

THE SCREAMING EAGLE FROM PAGE 15

What was going on behind and between the lines, however, was a different matter altogether.

John Troxel, a 29 year old Nehalem native who had been unemployed for 17 months prior to his arrival at the *Times Eagle* as Tillamook County reporter, described the situation.

"It got to a point that there was a rift basically between the rest of the staff and O'Halloran versus Need, with me in the middle. The problem was a difference in philosophy, with Dan preaching that Need was detrimental to the paper and claiming that people with money wouldn't put anything into the paper until Need was out of ownership. It got to the point where everyone gave Need only lip service respect, and it's more truth than poetry that he was under house arrest in his own newspaper."

The cards O'Halloran played to discredit Need were his obvious eccentricity and love of a good beer, and of course, the undeniable fact that the paper had been a financial disaster from a management point of view from day one.

Through his eyes the proselytized staff came to regard the *Times Eagle's* founder as a live-in liability who functioned on the border lines of alcoholism and mental imbalance, and might at any moment commit an embarrassing public act that would irreparably injure the paper.

O'Halloran was a man whose vision and plan for the *Times Eagle* transcended even that of Need who merely wanted to reign as imperial head of a coastal daily that extended from Brookings to Astoria.

Dan O'Halloran's desires were customarily couched around his favorite phrases "doing things" and "getting some people who can make things happen down here." What things and what people remained largely undefinable, but his master plan for a remake of the Oregon coast was large, complicated and included the *Times Eagle* as the prime mover.

As John Troxel described it, the "plan" was a pivotal weapon in the power struggle with Need for the paper.

"O'Halloran had grandiose ideas for the paper and the coast, he was waiting for friends in high places, he had things to take care of and the problems would end, the money would come in when O'Halloran was in control, he would expand and capitalize the paper."

By the spring of 1975, life at Fort Wheeler, a rotted, leaking outpost of unpaid bills and defective wiring, had grown untenable for almost everyone.

"Kafka could have written the script for what I saw there," Troxel said. "O'Halloran screaming 'you've got to sell this paper or we won't get a dime', and Need going around asking, 'Why do you drive me out, why do you punish me, why so bitter and so much hatred?'"

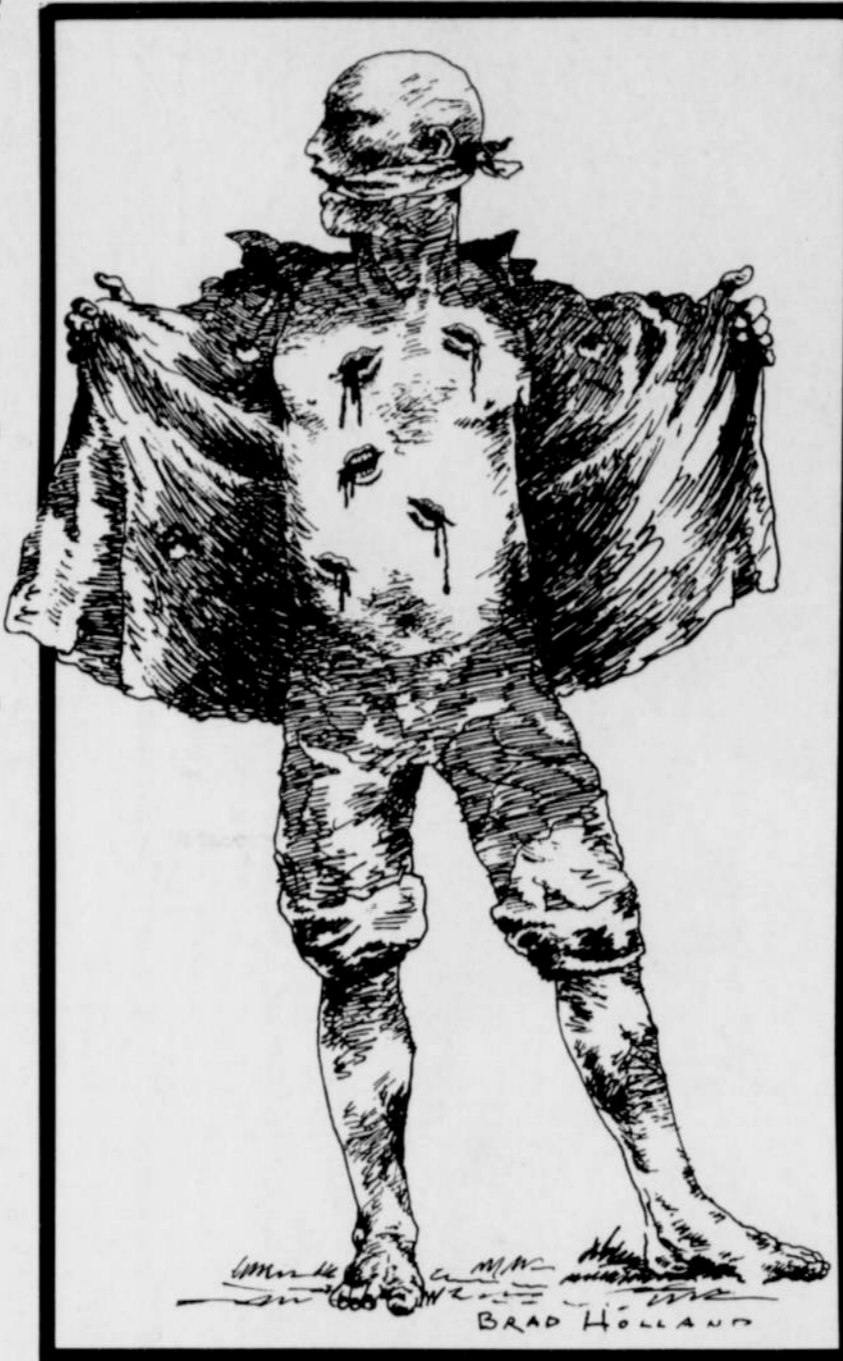
The end finally came in April when O'Halloran called a staff meeting and offered an ultimatum to Need: — "Sell me this newspaper and give me a letter of intent that you will stay on for a year as editor or we will walk out and start our own paper."

