

Nixon Aide Offers His Memory

By Peter A. Jay

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White House aide Ken Clawson told John Ehrlichman he would "recollect anything you want me to" about a meeting last summer to discuss what should be done with the contents of a safe in the office of Watergate conspirator E. Howard Hunt Jr.

A transcript of a telephone conversation between the two men, from a recording made by Ehrlichman, yesterday before the Senate select Watergate committee.

In the conversation, which took place April 17, 1973, Ehrlichman asked Clawson what he remembered about a meeting in the White House on June 19 or 20, 1972, at which both men were present, along with former presidential special counsel Charles W. Colson and former counsel John W. Dean III.

A transcript of a conversation on the same subject between Ehrlichman and Colson was also admitted as evidence. In that conversation, which also took place April 17, Colson told Ehrlichman he did not remember attending the meeting.

The meeting, Ehrlichman said to Clawson, concerned "what we ought to do about the contents of the safe, what we ought to say to the press, what we ought to do about Hunt and so forth."

Clawson responded that he had only "a vague memory" of the meeting.

"Well, it's interesting," Ehrlichman continued, "because Dean, who as you know has talked to the U.S. attorney at great length (about the Watergate affair and the possible criminal involvement of White House aides), cites some comments of mine in that meeting as evidence of corrupt attitude on my part. And I'm looking for anybody who can help me to recall what took place there."

Clawson replied, "If you want me to be forthwith and



KEN W. CLAWSON
... "vague memory"

straightforward with you, I'll recollect anything you want me to."

Ehrlichman then said Dean was telling the federal prosecutors—as he testified publicly later—that "I said two things at that meeting. One, that we ought to deep-six the contents of the safe, quote unquote. And two, that we ought to get Hunt out of the country."

Clawson said he hadn't heard that and "I would have absolutely no trouble in remembering either one of those two things had that been said."

In the conversation with Colson, Ehrlichman said, "My grapevine tells me that you are going to be summoned over there (presumably to appear before either federal prosecutors or a grand jury) today . . . and they're going to ask you about a meeting in my office which Dean has highlighted as the central gemstone in the case against me."

Colson, under Ehrlichman's questioning, said he

did not remember a discussion about disposing of the contents of Hunt's safe or about plans for Hunt to leave the country.

The transcript of the Ehrlichman-Clawson conversation follows:

Ehrlichman: You called me?

Clawson: No, I didn't call you.

Ehrlichman: I'm sorry. I got a message at home to call you. I'll be jiggered. Is this Ken Clawson.

Clawson: Unless it was Jim Clawson.

Ehrlichman: Couldn't have been. Isn't that strange. Gee I hope I didn't wake you up.

Clawson: I'm out of it with this damn cold.

Ehrlichman: Oh, that's too bad. While I have you could I ask you something. I'm awfully sorry to bother you. You may recall a meeting in my office which I think you sort of convened to talk about a press report during the Watergate aftermath, when it broke, a press report about Hunt's safe being in the White House. And you and Chuck (Colson) and Bruce Kehrli came up here and met with Dean and me to talk about what you know, what our response should be and so forth. Do you remember that?

Clawson: Vaguely. I remember better an earlier meeting in which the question was should we give out Hunt's dates of employment and what Charley's role was in hiring him.

Ehrlichman: Yeah. Well, this focuses particularly on what we ought to say to the contents of the safe, what we ought to say to the press, what we ought to do about Hunt and so forth. Do you have any present recollection of that?

Clawson: A vague memory, yeah, but I don't recall any of the details of it.

Ehrlichman: Well, it's interesting because Dean who as you know has talked to the U.S. attorney at great length, cites some comments of mine in that meeting as evidence of corrupt attitude on my part and I'm looking for anybody who can help me to recall what took place there.

Clawson: That's a helluva note, John.

Ehrlichman: I agree.

Clawson: If you want me to be forthwith and straight-

forward with you, I'll recollect anything you want me to.

Ehrlichman: Well, no, let me, let me tell you what my problem is and then you can . . . I've got to tell what I recall and what I don't recall. He alleges that I said two things at that meeting. One that we ought to deep-six the contents of the safe, quote, unquote. And, two, that we ought to get Hunt to leave the country.

