

Good Reasons to Distrust The Haldeman Book

By Walter Pincus

IN THE EARLY part of his book, "The Ends of Power," H. R. Haldeman writes, "I believe (John) Mitchell would have killed the idea of wiretapping the Democratic National Committee in a minute. If he was determined to wiretap for political information, he would have sent Liddy's minions into McGovern's (his emphasis) headquarters."

That is the kind of misleading statement that instills deep distrust of the Haldeman book.

The fact is that, according to sworn testimony never disputed at the 1973 Senate Watergate hearings, "Liddy's minions" were sent to bug McGovern's headquarters — not once, but twice. Both efforts failed. And had the June 17, 1972, operation at Democratic National Committee headquarters in the Watergate office building gone off without a hitch, the group had plans to return that very night for a third attempt at placing a listening device in the South Dakota Democrat's main campaign headquarters.

The McGovern bugging attempts don't appear in the Haldeman book. If they did, they would show that the Liddy-Hunt team was out to get political information on Democrats — and not just on Larry O'Brien, the Democratic Party chairman.

This thus would punch a hole in one of the book's prime conclusions: that the only bugging effort — the Watergate break-in — came "as a result of President Nixon telling Charles Colson to get some information regarding Larry O'Brien."

If that were the book's only failure of fact, it might be accepted as a slip, first on the part of Haldeman (or his ghost writer, Joseph DiMona) and then by the book's editors, who, one expects, at least read the work for accuracy.

But "The Ends of Power" has too many other errors and too much manipulation of material. They lead one to believe that in the effort to keep secret the "news" of the book and thus protect its commercial value, there was no factual review by someone familiar with Watergate. They also suggest that Haldeman left out some facts because they conflicted with his conclusions.

WHILE IT HAS no sinister connotations, one mistake vividly illustrates how neither authors nor editors knew the already published details of Watergate.

Midway in the book there is a description of events on the night of the Watergate break-in. Haldeman places all the burglars "across the street in a room in the Holiday Inn . . ." waiting for their chance to enter DNC headquarters.

He got the inn wrong — it was the Howard Johnson across the street from the Watergate office building — and only one of the burglars was there, monitoring DNC headquarters. The rest were at the Watergate Hotel, adjacent to the office building.

More serious are other manipulations of fact spread

throughout the book and designed to support one Haldeman "conclusion" or another.

Take the case of Tom Gregory. In a section designed to show that Washington public relations man Bob Bennett — who was a CIA connection — "directed" the Hunt-Liddy team, Haldeman identifies Gregory as an "original member of the Watergate burglary team" who went to Bennett "to ask permission to quit. He did not go to Gordon Liddy, who was supposed to be the man in charge of the team."

Gregory was a college student in 1972 and a friend of Bennett's nephew. Through the nephew and Bennett, Gregory met E. Howard Hunt Jr., who was searching for someone to act as a GOP spy inside the Muskie organization. Gregory took the job and provided Hunt with material on the Muskie campaign.

When the Muskie effort failed, Gregory — in response to a Haldeman directive — was transferred to McGovern headquarters.

The young student sat in on planning for the McGovern bug — another event that Haldeman conveniently forgets about. Gregory even accompanied the team when it made its first unsuccessful attempt to carry out that mission.

That experience bothered Gregory, for he never suspected when he started as a spy that break-ins and buggings would be part of the game. He did, as Haldeman writes, "become nervous" with bugging and tell Hunt he wanted out of the operation. Since his friend's uncle, Bennett, got him the job in the first place, he also expressed his fears to him. He did not go to Liddy because Hunt was his direct boss. He was never to be part of the "Watergate burglary team." Published records and testimony show that.

Another Haldeman manipulation occurs with his use of White House tape excerpts.

Haldeman uses excerpts from the famous March 21, 1973, "cancer on the presidency" conversation between Dean and Nixon where, halfway through, Haldeman himself joined the meeting. His intent is to show, as he writes, "that Nixon asked Colson to help him 'nail' O'Brien. Colson naturally turned to Hunt. And Hunt tried to do it by tapping O'Brien's telephone at Watergate."

Haldeman quotes Nixon as saying, "Chuck might have gone around and talked to Hunt and said, 'Well I was talking to the president and the president feels we ought to get information about this or that or the other thing.'"

Then Haldeman writes in the book that "Dean tried to turn Nixon's attention away" from Colson.

But the Watergate tapes show that what Dean did was say, "Well, Liddy is the same way . . ."

In his book, Haldeman drops that Dean remark and then prints Nixon's next statement: "I have talked to

Chuck . . . and I am sure that Chuck may have even . . . talked to Hunt along those lines."

The book also leaves out the next recorded pieces of conversation, perhaps because Haldeman said it: "I would — Well, anything could happen. I would doubt that," said the man who now puts the blame on Colson.

When, back in 1973, Dean agreed, it was Haldeman who added, "I don't think he would. Uh, Chuck is a name dropper in one sense, but not in that sense."

Thus it was Haldeman himself, and not Dean, who in 1973 tried to lead Nixon away from thinking Colson was behind Watergate.

Those, at least, were the sentiments voiced in 1973 by Haldeman. Now however, he writes that from the moment he heard of the break-in on June 17, his reaction was, "Good Lord, they've caught Chuck Colson."

Of course, Haldeman left out from the book a great deal more than what he said during White House conversations. Dozens of political memos bearing his initials were introduced at the impeachment hearings to show he did everything from push the Liddy intelligence operations to establish Liddy's pay at \$4,000 above his White House salary.

◆
ONE OTHER EXAMPLE is worth noting. It deals with the Nixon wiretaps that began in 1969 and continued through 1971. Haldeman points to Henry Kissinger as the instigator, fearful of news leaks. In Haldeman's words, it was a program "inspired by Henry's rage but ordered by Nixon."

Haldeman at one point writes, "I hate wiretapping because I hate prying into anyone's private life," though he adds: "I do believe, however, in stopping leaks of security secrets" and using FBI wiretaps if that is "the only way to find them." In less than two years, he received 52 FBI wiretap summaries — another fact not mentioned in the book.

When summaries were sent to him, Haldeman writes, "I directed the FBI to simply send them to . . . my assistant . . . and stop the theatrics. It was all a waste of time, anyway."

What Haldeman left out was that he, not Kissinger or Nixon, ordered the last of the 17 wiretaps. It was on James McLane, a newly hired member of the White House domestic staff who dealt with economic rather than national security matters.

Those summaries, which went to Haldeman for two months, according to the impeachment committee reports, mostly concerned McLane's initial unhappiness with his job.

The book also doesn't record Haldeman's praise of Ehrlichman's use of wiretap intercept material that permitted the Nixon White House to prepare a response to a Life magazine article against the Vietnam war. "Let's get going," Haldeman wrote to an aide after being told of the project.

In the final pages of the book, Haldeman writes: "and the ultimate irony is that the Watergate break-in stands as the only major political scandal in history in which not one of those who brought it about was personally benefited by it in any way — and no one other than those who brought it about was personally hurt by it in any way."

That is a comment on itself.

Pincus is a member of the national staff of The Washington Post.