



Mr. Phfft ...in eye of political storm

Washington Star

GRAND CAY, Bahamas —
As his yacht Sea Lion II
sliced through the emerald
Bahamas waters, Robert Ab-
planalp, the aerosol king,
glanced toward a precarious
perch on stilts 25 feet above
the deck, used as a high-rise
lookout chair for deep-sea
fishing.

"That's where Nixon likes
to ride, up in the 'tuna
tower,'" he confided. "He
scares the hell out of me
every time."

Abplanalp, the man who
made the world go "phfft"
with his aerosol can empire,
is one of the closest friends
of Nixon and financier of the
President's San Clemente,
Calif., home.

Standing on the bridge, a

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Abplanalp has squirted fortune out of a can

The New York Times News Service

NEW YORK — A banana split awaits the crowning touch. One squirt of the aerosol can and out comes whipped cream.

A Schnauzer snaps at the mailman. Squirt! And the dog is subdued with aerosol spray.

And so it goes in the world of the aerosol process — the suspension of fine solid or liquid particles in gas — hair sprays and shaving cream, deodorizers, sun lotion, even aerosol air.

From a slow start after World War II in "Bug Bombs" that rarely worked, the aerosol industry has grown to such magnitude today that sales of 300 different aerosol products are rapidly approaching \$3 billion a year.

The man behind it all is Robert Abplanalp, a college dropout who is widely credited with making an aerosol valve that really worked at a price no one could refuse.

Even today he is known not as "the father of modern aerosols," as he would like to be known, but as one of President Nixon's closest friends and the man who loaned the

President more than a million dollars to buy and fix up his estate in San Clemente, Calif.

Abplanalp is also president, chairman, chief executive and sole owner of the Precision Valve Corp., a company that makes half the valves used in the aerosol business today.

He first met the future President early in 1961, a few months after Nixon lost the presidential election to John Kennedy by a thin margin. He simply wrote Nixon a letter saying he was a strong supporter and would like to meet him.

When they met a short time later at Nixon's home, Abplanalp told Nixon that any time he could be of service he would be glad to do so.

By the time Nixon lost his race in 1962 for the governorship of California, Abplanalp had retained the California law firm Nixon had joined, Adams, Duque & Hazeltine.

Precision Valve, which was started in 1949, today employs 800 people in plants in Yonkers and Chicago. It turns out a billion valves a year.

Valves account for only part of the company's \$60 million in sales in the United States; other aerosol parts and special services for customers account for the balance. The

company's sales from 10 foreign plants are believed to be at least as large.

The typical aerosol product consists of a can (under less pressure than a soft drink, according to the Chemical Specialties Manufacturers Association), a valve assembly, a propellant and the product itself. Propellants in use today include nitrogen, nitrous oxide and several trademarked fluorocarbons, such as Freon.

Although they work differently, depending on the product and whether they come out of the can as a foam, spray, mist, droplets or a stream, the most popular — a hair spray — calls for both the product and the propellant to go into the can under pressure. When the valve button is pushed, both come out together. The propellant quickly turns to vapor and in turn breaks up the hair spray into tiny droplets.

Despite changing times, hair sprays have long held the top spot among aerosols, followed by deodorants, laundry products and paints. Food products have proved unpopular.

And what of Abplanalp in the future? "Maybe it's a secret," a friend said, "but one of the things he's working on now is a new way to desalt seawater."

Nixon's friend in eye of storm

Continued from 1A

beer in his hand, he is a man trying to keep his ease in the eye of a political storm.

Grand Cay, Abplanalp's private island, has become a frequent weekend presidential hideaway on foreign soil. With that have come all the trapping of power and protection that follow a President, all the costs . . . and some of the controversy.

Abplanalp, already revealed as the secret buyer of most of the land at Nixon's San Clemente estate, says he was recruited for that deal by Nixon attorney Herbert Kalmbach.

