

Some Points in Dean's Story Are Disputed by Kleindienst

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Former Attorney General Richard G. Kleindienst yesterday disputed several points in the sworn testimony of former presidential counsel John W. Dean III before the Senate select Watergate committee.

Kleindienst contended, for example, that Dean had not given a full or accurate story of a meeting in the attorney general's office at the Justice Department shortly after the June 17, 1972, break-in at Democratic National Committee headquarters at the Watergate.

According to Dean's testimony, the presidential counsel sought to warn Kleindienst and Assistant Attorney General Henry E. Petersen that the White House could not "withstand a wide open investigation" of the Watergate affair.

But Kleindienst, in an interview with The Washington Post, said that it was he and Petersen who warned Dean of the seriousness of the matter and suggested that one of the three men seek an early appointment to discuss it directly with President Nixon.

Petersen urged that Kleindienst be the one to approach Mr. Nixon, the former attorney general recalled, but Dean "said no, that he would do it."

Other Justice Department sources familiar with the meeting have previously told The Post that Kleindienst and Petersen at the time hoped that the President would call the attorney general and direct that a vigorous investigation be conducted, regardless of who was implicated.

But the phone call apparently never came, according to those sources, and Kleindienst and Petersen were left to conclude either that Dean had not discussed the matter with the President, as promised, or that the Chief Executive was ambivalent about the investigation.

Kleindienst said yesterday that his feeling at the time of the meeting with Dean was that "somebody ought to advise the President what a full FBI investigation means . . . that when you start it, you can't stop it 25 per cent of the way."

He recalled that he had warned Dean that "anyone who had anything to do with it (the Watergate break-in) would be caught up in the investigation."

Dean's concern, according to Kleindienst, was that "the FBI would be poking its nose into the White House."

As a result, Kleindienst said, he and Petersen had assured Dean that there would be no "fishing expedition" into White House affairs, but added that "any

signs of other crimes would be investigated."

The former attorney general said that Dean had consistently "misled" him and Petersen into believing that he (Dean) was communicating directly with Mr. Nixon about the Watergate affair, whereas in fact his access to the President was strictly through former presidential assistants John D. Errlichman and H. R. (Bob) Halde- man, who have now been implicated in the Watergate cover-up.

Kleindienst insisted that in his own occasional personal contacts with Mr. Nixon, "the President never suggested anything to me but a full investigation, with the chips falling where they may."

During the interview yesterday at the offices of the Federal Bar Association, of which Kleindienst is president, the former attorney general insisted that Petersen's attitude toward the Watergate investigation was similar to his own.

He defended Petersen as "the finest career lawyer I've ever known," who should be regarded as "a hero" of the Watergate affair, rather than being suspected as one who helped protect the White House from full disclosure.

Kleindienst said it was merely "a courtesy to the President of the United States" to permit White

House aides to give private sworn statements on Watergate rather than appearing before the federal grand jury here investigating the break-in.

He said he felt there was "no problem" with the special arrangement, so long as the presidential aides' "full testimony" was made available to the grand jury.

The former attorney general denied that the procedure, established by Petersen to prevent embarrassment to the White House, was intended to hold back the Watergate probe.

"After all," he said, "the President is entitled to a little different treatment from the average citizen."

Kleindienst said he was certain that in a parallel situation, "Bobby Kennedy wouldn't have forced Ken- ny O'Donnell to appear before a grand jury."

(Robert F. Kennedy was attorney general while his brother, John F. Kennedy, was President. Kenneth P. O'Donnell was President Kennedy's appointments secretary.)

The arrangement was justified at the time, Kleindienst said, because "there was no evidence of guilt, cover-up or complicity by these people," including former presidential assistants Charles Colson and Egil Krogh Jr.

By last April 15, when Kleindienst says he first



RICHARD G. KLEINDIENST
... warned Dean

began to learn key details of the Watergate affair, "they weren't getting those courtesies anymore," he pointed out.

Kleindienst also denied yesterday that he had ever had a firm plan to enter the Texas law firm of former Treasury Secretary John Connally, as suggested by Dean in his testimony.

(Dean's testimony seemed to imply that the possibility of Kleindienst's losing his chance to enter the Connally firm was considered as a way to make the then-attorney general more cooperative with the White House.)

"John Connally and I have come to be good friends," Kleindienst explained. "Several months ago, since he knew I was planning to leave the Cabinet in September, he said he would like to talk" about Kleindienst joining the firm.

But the former attorney general said he was surprised to learn that Connally had discussed this with Mr. Nixon and that Dean had learned about it.