Need and Troxel were left alone in the *Times Eagle* building as O'Halloran left and took the staff with him. The dissidents wrote up a press release and sent copies to the local newspaper and *The Oregonian* announcing that the staff of the *North Coast Times Eagle* had "walked out in protest of the long standing administrative irresponsibilities of Imperial Pacific Corporation" and indicated plans to start a new publication.

Contacted about the press release by the *Daily Astorian*, Need dismissed the walkout as "the peasants staging their Annual Spring Revolution" and made plans to call up the old guard and consolidate his position.

Phones began ringing all over the Northwest as Need sent out the cry for help to old *Times Eagle* employees and sympathizers and a meeting was scheduled to organize the resistance.

As it was, the word got out but no one came, and Need



BRAD HOLLAND, 'PRESSURE ON THE PRESS'

abruptly canceled the war council, and in symbolic surrender replaced the American flag outside Fort Wheeler with a white flag of capitulation.

Imperial Pacific Corporation was dissolved and O'Halloran was handed complete control of the paper, with Need to stay on as editor.

Within a month Need was gone, driven north to the Washington side of the Astoria/Meglar Bridge by former editor McCusker's girl friend. When he got out of the car to begin the hitch toward Seattle, Need handed Georgia Jonsrud a \$1 bill and told her to give it to McCusker "for his back wages." It was the last anyone would see of Robert Stanley Need.

Shortly after his departure, the *Times Eagle* published a portrait of Need as written by Michael McCusker entitled, 'Yes, We Have No Bananas':

Robert Stanley Need (aka R.S. Bananas) and his ideologically unhinged form of journalism made the North Coast Times Eagle a squirt to be reckoned with, a mouse whose bite made elephants roar. His publishership, if not covered with glory, was smeared with the blood of his friends and his enemies: — Nothing, absolutely nothing, interfered with his obsession to challenge institutions and individuals he believed were obstructing the will and freedoms of the people. Need had guts, a desk pounding outrage against the fat and powerful who squeezed

their fortunes out of the little people and who...wanted to see the Oregon coast become a Coney Island of tawdry raunchy capitalism.... There were times when Need acted out the morality drama of Horatius at the Bridge, or the little Dutch boy who stuck his finger in the flooding dike.... Crazy chaotic, a spinning comet searching for an orbit, his eerie journalistic insight and bumptious raging personality founded and kept miraculously alive a stricken infant he pompously and probably deceitfully emblazoned on the flag of every issue, "The distinctive & unique journal of the Oregon coast."

"One reason I wrote that epitaph," said McCusker, "was that the sons-of-bitches would have just pulled his name off the masthead and let it go at that. The man founded the paper and I wanted to be sure the *Times Eagle* marked his passing."

A year later, on March 12, 1976, the last issue of the *North Coast Times Eagle* was published; and O'Halloran went (briefly) to jail for writing bad checks to Angels who proved not entirely ethereal in their material concerns.

