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G. Gordon Liddy leaving U.S. District Court Sept. 19 after pleading innocent to charges of breaking into Democratic headquarters at the Watergate.

Gordon Liddy: Cowboy On the Potomac

By Michael Kernan

In his FBI days, G. Gordon Liddy — now under indictment on charges of conspiring to bug the Democratic headquarters at the Watergate—once “bailed out of a moving car and outdrew” (as he put it) a most-wanted fugitive and captured him. Another time he broke up a mugging in Washington, took on seven attackers and broke his shoulder. He shot off a gun in a courtroom once, often carried a gun, and had a pellet pistol with him in an attache case during the Watergate surveillance, according to a government witness.

“Gordon’s a cowboy,” commented John S. Dyson, his Democratic opponent in a 1968 Dutchess County, N.Y., congressional race.

“I think Gordon’s a romantic. He wanted to go back to the days when men were men and life was simpler; he had a longing after the simpler days.”

Dyson debated Liddy in and around Poughkeepsie after the Republican nominee and eventual winner, Hamilton Fish Jr., refused to face Liddy. Beaten in the GOP primary, Liddy ran as a Conservative, supported by the right-wing United Republicans of America.

An ad in Liddy’s law-and-order campaign said: “He knows the answer is Law and Order, not weak-kneed sociology. Gordon Liddy doesn’t bail them out—he puts them in. . . .”

Three months before the election Liddy took himself out of the race and

announced he would campaign for Fish. Two months after that Liddy was named Dutchess County chairman of Citizens for Nixon-Agnew. The following April he came to Washington as special assistant to the Secretary of the Treasury.

Friction soon developed over the gun issue. Assistant Secretary Eugene Rossides was working on gun-control legislation, but Liddy—a National Rifle Association member rated as an expert pistol shot—took to holding private conferences with Justice Department officials and with opponents of gun control.

The break came, according to an Evans and Novak column, after Liddy spoke at the 100th anniversary of the NRA on April 4, 1971, praising the rifle lobby’s work and offering congratulations from the Nixon administration. Evans and Novak said the speech was made without authorization or approval and that as a result Liddy was fired in July. 77

A Rossides aide, asked about the columnists’ allegations, said, “We refused to comment on it at the time and that’s still the posture we’re taking, since Liddy’s under indictment. For your guidance, I will say it wasn’t all as zippy as they said. There was a mutual discussion of his leaving; it was some thing that both sides wanted.”

In any case, Liddy was picked up immediately by the White House and on

See LIDDY, E3, Col. 5



A poster from G. Gordon Liddy's 1968 primary campaign for a congressional seat from Dutchess County, N.Y.

Liddy: Cowboy on the Potomac

LIDDY, From E1

July 19, 1971, went to work in the office of the President's domestic affairs adviser, John Erlichman. Shortly after that, in December, he was recommended to the Committee for the Re-election of the President as counsel for a salary of \$22,800 after taxes.

"The kind of work I was doing there? My Lord," Liddy said in a telephone interview before his indictment. "Well, I was told to become thoroughly familiar with the new federal election campaign act of 1971. Then I was shifted downstairs as counsel to the finance committee, and that was my assignment until my services terminated on June 28 (1972)."

On that date, 11 days after the arrests at the Watergate, Liddy was fired from the campaign upon refusing to answer questions posed by the FBI on the alleged bugging. In September a federal grand jury indicted him on charges on conspiring to steal documents and eavesdrop at the Democratic headquarters.

A source close to the Watergate investigation said that Liddy and E. Howard Hunt had been inside the building at the time of the June 17 break-in but had escaped. Liddy spent some time in the motel room across the street where eavesdropping equipment was installed, according to a government witness.

Since the indictment, information about Gordon Liddy has been notably hard to come by. Liddy himself, reached at his Oxon Hill home, politely declined comment "because if I gave one interview I'd have to give them to everyone." He said he knew of nothing embarrassing about his life but urged the reporter to call his attorney, Peter Maroulis, for all information.

"There was plenty of money and power on the other side in that '68 election," he said, "and if there was anything to dig up they would have. I have clearances so high that the name (of the clearer) itself is classified. Anything like running around or drugs or drinking — I can't afford it." He chuckled pleasantly and ended the conversation.

