

Super Self-Salesman John Dean Faces Biggest Test as Witness

6/24/73
By William Greider
Washington Post Staff Writer

So much depends upon whether this young man is telling the truth, so much depends upon whether America believes him.

It is not too much to suggest that the nation's history could be altered by those uncertainties this week when, beginning Monday, John Wesley Dean III appears via TV in millions of living rooms. For John Dean means to finger the President.

He is bright and handsome, likable and ambitious, perhaps to a fault, one of those quick-study young people who gravitate to the Washington power games, knowing instinctively how to play. At 34, John Dean was inside the inner circle. Now he intends to blow it up.

John Dean is the first and, thus far, the only refugee from Mr. Nixon's White House to suggest that the President was implicated in



JOHN W. DEAN III
... to testify Monday

the crimes of Watergate, namely, the obstruction of justice. So far, those assertions have been made only in private to investigators or filtered through second-hand sources. This week Dean will spell it all out for

the Senate Watergate Committee and a network television audience.

The high stakes were reflected last week in the barrage of leaks and counter-leaks about what John Dean would say and about John Dean himself. If Dean's story is as damaging as the previews and if it is believable, that would greatly encourage the notion that Mr. Nixon cannot continue in office. If Dean's credibility can be destroyed, his story refuted, that might be the firebreak which would save the President.

The factual situation is so complicated, however, that public opinion may not be able to reach a clear verdict on who's lying. By the record, after all, John Dean has already lied about Watergate, or at least cooperated with the untruths advanced by others. But then so did many of his adversar-

See DEAN, A4, Col. 1

DEAN, From A1

ies in the case. The President's own spokesman, Ronald L. Ziegler, has revised the official version several times, and so has the President.

The truth about John Dean himself is, likewise, obscure. His background was as conventional as a collar pin, and his pre-Watergate career was as zippy as the Porsche he drives. Yet he left some conflicting opinions in his wake.

"John was peddling himself whenever he could," said one former associate, a government official who prefers anonymity. "He was a great salesman, as distinct from a great lawyer."

But one man's opportunism is another's dedication. "A quiet-spoken, decent, intelligent guy," said a senior Washington lawyer who

watched Dean at work in the 1960s.

From admirers as well as critics, a portrait emerges of a young man with a facile mind and accommodating opinions. He was a Republican in college, but moderately so, not a right-wing ideologue. In Washington, he always seized the next issue, whatever it happened to be, from drug abuse to New Left violence. At the White House, his job as counsel to the President was to "fight fires," not to make grand policy.

John Dean was born in Akron, where his father was a middle-rung executive for Firestone Tire & Rubber. He grew up there and in Evanston, Ill., though eventually his parents settled in Greenville, Pa., where they have managed to maintain a polite silence about their son's troubles.

In high school, shipped off to Staunton Military Academy in Virginia, where he roomed with Barry Goldwa-

ter Jr., now a congressman from California, and was a star backstroke on the swim team. By happenstance, he and Goldwater are across-the-street neighbors now in Alexandria.

Dean went to Colgate for two years, but then transferred to College of Wooster, a small Presbyterian school in northeast Ohio. An ex-roommate thinks maybe his family wanted a more serious, less social environment for young John.

"Wooster was the kind of place where everybody always says hi to everybody else," said Jim Stewart, Dean's old roomie. "That wasn't John's cup of tea. As a result, a lot of people called him a snob, but when you got to know him, you could see that wasn't true."

Stewart and Dean shared an off-campus apartment,

rattled off on football weekends to shoot game films for the team, occasionally drank 3.2 beer in the county taverns outside the dry town.

Dean dressed a bit more Ivy League than the Wooster standard. He majored in political science, organized a pre-law club and took part in Young Republican affairs. The big issues on campus were compulsory chapel and faculty charper-ones.

"The Wooster faculty was about 75 per cent Democratic, and the student body, drawing on upper-class Presbyterian families was at least 75 per cent Republican, recalled Dr. John W. Baker, who was Dean's departmental chairman. "The Democrats on the faculty were upset that kids were not really uptight about politics. They pretty much accepted the Republicanism of their parents."

Baker supervised John Dean's senior thesis, a 15,000 word treatise on political novelists, and remembers him as "an above average student, not a Phi Beta Kappa, but a good strong student. I had no doubt John would be a success at whatever he set out to do."

As a senior, Dean was a

leading participant in the punch-and-cookies seminars which Professor Baker held at his home. "He talked well," the teacher recalled "but I don't recall John ever being antagonistic on anything."

Stewart remembers his roommate's easy facility for keeping up. "He did a lot of reading," he said, "but he didn't have to do all the required course work because he could go in and get his grades if he wanted to."

Dean studied political style with some intensity, according to Stewart, and was particularly upset watching the 1960 campaign debates between his man, Nixon, and the Democrat, Kennedy.

