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by JACK ANDERSON



WASHINGTON — The astonishing story can now be told how the Watergate cover-up suddenly tore apart at the stitches.

From the most competent sources inside the White House and the Justice Department, we have learned the fascinating details.

Our sources declare categorically that President Nixon had no advance knowledge of the Watergate break-in and bugging. From the first, former Attorney General John Mitchell and White House counsel John Dean also swore to him that they had no part in the illegal operation. It was well known around the White House, however, that Jeb Stuart Magruder was neck-deep in the scandal.

As No. 2 man on the campaign committee, he directed the activities of Watergate ringleader G. Gordon Liddy. Magruder first introduced Liddy to his staff in January 1972 as a lawyer but added with a knowing smile: "Gordon Liddy also has other talents."

Liddy submitted regular reports to Magruder on the bugging operation under the code name, "Gemstone." Magruder also arranged for Liddy to draw cash out of the committee's safe. By way of accounting, Liddy signed small, white chits with a special mark that became known jokingly as "Liddy's Mark."

After the arrest of the Watergate wiretappers, an agitated Liddy immediately tried to contact Magruder in California.

Liddy demanded to use the White House security network so he could speak on a secure phone. Unable to get through to Magruder's hotel, Liddy left a message for Magruder to call him from a pay phone.

When the call came through, Liddy reported what had happened and received all instructions to destroy all incriminating evidence. Finally, Magruder directed Liddy to report at once to Attorney General Richard Kleindienst.

Liddy located Kleindienst at the Burning Tree golf course and rushed off to consult him. Powell Moore, the campaign press chief, asked to go along. They called Kleindienst into a back room and confided that the burglary-bugging squad, caught red-handed inside Democratic headquarters, was headed by the President's campaign security chief.

Coldly, Kleindienst picked up a telephone and reached Assistant Attorney General Henry Peterson. "Henry," instructed Kleindienst, "I want to be sure that these people are treated as any other person would be treated who is arrested under those circumstances."

The chastened Liddy returned to campaign headquarters and began stuffing his files into a small shredder, which chewed them up too slowly to suit him. So he hustled upstairs with arms full of documents and ran them through a larger shredder.

Over at the White House, meanwhile, Dean ordered two aides to clean out the files of Watergate conspirator E. Howard Hunt. Eight cardboard cartons of papers were sneaked out of the White House and stored in a warehouse. They were later returned to the White House and most of the documents were selectively destroyed.

Dean was ordered by the President to find out whether any White House people were involved in the Watergate crimes. Contrary to the

impression given out by the White House, Dean never submitted a written report.

Our sources state flatly that Dean used his authority to obstruct the FBI and to keep incriminating evidence away from the Justice Department. He even ordered Hunt out of the country. White House aide, Charles Colson, according to one source, exploded: "Do you want to make the White House an accessory to a fugitive from justice?"

One of the President's closest advisers, John Ehrlichman, wanted to put out a statement

acknowledging Magruder's role in the Watergate conspiracy. This was vigorously opposed by Clark MacGregor who succeeded Mitchell as campaign chairman. Dean finally persuaded the President to announce merely that "no one in this Administration, presently employed, was involved in this very bizarre incident."

A few presidential advisers, including Ehrlichman and Colson, warned the President in February that the Watergate decisions must have been approved by Mitchell and Dean. Nixon replied that both had denied any involvement and he asked for proof.

By mid-March, the President's faith in Dean began to waver. He ordered Dean to Camp David to write a belated report on his Watergate investigation. After a few days at the presidential retreat, Dean reported back to

the President that he simply couldn't write a report. Angrily, Nixon took Dean off the Watergate case.

Colson, meanwhile, took a lie detector test to prove his own innocence. Dean was furious. "Now we're all going to have to take one," he grumped.

Colson and Ehrlichman also put together information that (1) Dean had advance knowledge of the Watergate bugging; (2) Dean had ordered Hunt out of the country; and (3) Dean had authorized payments to the Watergate defendants to keep their mouths shut. On Friday, April 13, Ehrlichman confronted Dean with the charges.

That night, Dean put together some documents he had been saving, which indicated both H. R. Haldeman and John Ehrlichman had knowledge of the Watergate cover-up. Next day, Dean took the documents to Assistant U.S. Attorney Earl Silbert and made accusations against Haldeman, Ehrlichman, Mitchell and Magruder. In return, Dean asked for immunity.

Silbert refused to grant immunity. Instead, he called in Magruder and confronted him with Dean's revelations. This broke down Magruder who also confessed his role in the conspiracy.

The lid, which Mitchell and Dean had held on the Watergate scandal for 10 months, had blown off.