

Watergate Data Destruction Charged

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Following the Watergate break-in, two of President Nixon's top campaign officials directed a massive "house cleaning" in which financial records were destroyed and staff members were told to "close ranks" in preparing a public response to the incident, according to sources.

The two campaign officials were identified by the sources as former Assistant Attorney General Robert C. Maridian, now political coordinator of the Nixon re-election committee, and Frederick La Rue, a former White House counsel to the President and special assistant to the director of the Nixon campaign.

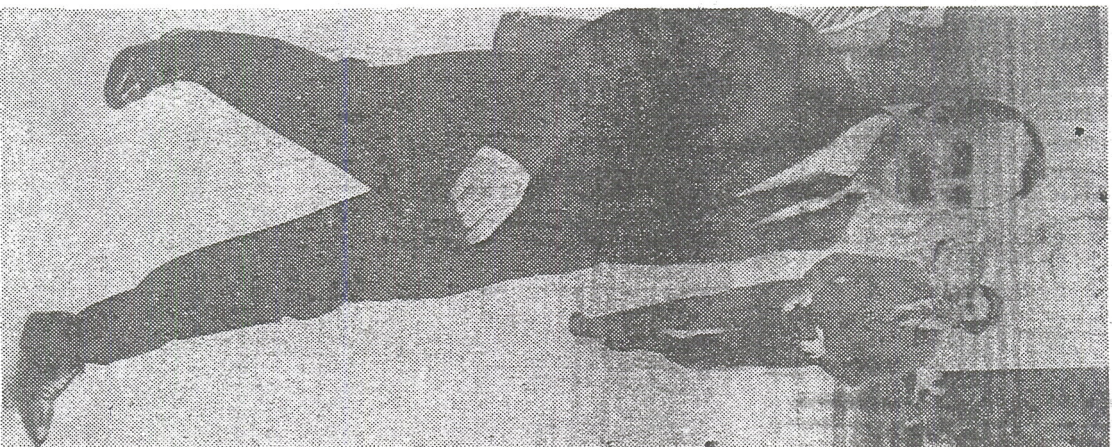
A spokesman for the Committee for the Re-election of the President said the committee would have no response other than to say that the sources of The Washington Post are "a fountain of misinformation."

The sources said "house-cleaning" resulted after Maridian and La Rue were instructed by John N. Mitchell, then campaign chairman, to take charge of developing the committee's response to the bugging at the Watergate June 17.

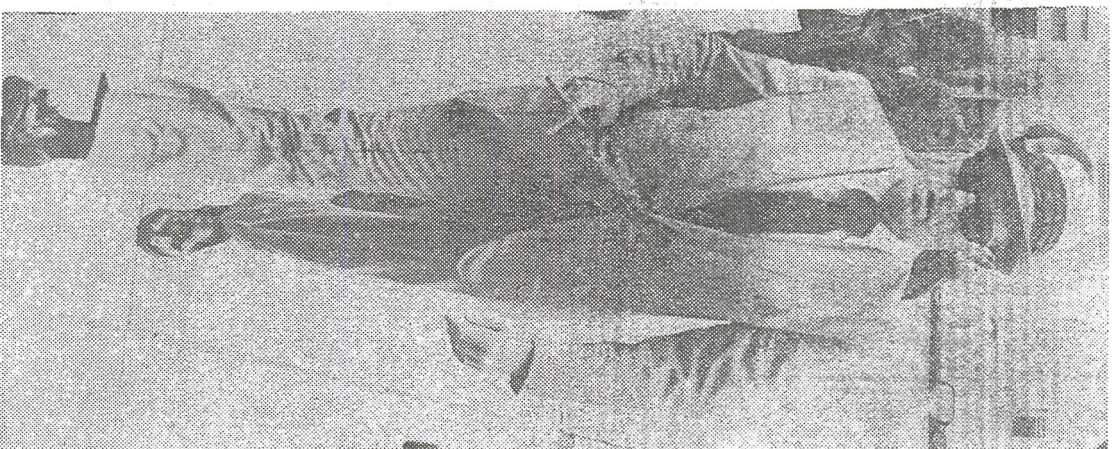
The destroyed records, according to law enforcement and Nixon committee sources, included the following:

- Memos describing wire-tapped telephone conversations

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Photos by Joe Heiberger—The Washington Post
Ex-White House aides G. Gordon Liddy ...



