

Kleindienst Steps Out of Bugging Case

By George Lardner Jr.
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Assistant Attorney General Henry E. Petersen has been given "full responsibilities" for the Watergate investigation and will report directly to President Nixon.

He took over the case Sunday from Attorney General Richard G. Kleindienst, who announced yesterday that he was withdrawing from the case because of information involving new suspects "with whom I have had a close personal and professional relationship . . ."

Petersen's appointment, the Justice Department said, eliminates the need for a special prosecutor to direct the government's case. Petersen does not have "a close personal and professional

relationship with people that appear to be involved," according to Jack W. Hushen, the Justice Department's director of public information.

Kleindienst announced that he was disqualifying himself in a short statement yesterday morning. Mr. Nixon had announced Tuesday—following a weekend meeting with Kleindienst and Petersen—that a renewed investigation in the past month had turned up "major developments."

The Attorney General said:

"Having been advised on Sunday, April 15, 1973, of information which relates to persons with whom I have

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had a close personal and professional relationship, I concluded on that date that it would be entirely inappropriate for me to exercise control over the sensitive matters being developed by the Department of Justice in connection with the Watergate investigation.

"Accordingly, I recused myself from participation in any phase of the investigation and I requested on that date that Assistant Attorney General Henry E. Petersen exercise full responsibilities in this matter.

"Assistant Attorney General Petersen is responsible only to the President."

Hushen said the announcement simply formalized the arrangement that has been in effect. "Henry Petersen's been in charge all along," he said.

The Justice Department spokesman added that any new prosecutions that result will be handled by the U.S. attorney's team here under prosecutor Earl J. Silbert—with Petersen maintaining overall direction of the case.



HENRY E. PETERSEN
... now in charge

A Justice Department careerist and former FBI agent, Petersen has also been mentioned as a possible candidate for FBI director since Mr. Nixon withdrew L. Patrick Gray's nomination earlier this month.

Petersen has been in charge of the Criminal Division at Justice since January, 1972, succeeding Will Wil-

son, who had resigned several months earlier. The new assistant attorney general subsequently came under criticism in connection with the Justice Department's handling of allegations of improper conduct by U.S. Attorney Harry D. Steward of San Diego.

The issue cropped up during Senate confirmation hearings last year on Kleindienst's appointment. Steward had come under attack for quashing a subpoena issued to a close political friend of Steward's during a grand jury investigation in San Diego of contributions to Mr. Nixon's 1968 campaign.

As deputy attorney general, Kleindienst had issued a statement in 1971 declaring that the charges had been thoroughly investigated and that "no wrongdoing" had been found. But during his confirmation hearings, Kleindienst said he had never read the FBI report on the controversy.

Drawn into the dispute, Petersen said he had been involved in the administrative inquiry of Steward's

conduct, which Petersen called "highly improper."

Petersen, however, defended the Justice Department's clearing of Steward as in the best interests of the department, which was then approaching the prosecution of a major tax case in southern California.

Correction

In a story in yesterday's editions, The Washington Post erroneously said that John N. Mitchell, former chairman of the Committee for the Re-election of the President, is a defendant in the \$6.4 million Democratic lawsuit over the Watergate break-in of Democratic Party headquarters.

The defendants are James W. McCord Jr., and the six other men convicted of conspiracy in the Watergate case; the Committee for the Re-election of the President; the Finance Committee to Re-elect the President and its chairman, Maurice H. Stans; McCord Associates, James McCord's firm; Jeb Stuart Ma-gruder, former deputy director of CRP; Herbert L. Porter and Hugh W. Sloan Jr., CRP aides.