign Affairs Committee chief counsel R. Spencer Oliver. In a six-page memo, Oliver urged a closer look at Bush's whereabouts and questioned why the Secret Service was concealing the name of the alibi witness for the afternoon trip.

"Why did the Secret Service refuse to cooperate on a matter which could have conclusively cleared George Bush of these serious allegations?" Oliver asked. "Was the White House involved in this refusal? Did they order it?"

Oliver also noted Bush's odd behavior in raising the October Surprise issue on his own at two news conferences.

"It can be fairly said that President Bush's recent outbursts about the October Surprise inquiries and [about] his whereabouts in mid-October of 1980 are disingenuous at best," wrote Oliver, "since the administration has refused to make available the documents and the witnesses that could finally and conclusively clear Mr. Bush."

From the newly released White House documents, it is clear that Oliver's suspicions were well-founded regarding the involvement of Bush's White House staff in the decision to conceal the name of his supposed afternoon host.

Keeping the tough-minded Oliver off the October Surprise investigation also became a high priority for the Republicans. At a midway point in the inquiry when some Democratic task force members asked Oliver to represent them as a staff investigator, Republicans threatened a boycott unless Oliver was barred.

In another gesture of bipartisanship, Hamilton gave the Republicans the power to veto Oliver's participation. Denied one of the few Democratic investigators with both the savvy and courage to pursue a serious inquiry, the Democratic members of the task force retreated. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[Inside the October Surprise Cover-up](#)" or [Secrecy & Privilege](#).]

The Case for the Trip

All this Republican resistance to the October Surprise investigation also must be viewed against the backdrop of significant evidence that Bush did go to Paris and that the Reagan campaign did undercut Carter's efforts to free the hostages.

Though some of those suspicions dated back almost to the time the hostages were freed on Jan. 20, 1981, other allegations emerged as the Iran-Contra investigation progressed in the late 1980s. That led PBS "Frontline" to recruit me in 1990 to examine whether the October Surprise case had been a prequel to the Iran-Contra Affair.

That Frontline documentary, which aired in April 1991, coincided with a New York Times op-ed by former National Security Council aide Gary Sick, giving new momentum and new credibility to the October Surprise allegations.

As the October Surprise controversy heated up with the Republicans and Bush allies in the news media waging a fierce counteroffensive Frontline asked me to stay on the story, which led to another discovery that bolstered the Bush-to-Paris claims.

Because of the April 1991 documentary, David Henderson, a former U.S. Foreign Service officer, recalled a conversation that he had had with a journalist on Oct. 18, 1980, about Bush flying to Paris that night to meet with Iranians regarding the American hostages.

Henderson couldn't remember the reporter's name but he passed the information on to Sen. Alan Cranston, D-California, whose staff forwarded the letter to me. By cross-checking some other information, we determined that the journalist was John Maclean of *The Chicago Tribune*, the son of author Norman Maclean who wrote the novel, *A River Runs Through It*.

Though John Maclean was not eager to talk with me, he finally agreed and confirmed what Henderson had written in his letter. Maclean said a well-placed Republican source told him in mid-October 1980 about Bush taking a secret trip to Paris to meet with Iranians on the U.S. hostage issue.

After hearing this news from his source, Maclean passed on the information to Henderson when the two met at Henderson's Washington home to discuss another matter.

For his part, Maclean never wrote about the Bush-to-Paris leak because, he told me, a Reagan campaign spokesman officially denied it. As the years passed, the memory of the leak faded for both Henderson and Maclean, until the October Surprise story bubbled to the surface in 1991.

The significance of the Maclean-Henderson conversation was that it was a piece of information locked in time untainted by later claims and counter-claims about the October Surprise dispute.

One could not accuse Maclean of concocting the Bush-to-Paris allegation for some ulterior motive, since he hadn't used it in 1980, nor had he volunteered it a decade later. He only confirmed it and did so reluctantly.

French Intelligence

And, there was other support for the allegations Republican-Iranian meeting in Paris.

David Andelman, the biographer for Count Alexandre deMarenches, then head of France's Service de Documentation Exterieur et de Contre-Espionage (SDECE), testified to congressional investigators that deMarenches told him that he had helped the Reagan-Bush campaign arrange meetings with Iranians on the hostage issue in summer and fall of 1980, with one meeting in Paris in October.

Andelman said deMarenches insisted that the secret meetings be kept out of his memoir because the story could damage the reputations of his friends, William Casey and George H.W. Bush.

The allegations of a Paris meeting also received support

from several other sources, including pilot Heinrich Rupp, who said he flew Casey (then Ronald Reagan's campaign chief and later CIA director) from Washington's National Airport to Paris on a flight that left very late on a rainy night in mid-October 1980.

Rupp said that after arriving at LeBourget airport outside Paris, he saw a man resembling Bush on the tarmac.

The night of Oct. 18 indeed was rainy in the Washington area. And, sign-in sheets at the Reagan-Bush headquarters in Arlington, Virginia, placed Casey within a five-minute drive of National Airport late that evening.

There were other bits and pieces of corroboration about the Paris meetings.

A French arms dealer, Nicholas Ignatiew, told me in 1990 that he had checked with his government contacts and was told that Republicans did meet with Iranians in Paris in mid-October 1980.

A well-connected French investigative reporter Claude Angeli said his sources inside the French secret service confirmed that the service provided "cover" for a meeting between Republicans and Iranians in France on the weekend of Oct. 18-19. German journalist Martin Kilian had received a similar account from a top aide to intelligence chief deMarenches.

