

News Briefing At White House Turns Stormy

By Lou Cannon

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Presidential counsel Leonard Garment yesterday explained the differences between the President's latest Watergate statements and his earlier ones by saying that Mr. Nixon now has "a clearer recollection" of the events surrounding the burglary.

Garment was one of three presidential surrogates who took turns explaining Mr. Nixon's statement at a stormy White House briefing in which reporters frequently drowned out the answers while Garment pleaded for "fairness" for deposed White House aides.

In his television speech to the nation on April 30 the President described how he had discounted press stories about Watergate throughout the election campaign and until March 21 of this year "because I believed the reports I was getting, because I had faith in the persons from whom I was getting them."

But in his statement yesterday it appeared that the President had indicated doubts about the official version of the case as early as a few days after the break-in, when he said he had incorrectly suspected involvement by the Central Intelligence Agency.

Mr. Nixon said he had been "advised that there was a possibility of CIA involvement in some way," but neither Garment nor White House Press Secretary Ronald L. Ziegler was able to say who advised him.

Ziegler maintained that the

latest presidential statement was consistent with earlier Watergate statements. However, Garment said that the President now had "a clearer recollection of the case."

"It's a more detailed statement, it encompasses other subjects, it encompasses materials that are explanatory on matters that were a puzzle to you and us at that time," Garment said.

Also participating in the briefing was special counsel J. Fred Buzhardt, who recently came to the White House from the Pentagon.

He bore the brunt of questioning about a section of the Nixon statement which said that the President had authorized a plan which allowed "surreptitious entry—breaking and entering, in effect—on specified categories of targets in specified situations related to national security."

Buzhardt said the document, which was rescinded because of objections from then-FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, was still classified and related to national security matters going beyond the Watergate case.

When Buzhardt declined to answer questions about the document, reporters turned on Garment with the following exchange:

Does the plan authorize breaking and entering in domestic security cases?

"I really don't know," Garment replied.

"Len, have you read it?" another reporter asked.

"I've read parts of it," Garment started to explain. This brought back Buzhardt, who said:

"I would not address it further. It's a classified document."

"Do you realize you're leaving unanswered the question of whether the President of the United States approved felonies?" another reporter shouted.

Buzhardt's answer was drowned out by other shouted questions and by Garment, who suggested that such activities were customary where national security is involved.

"Activities of that sort in the area of national security have been traditionally authorized by presidents in order to meet problems that go beyond the boundary of the ordinary civil law," he said.

These activities, Garment added, "have gone on for many years."

Ziegler said later that President Nixon's latest statement was not, however, meant to comment on the activities of any other president.

Of the White House triumvirate, it was Buzhardt who fared the hardest in the questioning.

What have you been doing since you came to the White House from the Pentagon? he was asked at one point.



Associated Press

Attorney General-designate Elliot Richardson before Senate Judiciary panel.

"Working," he replied.

"Were you brought here because you have some knowledge?" he was asked.

"I don't precisely know why I was brought here," he responded, and the rest of his answer was drowned out by other questions.

Garment said repeatedly that people involved in the case were being accused by innuendo and by "a virtual Niagara of charges in public proceedings and leaks from various investigations conducted in secret." He asked for "fairness" from the press and declined to answer a

question about whether Mr. Nixon stood by his April 30 remarks about H. R. Halde-**man and John Ehrlichman.**

On that day the President described his two deposed top aides as "two of the finest public servants it has been my privilege to know."

Garment pleaded for understanding about the background of the 1970 security plan authorized by the President.

"One must consider the domestic circumstances at the time of Cambodia and Kent State and what was the climate of the country and around the White House

and Washington at that time," he said.

Security concerns followed a "declining fever chart" in subsequent months, he said.

Garment was pressed hardest on the question of whether the President had really approved what Garment said the statement "described euphemistically as surreptitious entry."

"Have Presidents broken the law if they can justify it, and doesn't that lead precisely to Watergate?" he was asked.

"I'll leave that to historians," Garment said.