... and E. Howard Hunt at District Court
for arraignment. Story is on Page A10.

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tions of Democratic Party officials at the Watergate. The memos each began with the phrase "Confidential informant says," thereby making it possible that those who read them did not necessarily realize the contents had come from wiretapping.

• A list showing that three top Nixon campaign officials withdrew about \$300,000 from a secret fund earmarked for especially sensitive political projects — including intelligence gathering about the Democrats. The three officials, all ex-White House aides, are Jeb Stuart Magruder, deputy director of the Nixon re-election committee; Herbert L. Porter, scheduling director of the campaign; and G. Gordon Liddy, the former finance counsel of the Nixon committee. (Liddy was indicted with six other persons last week on charges of conspiring to bug the headquarters of the Democratic National Committee inside the Watergate.)

• As many as seven ledger books listing campaign contributors and the amount they gave before April 7, the effective date of a new federal election disclosure law requiring full public accounting of all contributions and expenditures. (Previously, it has been reported that these records were destroyed in April.)

The re-election committee's response was controlled by not permitting anyone to talk to the news media without specific clearance and by drafting all press releases about the Watergate incident with extra care.

Stern warnings were issued to the staff not to talk with representatives of the news media.

In large part because of this "housecleaning," it has taken three months for these details to come to light.

Committee spokesmen do not contest the existence of the memos made from the al-

leged wiretapping, although several top campaign officials have denied receiving them.

As for the secret fund, its existence was reported and labeled an election disclosure law violation by the General Accounting Office, the investigative arm of Congress. The GAO said the fund, which apparently varied in size, amounted to \$350,000 on May 25. Spokesmen for the Nixon campaign have never described the purpose of the fund except to say that it was used for legal purposes.

According to the sources, Mardian and LaRue were told by John N. Mitchell, then the Nixon campaign manager, to take charge of developing the Committee's response to the bugging incident.

This included dealing internally with committee staff members.

On the Monday (June 19) after the incident, a number of meetings were called to tell the committee staff that the top officials had nothing to do with the incident.

At one such meeting, Liddy made a brief speech denying any knowledge of the Watergate bugging. He blamed James W. McCord Jr., the security chief of the Nixon committee who was arrested during the Watergate break-in, describes him as a "bad apple."

Among those who participated in the destruction of committee records, according to Nixon campaign employees, was Robert Odle, the personnel director of the re-election committee.

Following the arrest of five persons inside the Watergate at 2:30 a.m. on June 17, sources reported, Odle spent virtually the remainder of the weekend moving from office to office inside the headquarters of the Committee for the Re-election of the President at 1701 Pennsylvania Ave. NW.

Some sources said Odle's weekend activities constituted an "inventorying" of what was contained in committee files, and that no records were ac-

tually destroyed until after Mardian and LaRue returned from a West Coast trip on Monday, June 19

Other sources, however, said that Odle removed records that weekend from McCord's office.

"Everytime Rob (Odle) would go into McCord's office he would order everybody else out of the area," said one source.

Later, when the FBI began looking at committee records in its investigation of the Watergate bugging, it was Odle who directed investigators from office to office, according to several sources.

During the week following the break-in, said one source, "Mardian and LaRue went looking around for information that might be incriminating," including memos and "records of payments to people." By the time FBI agents arrived in the company of Odle, the relevant records had been destroyed, the sources said.

People known to have information about the destroyed records were advised by Mardian, La Rue and others "to stay away from certain areas" when being questioned

by investigators, said another source.

Some employees who worked in offices where records were destroyed suddenly received unexpected promotions, including aides to McCord and employees in the finance division, several sources said.

"We were never told in so many words, 'Don't talk,' said a committee employee. "It was always, 'Hold ranks,' or, 'keep the ship together.'"

Steps were taken to insulate the Nixon campaign staff from the press. Sally Harmony, who had served as Liddy's secretary, became Odle's secretary and told a reporter: "I'm under strict instructions from the committee not to talk to anybody. You'll have to call the press office if you want to know anything."

Another employee of an office where records were destroyed complained of being followed recently to a luncheon appointment with an old friend who happened to be a reporter. The reporter expressed skepticism but that afternoon the employee phoned back to say a superior had asked questions about the lunch conversation.



Photos by Joe Heiberser—The Washington Post

Five of the seven defendants in the Watergate case arrive at the U.S. District Courthouse with lawyers.