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Ehrlichman on witness stand

WASHINGTON (AP) — John D. Ehrlichman testified Monday that shortly after the Watergate break-in, former President Nixon accused the Central Intelligence Agency of conducting its own cover-up by refusing to seek limits on the first investigation of the matter.

Becoming the third of five Watergate cover-up defendants to take the stand, Ehrlichman quoted Nixon as saying he did not believe high-ranking officials of the CIA.

Ehrlichman's lawyer, William S. Frates, said Nixon lied to Ehrlichman in part to insure Ehrlichman's continued participation in the cover-up.

Ehrlichman, former White House domestic affairs chief, recounted the meetings he had with Nixon on July 6, 1972, at the former president's San Clemente, Calif., estate.

By that time, CIA leaders had informed the FBI that no intelligence resources in Mexico would be jeopardized by a full-scale investigation of Watergate.

"The President said to me in short that he doubted that assurance," Ehrlichman testified. "He believed Gen. Walters was in effect covering up CIA activities."

The 49-year-old Ehrlichman quoted Nixon as saying that despite what the CIA said, Nixon believed "a vigorous FBI investigation could uncover confidential and secret CIA activities to the detriment of the CIA and national security."

CIA deputy director Gen. Vernon A. Walters has testified that at the request of defendant H. R. Haldeman, the FBI was asked to limit its investigation into money used to finance the original June 17, 1972, break-in. Later, Walters testified that the FBI was told no CIA interests were involved.

Walters said he told then-acting FBI Director L. Patrick Gray III he wasn't going to allow "those kids at the White House" to push him around.

Previous testimony has shown

Ehrlichman ordered Gray not to hold the meeting with various FBI and CIA officials in the weeks following the break-in.

Ehrlichman acknowledged that on the stand, but said his order cancelling the meeting had nothing to do with limiting the Watergate investigation.

Instead, Ehrlichman said he was concerned about Mark Felt, now a retired FBI official, then suspected of leaking information to the newspapers.

Ehrlichman said he was worried that the contents of the meeting would become public if Felt attended.

Ehrlichman testified that not until the date of the original break-in did he have any knowledge of its planning or execution.

Earlier, Ehrlichman's lawyer, Frates, had complained that limiting his witness list was denying Ehrlichman a fair trial.

At the request of Watergate prosecutors, U.S. District Judge John J. Sirica has declined to allow the jury to hear all or part of the testimony of four of Ehrlichman's witnesses.