As early as 1987, Iran's ex-President Bani-Sadr had made his own claims about a Paris meeting, and Israeli intelligence officer Ari Ben-Menashe testified that he was present outside the Paris meeting and saw Bush, Casey and other

Americans in attendance.

Finally, the Russian government sent a report to the House task force, saying that Soviet-era intelligence files contained information about Republicans holding a series of meetings with Iranians in Europe, including one in Paris in October 1980.

“William Casey, in 1980, met three times with representatives of the Iranian leadership,” the Russian report said. “The meetings took place in Madrid and Paris.”

At the Paris meeting in October 1980, “former CIA Director George Bush also took part,” the report said. “The representatives of Ronald Reagan and the Iranian leadership discussed the question of possibly delaying the release of 52 hostages from the staff of the U.S. Embassy in Teheran.”

Requested by Hamilton, who was in charge of the lackadaisical congressional inquiry into the October Surprise mystery in 1992, the Russian report arrived via the U.S. Embassy in Moscow in January 1993. But Hamilton’s task force had already decided to dismiss the October Surprise allegations as lacking solid evidence.

The Russian report was kept hidden until I discovered it after gaining access to the task force’s raw files. Though the report was addressed to Hamilton, he told me last year that he had not seen the report until I sent him a copy shortly before our interview.

Lawrence Barcella, the task force’s chief counsel, acknowledged to me that he might not have shown Hamilton the report and may have simply filed it away in boxes of task

force records.

Casey in Spain

I also discovered in the files at the George H.W. Bush Presidential Library in College Station, Texas, another document that supported allegations that Casey had traveled to Madrid, as Iranian businessman Jamshid Hashemi had claimed. Hashemi testified under oath that Casey met with Iranian emissary Mehdi Karrubi in Madrid, Spain, in late July 1980 to discuss delaying the release of the American hostages until after the presidential election so as not to help President Carter.

Searching through the archived files at the Bush library, I found a "memorandum for record" dated Nov. 4, 1991, by associate White House counsel Chester Paul Beach Jr.

Beach reported on a conversation with State Department legal adviser Edwin D. Williamson who said that among the State Department "material potentially relevant to the October Surprise allegations [was] a cable from the Madrid embassy indicating that Bill Casey was in town, for purposes unknown."

However, the House task force was apparently never told about this confirmation of Casey's presence in Madrid and proceeded to reject the Madrid allegations by citing a particularly bizarre alibi for Casey's whereabouts on the last weekend in July 1980.

The task force placed Casey at the exclusive all-male retreat at the Bohemian Grove in California although the documentary evidence clearly showed that Casey attended the

Grove on the first weekend of August, not the last weekend of July. [For details, see *Secrecy & Privilege*. For more on Casey's alleged travels, see Consortiumnews.com's "October Surprise Evidence Surfaces."]

Stranger Than Fiction

Another stranger-than-fiction twist in this story is the new revelation that a figure from the Watergate cover-up was Bush's "alibi witness," although the witness apparently could not be counted on to support Bush's October Surprise alibi.

Though Richard A. Moore was not one of the household names from the Watergate cover-up, a review of literature on the scandal reveals that he was a trusted aide to President Nixon and helped formulate both legal and public-relations strategies to fend off the Watergate investigations.

In *The Haldeman Diaries*, White House chief of staff H.R. Haldeman describes Nixon frequently sending his top aides to consult with Moore about developments in the scandal. At one point, as White House counsel Dean is starting to talk with prosecutors, Haldeman notes that "Moore was very close to Dean, how about having him talk with Dean and see what he has in mind."

In Dean's *Blind Ambition*, Dean credits Moore with first coming up with the memorable phrase that the Watergate cover-up was becoming "a cancer" on Nixon's presidency, a metaphor that Dean used in a key confrontation with Nixon and repeated during the Watergate hearings.

During those hearings, Moore was dispatched by the White

House to dispute Dean's assertion that Nixon was complicit in the cover-up of the June 1972 break-in at the Democratic National Headquarters at least as early as that September.

On July 12, 1973, Moore told the Senate Watergate Committee that "nothing said in my meetings with Mr. Dean or my meetings with the President suggests in any way that before March 21 [1973] the President had known, or that Mr. Dean believed he had known, of any involvement of White House personnel in the bugging or the cover-up."

Perhaps because of his status as a lawyer to Nixon, Moore escaped the fate of many other White House insiders who were indicted and prosecuted for false testimony and obstruction of justice.

Being a Yale alumnus and a friend of the well-connected George H.W. Bush, who was then chairman of the Republican National Committee, probably didn't hurt either.

Moore had started his legal career working as a lawyer for the American Broadcasting Company in the 1940s. He was a close friend of Nixon's Attorney General John N. Mitchell who brought Moore into the Nixon administration as his special assistant. Moore moved over to the White House in 1971 to serve as special counsel to Nixon.

After leaving the White House, Moore returned to the television industry, becoming a founder and associate producer of "The McLaughlin Group" political chat show.

In September 1989, President George H.W. Bush named Moore as Ambassador to Ireland, where he stayed until June 1992, when his testimony in another political scandal might have proved

very important in either exonerating Bush or exposing a phony cover story that protected Bush's participation in an operation that bordered on treason.

Without ever being questioned in the October Surprise mystery, Moore died in Washington on Jan. 27, 1995, at age 81. He succumbed to prostate cancer, according to his daughter Kate L. Moore.

The late investigative reporter Robert Parry, the founding editor of Consortium News, broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and *Newsweek* in the 1980s. His last book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, can be obtained in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)).

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