

Nixon wanted FBI probe slowed

WASHINGTON (AP) — Watergate prosecutors traced Monday how former President Richard M. Nixon and his aides tried to get top Central Intelligence Agency officials to convince the FBI to rein in its investigation of the break-in at Democratic National Committee headquarters.

Lt. Gen. Vernon A. Walters, deputy director of the CIA, and L. Patrick Gray III, former acting head of the FBI, testified at the session of the Watergate cover-up trial in which a tape was played of Nixon agreeing that the FBI probe had to be brought under control.

At the same time, the Supreme Court let stand a lower court decision rejecting a motion by former White House staff chief H.R. Haldeman to strike down the indictments of the men charged in the coverup. Haldeman had contended the grand jury was not legally in existence when the indictments were handed down.

The Watergate prosecutors played tape segments of three meetings between Nixon and Haldeman on June 23, 1972, six days after the break-in.

Between the second and third meetings, Haldeman and John D. Ehrlichman met with Walters and Richard Helms, then CIA director, and Haldeman instructed Walters to tell Gray that FBI attempts to trace money found on the Watergate burglars could

compromise covert CIA activities in Mexico.

When defense attorneys tried to block a portion of Gray's testimony about his subsequent meeting with Walters, prosecutor James F. Neal argued that "these are the obstructive words ... there is no other way you can show the clear agency from Haldeman to the former President of the United States to Ehrlichman to Walters to Gray, and that is obstruction. We've got to be able to show the very words that obstructed the FBI investigation for two weeks in this case."

Referring to the message Walters carried to Gray, Neal said, "They (the FBI) weren't about to uncover anything except a plot to bug Democratic National Committee headquarters."

During his first meeting with Nixon, Haldeman advised the then president that the FBI investigation of the break-in "is now leading into some productive areas, because they've been able to trace the money."

He suggested that Gray be told that there was CIA involvement that had to be protected.

Nixon agreed and told Haldeman, "You call them in ... Play it tough ... Don't lie to them to the extent to say there is no involvement, but just say this is sort of a comedy of errors ... and that they should call the FBI in and say that

we wish for the country, don't go any further into this case, period."

A few minutes before the meeting with Walters and Helms, Nixon and Haldeman met again and the president was heard to say on the tape, "It's likely to blow the whole, uh, Bay of Pigs thing which we think would be very unfortunate for CIA and for the country at this time, and for American foreign policy, and he just better tough it and lay it on them."

Immediately after the meeting, Haldeman reported to Nixon that "it's no problem."

Haldeman, Ehrlichman, former Atty. Gen. John N. Mitchell, former Asst. Atty. Gen. Robert C. Mardian, and Kenneth W. Parkinson, one-time attorney for Nixon's re-election committee, are on trial on charges of conspiring to obstruct the Watergate investigation.

Nixon was named an unindicted co-conspirator by the grand jury that brought charges against the other five.

Gray testified that he received a telephone call on June 23 from John W. Dean III, then White House counsel, who told him, "It was pretty important I talk to Gen. Walters, that he had something to tell me."