Clawson: Oh, I could . . . listen, John, if anything like that, if either one of those two things were said, that would be vivid in my mind.

Ehrlichman: I would think so. I would think so.

Clawson: And that's objectively.

Ehrlichman: Now, in point of fact, Dean phoned (G. Gordon) Liddy and asked Liddy to have Hunt leave the country.

Clawson: That's new news to me.

Ehrlichman: Yeah, but you see this . . . and what he's doing is saying well I was just being a good German and carrying out orders.

Clawson: No, I would have absolutely no trouble in remembering either one of those two things had that been said.

Ehrlichman: Well, OK.

Clawson: I would just remember that.

Ehrlichman: Yeah, that's a fairly dramatic event. OK, thank you very much. Awfully sorry to have bothered you. I just don't understand.

Clawson: If there's anything I can do in this thing, please let me . . .

Ehrlichman: I will. I will. Thank you, Ken.

(In the conversation with Clawson, the phrase of Clawson's "vivid in my mind" in the committee's copy of the transcript appears as "vivid in my recollection" in the transcript kept by Ehrlichman and his attorneys. The discrepancy was not explained.)

The transcript of the Ehrlichman-Colson conversation follows:

Colson: Hello.

Ehrlichman: Hi.

Colson: Hi, John. I'll be over about 11 if that's convenient.

Ehrlichman: Fine, that's very good.

Colson: Two quick ques-

tions, though. One thing I should tell you is that our great find last night really started accelerating. Something coming out this morning. Dean involved. Now I notice The LA Times has it this morning but the people that (David) Shapiro (Colson's law partner) has been getting information from, you know, the town is buzzing with, is alive with the story, so I don't think we have a helluva lot of time.

Ehrlichman: All right.

Colson: I just thought I'd let you know that.

Ehrlichman: I appreciate it.

Colson: Did he, when he went over there, was he given any immunity?

Ehrlichman: Not yet.

What they've done, apparently . . .

Colson: They shouldn't give it to him.

Ehrlichman: I know it. What they said to him is that unless he turns up corroborated evidence against (H. R.) Haldeman and me . . .

Colson: Is that who he's trying to make?

Ehrlichman: Sure.

Colson: Who, Dean is?

Ehrlichman: Yep.

Colson: That's John Mitchell again. Son of a bitch.

Ehrlichman: Unless he does that he doesn't get immunity. Now my grapevine tells me that you are going to be summoned over there today.

Colson: Oh, really?

Ehrlichman: Yep. And

that they're going to ask you about a meeting in my office which Dean has highlighted as the central gemstone in the case against me and so just in case you get hauled over there before 11 o'clock, maybe I'd better tell you about it. It was a meeting that Kehrli, Clawson, you, Dean and I had here.

Colson: I wasn't there.

Ehrlichman: In my office.

Colson: I was not there.

Dean tried this one out on me Friday night, and I said the only thing I can ever recall, John, is I once told you I thought it was a stupid, god-damn thing for (Howard) Hunt to be unavailable.

Ehrlichman: Well, that's

the meeting where supposedly I ordered him to tell Hunt to leave the country.

Colson: Never heard that. And I will so state under oath.

Ehrlichman: Or that I admonished everyone that we ought to figure out some way to deep-six the contents of Hunt's safe.

Colson: No. No way. I was the one who said go get Hunt's safe and be sure it's preserved for the FBI.

Ehrlichman: Right.

Colson: A. and B it's stupid to get another country. But that was in my office, not yours. And you weren't present.

Colson: I can handle that one easily.

Ehrlichman: But you were not in a meeting here?

Colson: Well, I may have been but I sure don't remember that.

Ehrlichman: That's the way. OK.

Colson: All right? I can handle that.

Ehrlichman: Thank you. I'll see you at 11.

Colson: There's a couple of things you and I need to do to protect each other's flank here but we'll talk about that, but no, I'm serious.

Ehrlichman: Fair enough.

Colson: Let's get it clearly understood that son of a bitch doesn't get immunity. I want to nail him.

Ehrlichman: Well I'm doing my best.

Colson: No, I want to nail him. I'll take immunity first.

Ehrlichman: OK.

Colson: Allright?

Ehrlichman: Allright.

Colson: Thanks.