

Watergate Liddy: An Unlikely Hero

by Jack Anderson

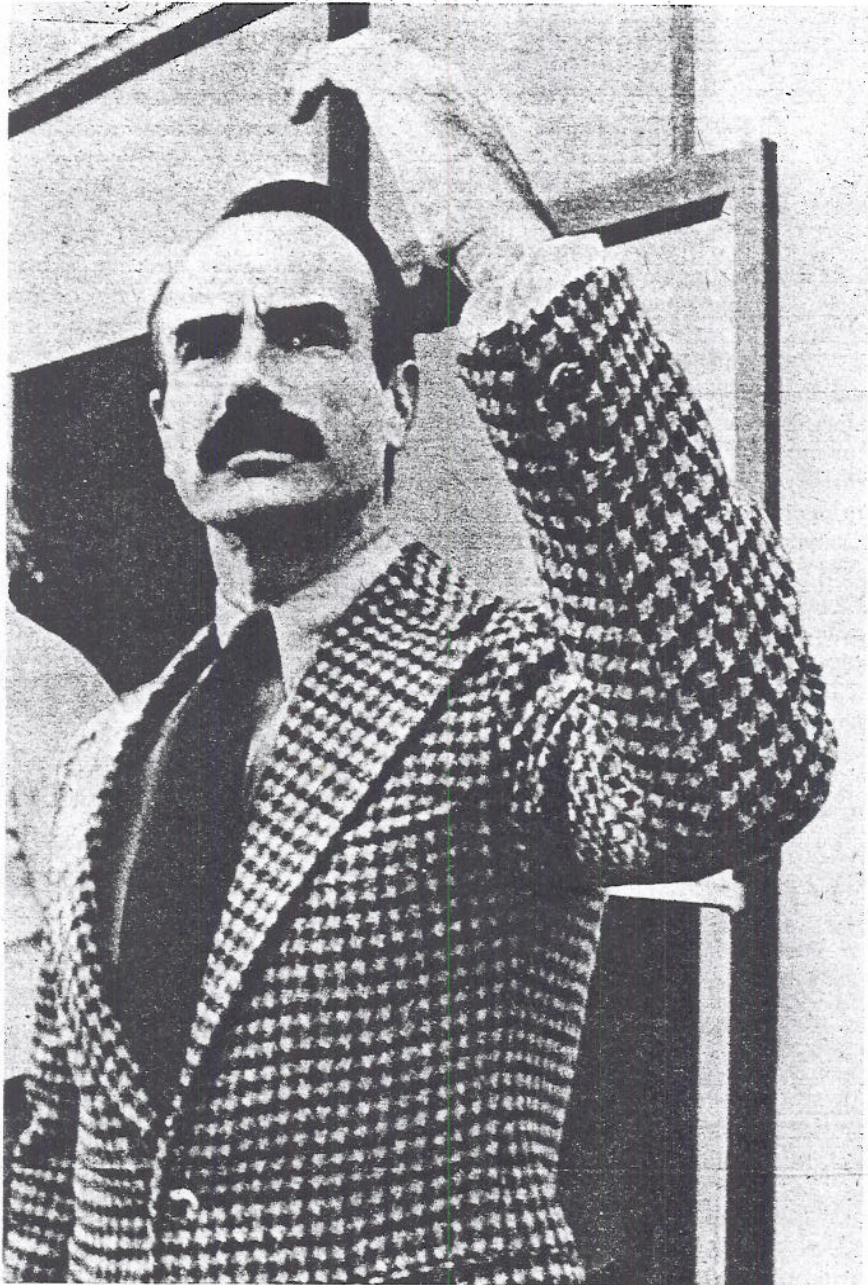
WASHINGTON, D.C.

That indomitable Watergate spirit, G. Gordon Liddy, emerged from prison after 52½ months to a hero's welcome. A less likely, more perverse hero would be hard to imagine. He planned the Watergate break-in; his only misgiving was that it was too restrictive. Afterward, he offered to be gunned down in the streets, Mafia-style, for his failure.

His White House colleagues scrambled to incriminate others in exchange for their own freedom. But Liddy en-

tered prison without uttering a word in his own defense. When he learned that fellow conspirator E. Howard Hunt had broken the secrecy oath, Liddy hollered for a guard. "Keep him away from me," growled Liddy, "or I'll kill him!"

The other inmates admired Liddy's stoic silence. "Watergate Liddy," they called him. But he was not a model prisoner. He couldn't keep out of scuffles. "He was like a bantam rooster who was ready to fight," recalls Watergate burglar Frank Sturgis. According to in-



G. Gordon Liddy leaves prison after 52½ months of confinement. He was most severely punished of all the Watergate conspirators—also the most silent.

side sources, he was beaten at least once by prison guards.

