



By JACK ANDERSON



WASHINGTON — At the center of the Watergate web, investigators now believe, is the deposed White House major domo H.R. Haldeman. Most of the strings in the Watergate tangle seem to lead back to him.

String No. 1 — Most of the men implicated in the scandal belonged to his tight little circle. Such key Watergate figures as John Dean, Jeb Magruder, Dwight Chapin and Gordon Strachan reported directly to him.

String No. 2 — Haldeman was such a meticulous manager, investigators have concluded, that the Watergate operation couldn't have occurred without his knowledge. He stayed behind the scenes, using loyal aides to do the dirty work. He kept them on such a tight leash, as one insider put it, that "they couldn't sneeze without his permission." During a presidential appearance that Chapin scheduled, for instance, another aide asked Chapin to arrange for President Nixon to walk five feet out of his way to greet an important labor leader. Chapin said he couldn't do it without Haldeman's approval.

String No. 3 — Jeb Magruder has told prosecutors that ex-Attorney General John Mitchell opposed the Waterbugging, although he went along reluctantly in the end. It was Dean, according to Magruder, who kept insisting on going ahead with the scheme. Dean, in turn, has said he took his directions from Haldeman.

String No. 4 — Haldeman controlled a \$350,000 cash fund that apparently was used to bribe the Watergate defendants to keep their mouths shut. The money was delivered by Haldeman's assistant, Gordon Strachan, to the apartment of campaign aide Fred LaRue. Like the others, LaRue was also a Haldeman loyalist.

Not long after the Waterbuggers were arrested, our White House sources tipped us off that the plot had Haldeman's imprint all over it. Although these sources had demonstrated their reliability in the past, we knew they disliked Haldeman

intensely. We therefore investigated cautiously and could find no direct Haldeman involvement.

But we were able to report on August 22, 1972, that Haldeman was calling the political shots for President Nixon. "Operating out of the White House on government salary," we wrote, "Haldeman has tried to remain the invisible man of the campaign.

"But we have established that most of the important campaign decisions have come through him. . . . Haldeman issues political directives, approves campaign contracts, receives political reports and coordinates campaign activities. . . . Those on the inside say he is the most powerful man in the 1972 campaign, second only to the President himself."

It took us until February 25, 1973, before we could link Haldeman's name for the first time to Watergate. Still, we could only report that "the Watergate tracks (lead) right up to Haldeman's door." We noted that FBI agents had been forbidden from questioning him. "Yet," we wrote, "they were able to trace Watergate clues to Haldeman aides, who never make a move without asking Haldeman."

Then we described how he operated. "Haldeman exercises his power," we reported, "from behind the scenes, carefully

staying in the darkest part of the President's shadow. He has surrounded himself with bright, disciplined, younger men who don't question his instructions.

"He deliberately brought them to the White House from comparative obscurity, with few political ties, and, therefore, less risk of divided loyalties. Their loyalty to Haldeman, say our sources, exceeds even their allegiance to the President."

DIAGNOSIS OF HALDEMAN — Haldeman has been described in news accounts as a pragmatist, a managerial type, who was more interested in efficiency than ideology. This is not the impression we get. On the contrary, he has strong convictions, which he sought to impose upon the country.

Like the President, Haldeman grew up in California when it was still the golden state, with orange groves, clean air and a feeling it was indeed the land of promise. His grandfather migrated to California early in the century, made a small fortune as a building supply dealer and started the Better America Foundation in 1922. Haldeman's father, echoing the religious fundamentalism of Nixon's Quaker mother, devoted considerable energy to the Salvation Army.

There has been no hint that Haldeman pocketed any of the campaign cash that passed through his hands. He used it strictly to gain political power and achieve political goals.

Those who know Haldeman describe him as the sort of ideologue who would violate the law to achieve law and order. He believes fiercely in the rightness of the Nixon cause. To this end, Haldeman sought to bolster the power of the White House.

He spoke privately of "one-man rule," of President Nixon's "right" to run the country. As Haldeman saw it, the President was the only official elected by all the people. Haldeman felt this gave Richard Nixon a mandate, particularly after the 1972 landslide, to set the nation's policies and, if necessary, to ride roughshod over Congress, whose members individually represented limited constituencies.

The President, in turn, delegated much of his power to Haldeman. Explained a White House source: "The President had a dread that the demands of office would leave him no time to think. Bob Haldeman freed the President from the details that otherwise would drain his time."