

FBI Agents Accuse
White House of 'Sham'

By Morton Kondracke

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WASHINGTON — (CST) — FBI agents have complained that they were "used" by the White House to create a false "public relations impression" that a tight guard was placed on the files of presidential aides H. R. Haldeman and John D. Ehrlichman after they resigned amidst the Watergate scandal.

In fact, according to the agents, the file-guarding operation was a "sham."

No guard at all was put on the files until nearly nine hours after the Haldeman-Ehrlichman resignations were made public on April 30. That was at least 24 hours after the two aides learned, in a weekend conference with President Nixon at his Camp David retreat, that he wanted them to resign.

Once agents arrived at the White House at about 9 p.m. April 30 — about the time Nixon was delivering his TV address on Watergate — they were told to stand outside the offices containing files they were to guard.

Guidelines

In guidelines issued them the next day, the agents were told that they were not allowed to examine any White House documents, or "working papers," that they were not to log the movement of papers in and out of offices and were not to ask White House employees their identities or what documents were in their possession.

They said that no inventory of documents was conducted and that Haldeman and Ehrlichman had full access to their files.

One agent complained to associates and superiors that the guard force would be effective only to stop Haldeman or Ehrlichman from driving a station wagon up to the White House

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door to haul away a truckload of Watergate evidence.

A White House official and two aides to acting FBI director William Ruckelshaus confirmed the agents' accounts of the guidelines, which were drafted in a 7:30 a.m. meeting May 1 by Ruckelshaus aide Gary Baise, White House assistant counsel Douglas Parker and John McDermott, special agent in charge of the FBI's Washington field office.

The guard operation itself grew out of consultations between Ruckelshaus, Attorney General - designate Elliot L. Richardson and the new White House counsel, Leonard Garment.

Baise and another Ruckelshaus aide, Jack Conmy, said the agents' main function was to prevent a large batch of documents from being removed at one-time — as apparently has occurred before in the Watergate affair. They said the guidelines were designed to prevent the guard from halting work at the White House.

Conmy conceded that removal of small quantities of sensitive documents — as also has occurred before — was possible under the guidelines, but he said that agents were authorized to — and did — examine the briefcases of Haldeman and Ehrlichman to determine what they might be carrying out of their offices.

Still Have Access

A White House official who asked not to be identified said the two resigned aides still have access to their files, which have now moved to two "secure rooms" in the Executive Office Building next door to the White House and have been under Secret Service guard since Monday.

The White House official said the purpose of guarding the files has not been to deny access to them or to prevent their being copied but to block the removal of "presidential papers."

According to the White

House official, Haldeman and Ehrlichman may examine, if they wish, files left behind by fired White House counsel John W. Dean III, though they have not sought to do so.

Dean — who is out of favor with President Nixon and has alleged a Haldeman-Ehrlichman-Nixon plot to make him a Watergate "scapegoat" — has not asked to see his own files, the official said, so that the issue of his access has not arisen.

Dean has indicated that he moved classified documents from the White House before he was fired and placed them in a safe deposit box to prevent their "illegitimate destruction." Files he left behind are stored in a "secure room" and open to examination by designated White House aides.

Analogies

According to the White House official, Dean would not enjoy the same easy access to Haldeman and Ehrlichman's files that they may have to his. He would "have to specify what he wanted to see and what the purpose was in seeing it," the official said.

The FBI agents who complained about their guard duties referred to the impression left by White House spokesman that the so-called "safeguarding procedure" was tight and strict, rather than loose, permissive and late.

One agent asserted that the difference between spokesmen's statements and the reality of the guard operation was in proportion to the difference between statements and reality in connection with Watergate investigations over the past year. He alleged that the FBI had been "used" from the beginning and had been "used" again in a "show" intended to impress the public.