Breaking a long silence on the California property, Abplanalp told The Washington Star-News that his purchase of the land was both proper and, in the long run, profitable.

Angry at persistent, but unproven, rumors that campaign backers may have had a role in the purchase, Abplanalp said sharply, "I'm the only investor. There aren't any other outside investors."

While a tropical rain thundered down about his yacht docked in a Bahamas Bay, the 51-year-old long-time friend of the President talked about the land deal in an interview salted with both candor and humor.

"What the hell am I gonna do with the land?" he said gruffly. "I'm going to build a 10-story whorehouse on it."

Then winning at the kind of wry quip that makes him likeable in private but can be embarrassing in public, Abplanalp quickly explained he is holding the San Clemente acreage in a family-owned partnership for future growth in value.

Besides disclosing that he got into the deal through a plea from Kalmbach, Abplanalp revealed that the land was not bought by an investment company formed by him, contradicting an earlier White House statement.

Abplanalp scoffed at the suggestion that his purchase was a bargain for Nixon and said, "There is no way I'm not gonna make money on the deal — unless California sinks into the ocean."

Abplanalp, 51, a Yonkers, N.Y., businessman, loaned Nixon the money for the downpayment on the San Clemente estate four years ago, then bought most of the land for \$1.2 million in 1970. The White House kept secret both the loan and the land deal until this May.

Abplanalp did say one other outsider was involved in helping finance his part in the San Clemente dealings at the outset: Abplanalp said he has now bought out that person's share. He refused to identify him.

The other investor is thought to be C. G. (Bebe) Rebozo, the President's regular companion and his neighbor at Key Biscayne. Abplanalp and Rebozo are personal acquaintances, and the New York manufacturer is an official of Rebozo's bank on Key Biscayne.

But if he is angry about criticisms of the San Clemente deal, Abplanalp is tender toward critics of the Grand Cay retreat. To avoid criticism, he said he has insisted on paying

for almost all of the security changes — at a personal tab of about \$1 million.

He paid for the helicopter landing areas, for the extra buildings for White House personnel, for road improvements, and for alterations of the gleaming white, two-story home above the bay, he explained.

Although the U.S. government has put \$160,000 into special communications equipment on the island, Abplanalp said that will be dismantled and carted away after 1976. He added, with the wry humor that is his watermark:

"What would I use it for? Who would I call? 'I am sorry. Mr. Brezhnev, I was trying to reach my bookmaker?'"

Abplanalp's aerosol valve popularized the spray can a quarter-century ago. Now he is president and sole owner of all the stock in Precision Valve Corp., which makes more than half the world's supply of spray valves.

A beefy man with an earthy Bronx accent, Abplanalp has been a frequent host to Nixon on Grand Cay, an island in the Bahamas just offshore from his fishing resort on Walker's Cay.

The two men have been close personal friends since Nixon was a New York lawyer in the early '60s. "Hell, I had no idea he was going to be president," Abplanalp said.

Abplanalp, known as "Big Al" in his younger days, places his own personal worth in the area of \$30 million — not quite the \$250 million fortune that has been estimated in the past.

With a 99-year lease on a dozen small coral keys at the northernmost reach of the island nation off Florida, Abplanalp has become a son of the seas, with that special fire only a city man can have.

"You can smell the air out here," he said. Nixon has been hopping down to Abplanalp's island since 1965, in the days when he was distant from the White House. Now, more than ever, Grand Cay is a haven for him.

Grand Cay, reached only by boat or presidential helicopter, anchors a short necklace of islands that runs north to Walker's Cay.

The 6-foot-1 Abplanalp, whose uniform of the day is usually a short-sleeved sport shirt and shorts, spends most of each member with his family on Grand Cay or at Walker's Cay Club.

Cruising back into the crowded marina at his fishing resort, Abplanalp said he could see only one good side to all his exposure in the news media. "Walker's Cay is in the black for the first time."



Aerosol king Robert Abplanalp

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