By O'Halloran's estimates, the paper was about \$7,000 in hock to local creditors and backers and was without a base of operations. The old *Times Eagle* building was abandoned in midwinter when the leaking roof and hostile visits from creditors forced an overdue evacuation. The paper moved to Manzanita to share a small one-story building with a beauty parlor until it was forced out and came to final rest in O'Halloran's garage.

The last few months rivaled the summer of 1974 for hardship and deprivation, as O'Halloran was increasingly publisher-in-absentia; more and more frequently disappearing on extended missions of mystery out of town while the core staff of David Attmore, Doug Davis and Ken Greenfield ran the newspaper.

The O'Halloran version of the *Times Eagle* story was long and disjointed, deviating only in point of view from that told by Troxel, McCusker, Davis and others. It is essentially a self-justifying tale, and the case for his strongarm takeover of the newspaper rests heavily on his depiction of Need as a man completely out of touch with the real world, an administrative buffoon who was in the latter stages of a psychological breakdown; in short, a man completely incapable of running a newspaper.

Suggesting that Need had sexual problems and that he wanted to be the "next Tolstoy or Napoleon," O'Halloran said of the takeover, "Bob wanted me to come and save the *Times Eagle*...I asked Bob to shape up or ship out, that's all...I could have done it in a much more direct and probably heavier way. I could have just said, 'I'm taking it', period."

O'Halloran as explained by O'Halloran was a man who devoted his post-Vietnam years (since 1968) to moving within and learning about corporate-level America. By his own testimony he worked for various corporations and major-account ad agencies, and claimed to have been instrumental as a high level campaign worker in the elections of state and national candidates in three western states.

His experience in media was indicated to include a year and a half as a newscaster for a CBS affiliate, a producer of cinema documentaries and time spent as a newsman on an undisclosed publication.

O'Halloran considered himself a man of action and daring, and was fond of hang-gliding off the top of Neah Kah Nie Mountain. Likewise, he convinced Manzanita restaurateur Nelson Souza to pay up for a full page ad by shooting a couple of hunting arrows through the thick wood door of what was then Father's Restaurant.

O'Halloran spoke a New Frontier rhetoric and had what many thought were singular talents of influence and persuasion. To some he was a charismatic visionary leader, and to others a brainwashing, megalomaniacal opportunist.

To Michael McCusker, squeezed out as editor in late 1974, he was a "wheeler dealer, a con man" and a "ruthless individual who gutted something of great value for his own oppressive ends. He couldn't have more thoroughly destroyed the *Times Eagle* and its publisher if he had been ordered to by his bosses in the CIA."

To John Troxel, he was a man of "extreme mania and paranoia" who hated books, bureaucrats, institutions and governments" and had "an incredible ability to make people believe in him."

To Doug Davis he was a "charismatic personality who blew me away" and a "completely amoral man" who "chose to cast himself as a mysterious character."

The temptations were equally strong to romanticize the fallen Need as a heroic figure and write off O'Halloran as a conscienceless blackguard, but the curious thing about O'Halloran was that few of those who knew him harbored a dislike for the man.

As Davis told it, "To understand the devious and unethical side of him, you have to be acquainted with the idealistic and creative side."

To the townspeople who welcomed it in the spring of 1971, the *North Coast Times Eagle* quickly became "The Hippie Herald," an outrageous and unnative son that alternately romanced and left them aghast on its self-ordained mission to save the Oregon coast.

It was a paper that had enough political clout to leave developers from Lincoln City to Cannon Beach trembling under its investigative eye and one that was instrumental in making Young's Bay in Warrenton too hot a spot for Amax Aluminum Corporation to locate.

It had a musical masthead that saw 139 names come and go in less than 5 years, the large majority of whom left somewhat mystified and burned out but with little sense of remorse.

To Terry Blevins, "The *Times Eagle*...addressed itself to matters of life and death, to the affairs of humans. It was concerned with survival at the gut level and its hourly confrontations with the universe gave it a better perspective than any other newspaper I will ever enjoy. The *Times Eagle* was the only newspaper I had ever seen, or have seen since, that took the side of Man against the evil forces of Mankind."

Why that paper failed is a question that screams with possibilities. It started with a suicidally inadequate financial base and quickly alienated what little advertising existed along a poverty-stricken stretch of Highway 101.

But the deeper question is whether a newspaper that maintains an unbridled editorial voice and exploits fully its 1st Amendment right to freedom of the press, as the *Times Eagle* undeniably did, can still survive in modern America without being as large, well ensconced and unassailable as *The New York Times*.