At Allenwood Prison Camp, he was assigned to a hallway cot near the all-night TV room. He immediately squawked that he couldn't sleep because of the noise. The guards, who had ignored other complaints, banned TV-watching after 11:30 p.m.

The outraged prisoners retaliated by setting Liddy's mattress on fire. When he got a new one, they soaked it. They also threw all his personal property out the door.

Yet this strange, tenacious, taciturn figure never faltered. He stood up to the toughest cons; he spent 100 days in solitary confinement without a murmur. He endured the longest of the Watergate sentences in a way that won a sort of grudging public admiration.

Tagged by Nixon

PARADE has asked me, as an intended Liddy victim, to assess the silent man of Watergate. He entered my life in late 1971. It is unclear who in the White House selected me for this honor. Ex-White House aide Charles Colson has testified that he was asked "many times" by President Richard Nixon to take action "to discredit Jack Anderson." Not even the target of the Watergate break-in, Democratic National Committee Chairman Larry O'Brien, was higher on Nixon's "enemies list." Watergate informer John Dean has said that O'Brien "was second only to Jack Anderson as a target of ugly thoughts."

It was left largely to Liddy and Hunt to translate the ugly thoughts into meaningful action. According to The New York Times, my name was posted prominently on a wallboard in their basement sanctum as a voodoo meant to inspire them on against the foe.

I still don't know whether my doctor's office was broken into, my phones tapped, my mail intercepted, my files photostated or what other Liddy routines were invoked. But I was aware in 1971-72 that I had become the object of certain discomfiting attentions. I didn't know then that there was a White House "enemies list." But I did know that I was on someone's list.

Pursuers on track

Men with binoculars and walkie-

talkies began stalking our house, bringing to the neighborhood an exhilarating air of intrigue. Occasionally I would catch sight of my pursuers, usually following about three blocks behind. Later I was to learn that the CIA assigned 18 radio cars to keep a watch on me.

One time, Liddy overreacted to an offhand remark by Watergate figure Jeb Stuart Magruder. As Magruder later recounted the incident, he had mentioned my name and grumbled: "Boy, it'd be nice if we could get rid of that guy." Liddy automatically interpreted

Magruder's meaning in his own way and started out to gun me down.

Fortunately, he mentioned his mission to Magruder's aide, Robert Reisner, who decided to double-check Liddy's instructions. Reported Reisner to the astonished Magruder: "Liddy just rushed past my desk and said you'd told him to rub out Jack Anderson." Magruder managed to head off the impetuous Liddy before he reached my office. The constrained assassin was disappointed. "When you give me an order like that, I carry it out," he grumped, annoyed over Magruder's imprecision of speech.

Another time Liddy and Hunt sought some exotic poisons from a CIA expert, Dr. Edward Gunn, to use against me. Once again, fate intervened. The doctor refused to give them the poisons.

At least G. Gordon Liddy had flair; even his detractors would concede that. A month before the fateful Watergate break-in, during a dry run at Sen. George McGovern's campaign headquarters, Liddy suddenly whipped out a pistol and shot out a streetlight. He was a fast draw.

Under pressure

Then there was the time campaign treasurer Hugh Sloan asked Liddy to accompany him to the bank to deposit \$350,000 in Nixon cash. Sloan's briefcase was stuffed with currency; Liddy's concealed a gas-operated pellet gun.

Afterward, when the two men stopped for lunch, Liddy warned Sloan that the gas pressure in the gun tended to build up and the weapon might acci-

dentally discharge. Sloan suggested urgently that his companion do something about it. So Liddy strode into the men's room, entered the first stall and fired the gun into the john. The reaction of the man in the next stall is unrecorded.

Liddy maintained an arsenal of firearms, including a pistol that could fire a lethal pellet underwater. Once he used his White House pass to try to buy a large assortment of guns from a Virginia dealer. On another occasion, he calmly placed a brace of pistols on his dining room table before receiving a delegation of angry neighbors.

Ready for action

Liddy was a man of action. He once leaped out of a cab to rescue a man being mugged but was beaten unmercifully by the mugger's accomplices. Another time, Liddy leaped off a garage roof like Batman to frighten some noisy teenagers. He also slapped one of them around. And he once advised the startled wife of Republican official Robert Odle to carry a sharpened pencil that could be driven like a stiletto into an attacker's throat.

Some of Liddy's bluster may have been calculated to impress his audiences. "He's a bravado type, very aggressive, a tough guy," says one friend. Liddy once held his hand over a burning candle until the flame severely seared his flesh. He merely wanted to prove to a couple of girls that he was tough. To other girls he distributed huge pictures of himself beside a police car, his gun and flashlight at the ready.

