

Mitchell failed to 'admit guilt'

F. Poole
10-22-74

WASHINGTON (AP) — John W. Dean III testified Monday that he and other senior White House aides decided in March 1973 that to solve their Watergate problems, John N. Mitchell would have to admit his guilt for the break-in at the Democratic National Committee.

Dean said on his fourth day on the witness stand at the Watergate cover-up trial that the idea lapsed when neither H.R. Haldeman nor John D. Ehrlichman proposed to Mitchell that he take blame as planned.

Mitchell, a former attorney general, Haldeman and Ehrlichman are among five defendants at the trial.

Dean said a meeting on March 22, 1973, was called where either Ehrlichman or Haldeman was to suggest that Mitchell "step forward and account for activities prior to June 17."

The original Watergate burglars were caught at Democratic National Committee Headquarters on June 17, 1972.

In answer to questions from prosecutor James F. Neal, Dean testified that he and other White House officials were hopeful "that would eliminate investigation of activities after June 17."

Earlier, Dean testified that he had proposed on March 21 that Mitchell "admit his guilt" for the break-in.

Meanwhile, the jury heard a sixth White House tape in which former President Richard M. Nixon declares on the afternoon of March 22, "We're going to protect our people, if we can."

The jurors heard Nixon say in a flat emotionless tone to Mitchell:

"I want you all to stonewall it, let them plead the Fifth Amendment, cover-up or anything else, if it'll save it — save the plan. That's the whole point."

William G. Hundley, Mitchell's lawyer, had earlier made an

unsuccessful attempt to bar the jury from hearing portions of the March 22 tape, on grounds that Dean was present for only part of the meeting it records.

U.S. District Judge John J. Sirica, however, denied that effort, allowing Dean from the stand to say that no one entered or left Nixon's Executive Office Building office once Nixon and Mitchell continued a meeting only among themselves.

After the 15th day of the trial, Dean was scheduled to return Tuesday for more prosecution questioning, expected to last 1½ hours.

Mitchell, Haldeman and Ehrlichman are among the five defendants in the cover-up trial.

In addition to Dean's testimony Monday, the jury heard a fifth White House tape in which Nixon talks at a meeting with Haldeman, Dean and Ehrlichman about how to handle the various Watergate investigations, which were growing closer and closer to the White House.

The tape records a late afternoon March 21, 1973, meeting at which Dean proposes that White House aides be immunized from prosecution and then go before a grand jury.

Although the meeting ends inconclusively, Nixon and Ehrlichman oppose Dean's idea in favor of sending Dean to write a general report which they hope will satisfy Watergate investigators.

On the tape, previously made public by the House Judiciary Committee, Haldeman cautions that immunizing White House aides from prosecution would result in "a hue and cry from White House critics who would say 'this is just a super cover-up.'"

Lawyers for Mitchell sought to block the jury from hearing portions of the final White House tape to be introduced in connection with Dean's testimony.