Maroulis, reached in his Poughkeepsie office (where Liddy practiced law briefly after the '68 defeat), said, "I'm particularly reluctant to make any statement to the press because of the court order . . . Sorry, I can't assist you in any way."

Liddy's father, Sylvester J. Liddy, 72, senior partner in a Manhattan law firm and a graduate, like his son, of St. Benedict's Preparatory School in New-

ark, Fordham University and Fordham Law School, could not be reached at his office. His secretary said he was at an all-day conference uptown.

However, when the Liddy home in West Caldwell, N.J., was called minutes later, and Mrs. Liddy Sr. answered, she was interrupted by her husband, who had been listening on an extension. He said, "My son has asked me to help in preparing his defense, so I am not going to give out any statement whatsoever."

Neighbors of Liddy—who lives with his wife, Frances, and five children, ranging in age from 9 to 14, in a new suburban Maryland development—either hung up immediately or spoke with caution. The 2-year-old Liddy home is in the \$40,000-\$50,000 range, a gray half-brick colonial with blue shutters. The children go to public school and Mrs. Liddy teaches in a nearby elementary school. The three Liddy sons are active in boy's club baseball and a swimming team. There is a new puppy and several cats.

Liddy, a Roman Catholic, was married in 1957. An active marksman and gun collector for years, he also is interested in flying and is working on his license.

Erstwhile opponent Dyson found him "very aggressive, hardworking, tense, hyperadrenaloid and bitterly anti-Communist," and noted that he never seemed able to relax during the campaign, and could not be easy with his rivals even on the last day.

Dyson said, "he talked of bombing the dikes and pushing the war in Vietnam. He was antiblack, antipoor, reminded me of the younger Nixon, heavy beard and all. This Watergate thing didn't surprise me at all."

The present Dutchess County district attorney, Albert M. Rosenblatt, commented after the Watergate incident:

"When he worked as an assistant DA it became apparent that his most singular quality was his extraordinary ambition. I was to learn more of this later when we became rivals for the office of district attorney. It was a characteristic that one had to respect, for it was combined with great intensity and persistence. His attaining national fame or notoriety was absolutely predictable."

Liddy was born in New York City Nov. 30, 1930. Between his 1952 BS degree at Fordham and his 1957 law degree, he served in an Army artillery unit in Korea, emerging in 1954 as a first lieutenant.

Becoming an FBI field agent, he served in Indiana, Denver and finally Washington as a bureau supervisor, and left the bureau in 1962.

It was in Denver that Liddy arrested at gunpoint one of two persons in history to be on the 10-most-wanted list twice, Ernest Tait.

After four years of law practice with his father in New York, he became assistant district attorney for Dutchess County when the drug problem was first appearing there. Active in the war on drugs, he spoke often on the subject and led a raid on Timothy Leary's headquarters in the area.

The interest in drugs carried through to his Treasury days, when he campaigned for Operation Intercept, the Mexican marijuana blockade (a colleague: Hunt), by speaking to municipal groups along the 2,000-mile border from Brownsville, Tex., to San Diego. He also worked on an explosives control act.

Shortly after he moved to Washington in 1969 he ran into the mugging on Rhode Island Avenue.

As Liddy told the story, "If you're looking for color . . . I walked out and there were three fellows mugging another fellow. I chased them and they went to 14th Street—I didn't know about D.C. yet—they ran there and had some friends. I got in a fight with about seven of them and got my shoulder broken."

The courtroom shooting involved an apparently empty revolver that had been introduced as evidence. Wanting to make the point that an empty shell casing containing live primer could still be a threat, Liddy inserted such a shell in the gun and, during his summation, fired it.

"The poor court reporter fell off the stool," he said later. "The judge called me in and said why hadn't I asked permission. I said, 'Judge, if I had asked permission would you have let me do it?'"

Dutchess County Judge Raymond Baratta said of the incident, "I reprimanded him. He was a real gentleman; he would come in and apologize whenever anything like that happened, but it didn't deter him."

Baratta added that he had never known Liddy to carry a gun in the courtroom and that as judge he wouldn't have permitted it anyway. On the other hand, another judge, former Dutchess County District Attorney John R. Heilman Jr., said Liddy "used to pack a gun in city court and when going out on investigations."

Romantic, freewheeler, cowboy or not, Gordon Liddy saves his press notices, friends say. The reason: He wants his children to be able to read the whole story when they are older and decide for themselves what the excitement was all about.