"Look at that ass Nixon," Dean exclaimed at one point, but Stewart says the remark was more sympathetic frustration than scorn.

"He got very upset because Nixon came off so poorly," Stewart explained.

In 1961, John Dean came to the capital, first to study at American University then take a law degree at Georgetown. He worked summers as a very popular lifeguard at the Towers, an apartment building on Cathedral Avenue, and he married one of the residents, Karlan Hennings, daughter of the late Democratic senator from Missouri, Tom Hennings. A son was born, John Dean IV, but the marriage ended in divorce three years ago. Dean married

again last fall, the former Maureen Kane.

After Dean was graduated from Georgetown in 1965, he was well positioned for a capital career. He joined Welch & Morgan, a firm specializing in federal communications law, and sprinkled a few scholarly articles in various bar journals.

One of them, on reapportionment, appearing in the Oklahoma Bar Journal, employed a stilted prose which sounds like it was translated from German. "Be this problem as it may, the Supreme Court's position is clear," he wrote.

Another in the Federal communications Bar Journal reviewed the federal law on political broadcasting, and John Dean, future presidential aide, worried about the lopsided advantage available to an incumbent President under the "equal time" rules.

"Whatever the President says or does is a major news story," Dean observed. "It cannot be expected that the broadcaster make equal time available for every comment or story released from the White House, but some steps might be taken to remedy the severely handicapped party out of office." He did not pursue that problem once the White House was in Republican hands.

Dean's tenure as a practicing private attorney was brief and blighted. Six months after he joined the firm, a senior partner accused him of dabbling in a TV license application in competition with one of the firm's clients. He was fired, quietly.

"He had the traits that were liked," said Thomas F. Ging, a young Chicago lawyer who was junior to Dean then. "Ambitious, inquisitive, intense. He really impressed me. So when this thing came up, I was shocked."

Ging, like others around Washington, asks: "How did he get from the ashes of the Welch & Morgan debacle to the zenith of the White House?"

The answer, it seems, was pluck and luck. Through the offices of Ohio Rep. William M. McGulloch, ranking Republican on the House Judiciary Committee, Dean joined the small but lively staff of young lawyers who were fashioning anti-crime issues for the GOP minority. All of them went on to important positions in the Nixon administration—but Dean went the furthest.

"John's guiding ambition in life was to succeed," said one associate from those days, whose bitterness is rather frank. "I've never been able to see anything there, some principles, some

guiding ideas. If he has any, I haven't seen them"

As this fellow Republican lawyer describes it, Dean's service for the congressional Republicans was mainly "self-promoting."

"He took crime control before it was a popular subject," the ex-colleague recalled. "He picked our brains constantly and ran to the boss, 'Say hey, look at me, I got a hot idea.' We resented it. He'd never been in a criminal court in his life."

In those pre-Nixon days, Dean also served a stint on the staff of the National Commission on Reform of Federal Criminal Law, where he left a Kindler impression. Theodore Vorhees, a lawyer who was a commission member, recalled that liberal staffers first feared Dean's appointment because of his conservative congressional sponsors, but they were soon impressed by his hard work and spirit of cooperation.

"His point of view was somewhat more conservative," said Vorhees, "but in no time flat, he had worked into a partnership relationship with the rest of the staff."

When Mr. Nixon won in 1968 and a bond lawyer from New York named John N. Mitchell became Attorney General, the new administration naturally turned to Capitol Hill for the names of bright young lawyers. During the campaign, Dean and the others had served as a conduit for congressional views on issues, so their names were already famil-

iar. John Dean became associate deputy attorney general for legislation.

A Justice Department colleague remembers, again, a certain talent for the main chance. "John was peddling himself whenever he could," the man said. "He picked up the drug issue. He personally persuaded the AG to let him go around the country selling the federal model drug act. He loved that."

Dean was also at the side of Deputy Attorney General Richard D. Kleindienst in the tense days of November, 1969, negotiating with anti-war groups on the mammoth demonstrations of that period.

On July 27, 1970, he became counsel to the President. But the title makes the job sound bigger than it was. His predecessor was John Ehrlichman, who was terribly powerful, but when Ehrlichman moved on to head the President's Domestic Council, the position lost most of its clout.

By Dean's own description, his job was to "fight fires," collecting the legal footnotes to back up a White House position on "executive privilege" or arranging the paperwork on the President's personal finances.

"Those boys Haldeman and Ehrlichman didn't want anything other than a lieutenant," said one administration official. "They wanted a guy who would do it, not a guy who would say no."

He kept in the background. Once last year, when the Senate was dig-



Newsweek

Former White House counsel John W. Dean III, to testify this week, and wife Maureen.

ging into the ITT antitrust controversy, Dean was in the hallway advising administration witnesses. A news

reporter chased him down the corridor, but Dean ducked out of sight in the Vice President's office.

The big fire-fighting job was putting out the Watergate, but the blaze got out of hand.