

National

Hoaxes include pickles, dresses

Pranks plague media

United Press International
NEW YORK — Years ago, it was a carefully orchestrated California campaign to provide clothing for animals.

More recently, it was a claim from Connecticut that a red, white and blue pickle had been developed. It was revealed, appropriately, on the Fourth of July, 1979.

In May, a pill said to be made from pulverized cockroaches and offering help for acne and anemia sufferers, was previewed with elaborate publicity in New York.

Washington television stations broadcast reports in June that the city's mayor had been wounded, based on calls from someone claiming to be an aide.

On the eve of the royal wedding of Prince Charles and Lady Diana last week, a prestigious fashion daily published a sketch of the wedding gown, based on a communicate mysteriously slipped under the door of a London writer.

All of the revelations turned out to be hoaxes, the work of pranksters.

Reporters and editors have always had to guard against false stories from outside sources. Earlier this year, a fictitious story caused a Pulitzer Prize to be returned, and demonstrated the vulnerability of the media to false stories by its own members.

When Washington Post reporter Janet Cook's prize-winning story about an 8-year-old drug addict was discovered to be untrue, she was forced to resign. When the authenticity of New York Daily News columnist Michael Daly's column about riots in Ireland was questioned, he also resigned.

When a journalist is caught perpetrating a hoax, he or she is fired or disciplined. When people outside the media succeed in getting a false story published, there are few — if any —

penalties for the perpetrator.

A story distributed May 28 by United Press International reported on the alleged "cockroach hormone" health pill developed and distributed by "Josef Gregor," who claimed to be an entomologist. UPI subsequently discovered Gregor really is Joseph Skaggs, 35, an instructor at the School of Visual Arts in New York City.

Skaggs freely admits he is a painter and a "performance artist" who uses the media as his "medium" to show how easily they can be duped. He said he spent several thousand dollars and rented an office for a month as headquarters for a research group he named Metamorphosis. He enlisted friends and students to pose as members of "a control group" using the pills.

"We were hoodwinked," said UPI Managing Editor Don Reed. "Despite a lot of checking prior to moving the story, we didn't do enough on this elaborate publicity stunt."

Details about Lady Diana's wedding dress were a closely held secret until Women's Wear Daily published a front page sketch on the day

ly under the door" of a London fashion journalist.

Buckingham Palace quickly characterized the WWD description as "a bogus and clever hoax."

It turned out 24 hours later the WWD description had only the color of the gown correct.

WWD editor Michael Coady said he still is not sure whether WWD was duped.

"We never said it was the dress," Coady said. "The headline over the article in WWD says 'Is this the dress?' and then we said 'Is the document authentic?' It could very well have been a hoax, but it could have been an early press release, I'm not certain."

On the night of June 29, a man identifying himself as calling from the Mayor's Command Center in Washington telephoned broadcasters and told them Mayor Marion Barry had been shot and critically wounded near his home.

He said Barry was being taken to Andrews Air Force Base. Obviously familiar with backstop procedures, he gave a telephone number for the center, which is a source of information during emergencies.

WRC-TV and WDVM-TV broadcast the report. UPI moved a story quoting one of the stations. All were forced to retract minutes later.

Confusing the situation was the accidental shooting of a police officer near Barry's home. Barry himself was away from home and police and other aides could shed no light on the report he had been wounded.

Police and the District of Columbia Corporation Counsel say their extensive investigation leads them to suspect a disgruntled former employee in the Mayor's Command Center, but they could find no law that was violated.

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before her marriage to Prince Charles. It was based on what was described as a press release from Buckingham Palace that described the dress in elaborate detail, "slipped mysteriously



Photo by Dan C. Sullins

Play begins Thursday

Jim Burford tells his wife, played by Sharon Barrow, exactly why he doesn't love New York in a rehearsal scene from "Prisoner

of Second Avenue." The MSC Summer Dinner Theater show is scheduled to run August 6-8 in 201 MSC.

Underground missile system in limbo

United Press International
WASHINGTON — Despite reports the administration will scrap plans to house the MX missile system in deserts and place them instead on huge planes, Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger says no final decision has been made.

Military sources told United Press International that Weinberger has decided to junk the underground land-based launch planned for the Utah and Nevada desert.

Monday, "Aviation Week & Space Technology" magazine reported that Weinberger wants an airborne version of the new MX intercontinental nuclear missile in place of "shell game" basing in those two western states.

The 71-foot missile with its 10 indepen-

dently targeted warheads would be placed at first aboard a fleet of giant C-5 transports and later aboard a newly designed, propeller-driven aircraft dubbed "Big Bird," the weekly said.

Weinberger, appearing Sunday on ABC's "Issues and Answers," insisted no "firm, final" decision has been made on where or how the controversial MX missile system will be deployed.

"There's a very firm commitment to an MX system and by that I mean a strengthened, improved, much more accurate missile," Weinberger said.

"It's necessary because the Soviets during the past few years have greatly strengthened and improved their missiles, and this would give us a greatly increased deter-

rent capability.

"If we stay with older missiles that are not as accurate and are very vulnerable to Soviet attack, we lose that much of our ability to deter an attack on us, which is of course the object of the whole thing."

The Washington Post reported Saturday that Weinberger will suggest, and President Reagan is prepared to recommend, that the new missiles be placed aboard aircraft.

The Pentagon and the White House immediately denied the report.

"The president has not made any final decision," White House spokesman Dave Gergen told reporters Saturday.

But several military sources told UPI

Saturday there appears to be substance to the report, although some of them called it speculative.

And another official, who asked not to be identified, said he would be "awfully surprised" if the recommendation was made to implant the MX in the West.

The Air Force wants to build 4,600 missile shelters in Nevada and Utah. Among these shelters, 200 MX missiles would be moved randomly to confuse Soviet targeting.

Last March, Weinberger appointed a 15-man panel of nongovernmental experts to offer recommendations on where the MX should be based, with alternatives including placement on land, air or sea.

Union refuses

United Press International
WASHINGTON — Sen. Sam Nunn, D-Ga., is fuming over Labor Secretary Raymond Donovan's refusal to investigate whether Teamsters Union President Roy Lee Williams, charged with trying to bribe a senator, should be removed from office.

"It is a hands-off policy, designed more to protect the interests of the union hierarchy than the rank and file," said Nunn, whose Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigation's had requested the inquiry.

In a letter to the subcommittee, released by Nunn, Donovan said he had no authority to investigate Williams. He said he was acting on the advice of department solicitor Tim Ryan.

Williams, elected to a five-year term as president of the two million-member union in June, pleaded innocent June 12 to federal charges that he attempted to bribe a senator.

Williams is accused of conspiring with four others to offer 5.8 acres of Las Vegas property at a bargain price to Sen. Howard Cannon, D-Nev., in return for help in defeating a trucking deregulation bill last year.

Before that indictment was issued, Nunn's subcommittee asked the Labor Department to call Williams in for questioning on whether he should remain as Teamsters leader because he invoked the 5th Amendment 23 times last August in refusing to answer questions before the subcommittee about the union's scandal-ridden Central States Pension Fund.

The subcommittee wanted the department to seek removal of Williams from office for violating his responsibilities if he failed to adequately answer allegations that he was closely tied to organized crime figures.

Donovan responded in a July 9 letter released Sunday by Nunn. The secretary said the Labor Management Reporting and Disclosure Act does not provide any procedure for removal of officers of international unions by civil or administrative proceedings which could be instituted by the Department of Labor.

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