Former associates remember Liddy as a bristly but bright fellow, a sort of bantam Groucho Marx in a three-piece suit. Before he wound up behind bars, his main purpose in life was to send others to prison. He campaigned for Congress in 1968 as a law-and-order conservative. His campaign slogan: "Gordon Liddy doesn't bail them out. He puts them in."

His associates began to notice that he was, as one put it, "a little unusual." Recalls one former associate: "Liddy was very abrasive, very intolerant of others. He had no patience for anyone who made a mistake. If you were a strong person, he admired you. But if you were weak, vacillating or indeci-



Liddy's family was always solidly behind him. Here he's with (l to r) wife Frances and four of his five children: Thomas, 14; Alexandra, 18; James, 16, and Grace, 17.

sive, he held you in utter contempt."

In drug war

Liddy began his Washington career in the Treasury Department, assigned to Nixon's war on drugs. "He was very articulate. He wrote extremely cogent, succinct memos," recalls a former colleague. "But he screwed up a few things. I warned people about his judgment. He's one of the best lieutenants a man could have. But Gordon should not have been put in a policymaking position without guidance. He's much too, ah, inventive for that."

When the White House went into the second-story business, Liddy was brought in as the resident expert. Thus began the trail of bag-jobs, forgeries, frame-ups, break-ins, rough-ups and buggings.

Apparently, none of these activities struck Liddy as inconsistent with his ideas of law and order. Explains a close friend: "To this day, Liddy thinks that Watergate was a legitimate national

security matter." He believed in the President's right to steal and wiretap and rig court cases. Liddy justified it all in the name of national security.

View of patriotism

"Over a drink, Liddy would talk with enormous contempt of people like Daniel Ellsberg," the friend continued. "To Gordon, they were weak, fuzzy-headed, bleeding-heart traitors. To bring down this guy Ellsberg was in the national interest."

Liddy had equal contempt for the antiwar protestors whom he identified with Sen. George McGovern. Keeping McGovern out of the White House, therefore, became a work of patriotism. So it happened that Liddy plotted the Watergate crimes, which put him in the prison he had reserved for his enemies.

Yet he demonstrated a dark humor about his plight. When attorney Mitchell Rogovin wanted to visit him, Liddy wrote from jail: "You may select a date at your convenience with the reasonable expectation that I shall be here when you arrive."

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The human side of Liddy also showed through during his long imprisonment. Friends say he is extremely devoted to his wife Frances and their five children. He got word a few months ago that their gas and telephone service were being cut off because of unpaid bills.

A few friends—led by Donald Santarelli, a former top Justice Department official—got together and paid the bills. The grateful Liddy wrote Santarelli a warm letter: "Fran tells me that when you visited her earlier this month, she was within days of having both the gas and the phone shut off. Your very generous gift meant a very great deal to her and our children.

"I don't forget things like that, and you can imagine how much it means to a man in prison when someone helps his loved ones when he no longer can."

Power of the will

What motivates this strange, determined man? Above all, Liddy believes in the power of the will. A man can endure anything, he feels, if his will is strong enough. When reporters asked

him if he felt any responsibility for Nixon's downfall, he said: "One cannot lay the blame on a particular link in a chain unless that link has snapped. I submit to you that I have not snapped."

And he told ABC's Barbara Walters: "I am not bitter [about Watergate] because I believe that bitterness carries

with it a very heavy cargo of self-pity, which I consider to be fruitless and weak." Most people feel a certain awe for those rare individuals who, in the face of criticism or calamity, remain absolutely certain of their convictions.

Comments a friend: "Liddy is a strong believer that all men are not equal. He has great admiration for the strong societies in history."

Showed Nazi movie

Perhaps Liddy's greatest admiration is for the highly disciplined German society. He was raised in a German-American neighborhood. He is fluent in German and is fascinated by all things German. Perhaps the most telling incident occurred on Jan. 6, 1971, when Liddy invited some close Justice De-



Liddy and his wife drink a toast at a Washington restaurant following his release. A stoical man, he looks back on Watergate with neither bitterness nor repentance.

partment officials to a private showing of a classic Nazi propaganda film at the National Archives.

In the most dramatic scene, swirling clouds fill the heavens and Adolf Hitler bursts forth in an airplane like a Teutonic god to save Germany. Liddy was enraptured. "It left him almost in a state of levitation," says one witness. Recalls another: "Liddy was very much turned on by that film."

Many months later, when Liddy emerged from behind prison walls, he mumbled a phrase that the reporters didn't quite catch. They reported only that he'd said something in German. **P**