

By Mary McGrory
Washington Star-News

Washington

John W. Dean III says, and his voice is steady, "I know what I know. I want the truth to emerge. It won't hurt my hide. I've never given serious consideration to going to jail."

The former counsel to President Nixon spends his days in his Alexandria, Va., riverfront house, with a blond shag rug on the floor and music pouring out of the wall, behind drawn curtains and lowered blinds against the television crews who keep perpetual watch on his front door.

Until a month ago, he says, he subscribed to the White House attitude toward the Watergate.

"I joined and lived in the myth that it would all go away. I hoped it would but I didn't believe it."

APPEARANCE

Dean is 34, the picture of a proper young Republican, with regular features and little humor. His sun-bleached hair is just a little longer than the White House standard. He has luminous brown eyes and he blinks a lot when he talks. It seems more habit or ingratiating than nerves.

His pretty round-eyed blonde wife, Maureen, sits with him in the perpetual twilight. One of his lawyers, Robert McCandless, is on hand. Dean is ready to review his Washington career, but steers clear of "testimonial matters."

The first time he met the President was in 1967 — "a real fast handshaker." It was at the Republican National Committee policy meeting, where Dean, a young man on the rise, was explaining the potential of the law-and-order issue.

The last time they met was at a tense oval room encounter, when Dean observed that he did not think "it has to come to impeachment" and the President

dismissed him with a pleasantry about "your pretty bride."

STRUGGLE

Dean is now regarded as an engine of impeachment and he and Richard Nixon are locked in a struggle over immunity. Claiming little involvement and much knowledge, Dean has won immunity Senate Watergate committee, but the government prosecutors are resisting, on the ground that they can get indictments, possibly of Dean himself, without the grant.

Dean had wanted to be a writer. He studied Colgate

and at Wooster College in his native Ohio. He came to Washington on a seminar program, got hooked on government and stayed on to study law at Georgetown. His first job was with the minority staff of the House Judiciary Committee, and he developed there and later at the Crime Commission a reputation as a useful speech writer and researcher who knew just what Republican orators needed.

"I would still like to be a writer," Dean said. "Maybe I will write a book," he added, as counsel McCandless hooted. "I love to play with words and twist phrases. I always play scrabble."

When he was first asked to join the Nixon team, in December, 1969, by Richard Kleindienst who was "staffing up" the Justice Department, Dean demurred.

"I'm too young," he protested.

USE

But Kleindienst and John Mitchell, the attorney general who last week was indicted in the Vesco case, prevailed on him, and his boyish comeliness and smooth talk prompted his superiors to use him out front, as a negotiator with peace groups, as a White House briefer on crime legislation.

But he was not, he says, despite copious press accounts, a protege of John Mitchell.

"I was never close to him," he says. "You know he smokes a pipe, but it was always in his mouth and it was hard to know how he reacted to anything."

When in June, 1971, "suddenly out of the blue," Egil Krogh Jr., who has recently surfaced as one of the White House "plumbers," asked Dean if he wanted a White House job, Dean's immediate reaction was to say no.

"I had had just enough dealing with people in the White House to know it was the toughest place in the city to work," he remembers. But one day, soon after, while he was having lunch at the Congressional Hotel, he had a call from John D. Ehrlichman, a presidential assistant, asking him to take the next plane to San Clemente to meet the President.

"Looking back over it now," Dean says, "I see what they were doing to me. A helicopter was waiting for me, and a Marine saluted me."

At San Clemente, H. R. Haldeman, then White House chief of staff, took him over for a four-hour interview.

"He was very thorough," Dean says. "He took me apart, on my beliefs and on my way of doing things and the like, and then he put me back together again."

The next morning, after a further quiz, he was ushered into the presidential presence.

"There were two surprises," Dean says. "He was taller than I thought and he was wearing a red jacket — yes, red — very dapper."

When Dean went back to Kleindienst and Mitchell to tell them he was offered the position of White House counsel, Mitchell mused, "I wonder if Ehrlichman will put his foot on you."

LETDOWN

He did. The 27 months in the White House were a letdown for Dean. All his research was presented to the President through Ehrlichman. The one time he got a call from the President was when Mr. Nixon told him that Tricia—or Julie, Dean can't remember which of the Nixons' daughters — was doing a paper on presidential secession and needed help.

"There was a fantasticality," Dean mused, "But I had no real weight. I was counsel to the President, but I didn't counsel the President."

Up until a series of tense

encounters this spring, Dean saw the President only ten times, and never alone.

On April 15, two days before the President was to advise the nation of "major developments in the case," Dean suddenly found himself persona non grata.

"You know right away," he said. "You can't get records you ask for and the guards ask to see your pass."

CALL

But the President called him Easter Sunday, April 22. "He said I was still his counsel and wished me and my pretty wife the best and told us to go to church and smile well for everyone," Dean reported.

He added, "I thought it was a stroke move — don't let old John get out of hand."

He thinks the White House eyed him as a scapegoat because "I was locked in concrete on national television on August 29." On that date, the President presented him as the author of the Dean report, which cleared everyone under the White House roof of any involvement.

"I told some people," he said, "this is phenomenal what you have done by throwing me out front to catch me up in the whole thing."

DENIAL

He never wrote such a report, he insists.

"On a couple of occasions, when I was asked to write some fairy tales, they were fair themselves," Dean

He has never reflected on impeachment, he says. He retains an awe of the presidency and respect for the fantastic accomplishment of this one, "but when I met with him one-on-one this spring, he seemed to be another man, and I told him who I was and I would not roll over."

He did not think his testimony might bring the President down. "I am a specg in the cosmos; look at the power he has."

If he was chilled watching the President speak April 30, in which there was an ice cold reference to him in contrast to huzzahs for Ehrlichman and Haldeman, it was "only because of sadness that he had made a cosmetic speech — I hoped he wouldn't."



UPI photos

Dean Ducks

Former presidential counsel John W. Dean III dodged under a rope as he left U.S. District court in Washington yesterday. Dean appeared before lawyers for Common Cause, the citizens'

lobby, to give a deposition in that organization's suit against the Committee to Re-elect the President. Following Dean under the rope was Robert M. McCandless, his attorney.

FAITH

Dean approves of a special prosecutor, retains "great faith in the judicial process," and has hopes that the Senate committee will bring out the full story.

He has not yet made a fateful decision. If he is not granted immunity before the grand jury, he may be forced to take the Fifth Amendment to avoid incriminating himself. He would be thus putting himself in

contempt of court.

"It's a difficult call to make," he said in the sports lingo so popular in his day at the White House. "I haven't made that decision yet. I'm not trying to get anyone, not the President, not Halde-

man, not anyone."

"Haldeman," he says, "is the hardest working, most devoted man I ever saw. Ehrlichman, though, is something else."