The *Times Eagle* was a quixotic circus of romantic idealism and fiscal mismanagement that time after time snatched defeat from the jaws of victory, but its editorial credo of printing the "Truth" remained inviolate to the end. It is often said that the truth hurts but a principle question raised by the "unique & distinctive journal of the Oregon coast" is does it necessarily have to be fatal?

REPLY TO A COWARD

BY ROBERT STANLEY NEED

Friday morning's incoming mail was interesting. An envelope addressed *To The Editor?* and postmarked from Portland, contained a tear sheet of last week's Page 4, the editorial page of this newspaper. With black threatening arrows pointing at our editorial 'Exodus' bearing on the closing days of the Vietnam War, Paul Hudson's column bearing also on the same subject 'The Lucky War', and also on Dave Attmore's column 'In Defense of Bill Walton', was a scrawled epithet, "What is your news source —Pravda?"

Usually members of our profession simply ignore such anonymous responses because in the fact of their anonymity alone lies the inherent character of their cowardice.

But this time, whoever this coward is, deserves not the courtesy, but the necessity of reply.

His "Pravda" remark graphically underscores the extreme ignorance and stupidity of a segment of our national population that has in the past, continues at present, and threatens the future with absolute destruction of American liberties and national independence.

The articles in last week's *Times Eagle* addressed themselves to pertinent current problems and situations prevalent in our social and political life, this being done not only under the protection, but in fulfillment of our rights and responsibilities under the 1st Amendment and the Constitution. They were all editorials in construction and content and therefore were a demonstration of our publication's and its columnists' right to free speech and open commentary of individual opinion.

Neither the *Times Eagle* nor its writers have any obligation whatsoever to please the state, or for that matter, please all of its readership, all of the time. Intelligent readers have found this dramatically true over the past 4 years and have assisted us in an expansion of influence that has led the *Times Eagle* to an unassailable position as a widely read forum of public opinion. The freedom to express one's self, either staff or readership, has developed a favorable recognition of this publication as "one of the finest expressions of independence" within the state of Oregon and even beyond.

How ludicrous to compare the *Times Eagle* to *Pravda*! The *North Coast Times Eagle*, nor any member of its staff, and certainly not its readership, could long survive in the Soviet Union. Should the Russians successfully invade Oregon, the *Times Eagle* would receive the dubious distinction of being the very first publication to be discontinued and its irascible but

fiercely independent staff the very first lined up against the wall and shot. As the rifles would be lowered, the commander of the squad would read charges against us that echo back to those read against the colonial newsmen who died during and prior to our Revolution — "Guilty of defiance of authority, publication of material contrary to the will of the (Royal) state, and agitation of the populace." And from their point of view, we would admit to unmitigated guilt.

If our cowardly correspondent has ever possessed a modicum of logic, it must now have fully atrophied as it has in so many of his brothers and sisters. It is his virulent bigotry and ignorance that continues to generate the poison that prevents our nation from fully achieving the goals of brotherhood and tranquility we attempted to set for ourselves in 1776, and have fought and died for over the past two centuries.

He has brothers lurking in other places, writing letters, unsigned of course, to publications, or hollering from anonymity in the back of the mob, "Send the niggers back to Africa, Kill the commie, Pervert the kids, America love it or leave it," and so forth ad nauseum.

He is too weak of character to come out into America's sunlight and speak his mind as a responsible citizen having at least a grain of human understanding that no two people are ever going to fully agree and that this diversity of opinion is the very bedrock of our freedoms.

This person is the archtypical bully hiding in the back alleys of our Republic to club to death both individuals and ideas that have the slightest hue different than his own, granting him the ability to have any at all.

Where is this man on election day, publicly casting his vote on the immediate issues of the nation? Where is his name at the bottom of letters to editors contributing to discourse on the problems of our times? Where in your anonymity do we find constructive argument for your side of the solutions to the many questions we collectively face?

We think Mr. Anonymous has got the whole thing backwards. The *Times Eagle* has no place in Russia, but he does. He'd be great as a faceless, no by-line reporter for Pravda, merely setting into type the canned releases handed down from the Kremlin. They need people like you, Mr. Anonymous, who don't question a damn thing and let somebody else run the state for you. We sure as hell wouldn't want you to apply for a job on our loud-mouthed, rambunctious, opinionated, crusading, sometimes right and sometimes wrong but always independent *North Coast Times Eagle*.

(NCTE, April 30, 1975)