

Cover-Up Denied by Haldeman

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H. R. (Bob) Haldeman, President Nixon's former chief of staff, said yesterday he did not participate in any effort to cover up the Watergate scandal or to implicate the CIA in the case.

He told a closed session of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee, however, that at President Nixon's direction he set up a meeting with CIA officials to determine, among other things, whether the relation between some of the Watergate participants and the Bay of Pigs was a matter of concern to the CIA.

It is at this point, as investigating senators noted, that "substantial conflicts" emerged between CIA witnesses and the accounts of President Nixon's former two top aides.

Haldeman yesterday said the President asked that the CIA and FBI coordinate with each other to be sure that the Watergate investigation not disclose any covert CIA programs. This was substantially the testimony of former White House aide John D. Ehrlichman on Wednesday. It conformed also with the version of events described by President Nixon in a statement last week.

But former CIA Director Richard M. Helms and Deputy Director Gen. Vernon Walters said the White House aides directed Walters to meet immediately with FBI Acting Director L. Patrick Gray on June 23, 1972. Walters was instructed to tell Gray that the FBI's inquiry into passage of Watergate funds through Mexico could imperil CIA cover programs there, the CIA witnesses said.

This testimony gave rise to the inference that the White House aides were trying to use the CIA to shut off the FBI's investigation of the Watergate scandal's Mexican connection.

Haldeman yesterday acknowledged that Helms, during the June 23 meeting, "assured us that there was

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no CIA involvement in the Watergate and also that he had no concern from the CIA's viewpoint regarding any possible connections of the Watergate personnel with the Bay of Pigs."

It was not clear from Haldeman's testimony what gave rise to the White House concern over a possible connection between the 12-year-old Kennedy Administration fiasco in Cuba and the Watergate fund investigation in Mexico.

Sen. John Pastore (D-R.I.) yesterday described it as "very far-fetched."

The only apparent connection is that Watergate conspirator E. Howard Hunt and at least one of his aides were participants in the abortive CIA-sponsored invasion.

Haldeman said yesterday he did not recall any discussion during the June 23 meeting of the FBI's investigation in Mexico. Ehrlichman, however, testified the previous day that the President "was especially concerned about agency (CIA) activities in Mexico which might be disclosed."

At a White House briefing on May 22, White House counsel Leonard Garment had said the President asked for no restrictions on the FBI investigation in Mexico.

If Ehrlichman's testimony is correct the President was aware of the FBI inquiry into the "laundering" of Republican political funds, totalling some \$100,000, within six days of the Watergate break-in last year.

Haldeman said that the June 23 meeting was ordered by the President on the basis of a report from former White House counsel John Dean that the FBI "had requested guidance regarding some aspects of the Watergate investigation." He did not elaborate, however, on which aspects of the case the FBI was seeking White House guidance.

Haldeman specifically denied ever hearing any proposal that the CIA furnish bail and pay the salaries of Watergate bugging suspects. Walters testified that these suggestions had been raised with him by Dean and heatedly rejected by the CIA.

In his prepared statement to the committee, which was released by Haldeman, the

former White House aide said "we had no reason to believe that anyone in the White House was involved (in the Watergate scandal), and no reason, therefore, to seek any cover-up of the Watergate investigation from the White House."

At the same time, Haldeman added, "there was concern at the White House that activities which had been in no way related to Watergate or to the 1972 political campaign—and which were in the area of national security—would be compromised in the process of the Watergate investigation and the attendant publicity and political furore.

"Recent events have fully justified that concern—with the disclosure of the FBI wiretaps on press and NSC personnel, the details of the 'plumbers' operation, etc.," Haldeman said.

In a related development yesterday, Justice Department officials disclosed the text of a March 2, 1973, FBI memorandum asserting that the Central Intelligence Agency requested that two of its employees not be interviewed in connection with the Watergate case.

The reason cited in the memorandum was that the two employees were "operational" and that interviews might tend to blow their covers.

CIA witnesses have testified repeatedly that the agency was in no way involved in the Watergate case. They further testified that FBI investigative activities in Mexico would not endanger any covert CIA operations.

The FBI memorandum was unrelated to the bureau's Watergate investigation in Mexico.

Meanwhile, former CIA Deputy Director Gen. Robert E. Cushman, now Marine commandant, yesterday called a press conference to explain a conflict between his own testimony and that of Ehrlichman on Wednesday concerning CIA assistance to Watergate bugging conspirator Hunt.

Ehrlichman denied Cushman's claim that it was he who called the CIA on July 7, 1971, and requested the assistance — chiefly spy paraphernalia — to Hunt.

Cushman noted yesterday the the minutes of a top-level CIA meeting on July

8, 1971, showed that he specifically named Ehrlichman as having called on Hunt's behalf the previous day.

In December, 1972, Cushman related, Watergate prosecutor Earl J. Silbert asked him to describe in a memorandum how Hunt came to his attention. In his response he named Ehrlichman as having made the introduction.

Cushman sent the memo to Ehrlichman on instruction of William Colby, now the nominee for CIA director. Ehrlichman, Cushman said, asked Cushman to tear up the memo. The White House aide told Cushman he did not recall making the phone call about Hunt.

Since his own recollections were not precise, said Cushman, he agreed to write another memo without mentioning Ehrlichman. He said that he and Ehrlichman agreed it would "not be very fair" to name Ehrlichman in the memo unless he could prove it.

However, when Cushman's name emerged as having provided the assistance to Hunt earlier this month, CIA officials made a search of meeting minutes and found those of the July 8, 1971, meeting saying that it was Ehrlichman who first approached the CIA in Hunt's behalf.