

Dean Started Message About

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Former White House

Counsel John W. Dean III originated the mysterious message that Watergate conspirator James W. McCord would be receiving a telephone call from "a friend," which led to an offer of executive clemency for McCord, informed sources said yesterday.

The message and the subsequent clemency offer have figured prominently in McCord's testimony before the Senate select committee investigating the Watergate. Three lawyers have already been named as having passed along word from one to another that a "friend" would be telephoning McCord. But the identity of the initiator of the message remained undisclosed.

Informed sources said yesterday that it was Dean who gave the message to Paul O'Brien, a lawyer for the President's re-election committee, who then gave it to

William O. Bittman, lawyer for Watergate conspirator E. Howard Hunt Jr. Bittman then told Gerald Alch, then McCord's lawyer, who told McCord.

That same night, Jan. 8, 1973, McCord received an anonymous call and was told he would receive executive clemency if he pleaded guilty and remained silent in the Watergate break-in case. The caller said he was passing along the clemency offer for John Caulfield, a former White House aide who was a friend of McCord's.

Caulfield has testified before the Senate committee that he transmitted the offer for clemency on orders from Dean. Caulfield added that he believed President Nixon knew the offer was being made.

In short, Dean has now been linked to the clemency offer in two different ways: Caulfield's approaches and the chain of telephone messages through the lawyers, which McCord testified that

he regarded as similar pressure for him to remain silent.

Alch heatedly denied before the Senate committee that he knew anything about the White House offer and Thursday Bittman said he was just transmitting word from O'Brien and didn't know anything about clemency either.

O'Brien also insisted yesterday that he had never heard any mention of clemency. He said that his understanding of the message was that the "friend" would be contacting McCord about a letter McCord had written to Caulfield objecting to the possible use of the Central Intelligence Agency in the defense of the Watergate defendants.

All three lawyers maintain that their part in set-

ting up the subsequent clemency offer was inadvertent. O'Brien said he was talking to Bittman on other matters when the subject came up; Bittman said he was talking to Alch about something else when O'Brien called. And Alch said he just casually mentioned the message to McCord.

McCord, however, in his sworn Senate testimony, said that Alch told him after the first day of the Watergate trial (Jan. 8) that Bittman wanted to talk to him about "whose word I could trust regarding a White House offer of executive clemency."

Instead, Alch met with Bittman alone while McCord waited elsewhere in Bittman's offices. Then, according to McCord, Alch

Call to McCord

"took me aside and said that Bittman told him I would be called that same night by a friend I had known from the White House."

While all the principals agree on what happened, they disagree on what was said and on the implications of the whole incident. The question remains unresolved on the Senate committee record.

Dean could not be reached for comment

Meanwhile, Senate Watergate committee member Sen. Herman Talmadge (D-Ga.) was quoted by UPI yesterday as saying that it is important that key witnesses be called before the committee as soon as possible because any questions about possible involvement by President Nixon "must be resolved." Talmadge said

the early appearances of high-ranking present and former officials would help "remove the cloud of uncertainty that hangs over the country."

Committee sources said that Talmadge raised the question in executive session Thursday of speeding up the presentation of witnesses and perhaps calling such figures as Dean and former Attorney General John N. Mitchell, who are scheduled to appear towards the end of the first round of hearings.

The sources said, however, that Talmadge was persuaded that the committee's present format was necessary to properly lay the groundwork for later witnesses. No vote was taken on the matter, the sources said.