

A Mysterious Power

Frederick Cheney LaRue

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WASHINGTON, June 27— Frederick Cheney LaRue, who pleaded guilty today to obstruction of justice and will now help the Government prosecute the Watergate cover-up, is a Mississippi oil heir who for the last five years was an intimate friend and political lieutenant of former Attorney General John N. Mitchell.

Man in the News A shy, squinting man, given to mumbling, he had

a White House pass during the first Nixon term but no title and no salary. He was an elusive, anonymous, secret operator at the highest levels of the shattered Nixon power structure. He is a man of personal mystery, too—a latter-day character, it sometimes seemed, out of a Southern Gothic novel.

His father, Ike Parsons LaRue Sr., whom Fred LaRue shot and killed in a Canadian duck-hunting accident in 1957, was a first cousin of Sid Richardson, the late Texas oil and ranching tycoon. Ike LaRue, who had gone to jail in Texas for banking violations in his first business career, started again in Mississippi, looking for oil and backed by Texas money.

A Big Strike

In 1954, the family company—including Fred, Ike Jr. and their brother-in-law—made its first big strike in the Bolton field, 20 miles from Jackson. They worked the field themselves until 1967, when it was sold for a reported \$30-million.

Some Mississippi sources say the LaRues never really controlled the fortune; others believe they lost much of it in a Las Vegas casino investment. Fred LaRue himself was quoted a year ago as saying, "I'm no millionaire."

In any case, oil money that the LaRue's reportedly "spread around" in Mississippi politics made Fred a power in his home state and permitted him to roam free as John Mitchell's surrogate and "ghost" in a wheeling-dealing world that he came to love.

A 'Southern Strategist'

A heavy and bitterly disappointed contributor to Senator Barry Goldwater's 1964 Presidential campaign, Mr. LaRue introduced himself as a contributor to the Nixon forces in 1967. By the 1968 Republican nomination convention, he was a close friend and a ranking "Southern strategist" in Mr. Mitchell's campaign apparatus.

Harry Dent, who was once an aide to South Carolina's Senator Strom Thurmond

and became President Nixon's chief political aide in the White House, commented recently that Mr. LaRue was never as confident as was of the Nixon appeal to the South.

It irritated some Southern Republicans that Mr. LaRue wanted to make deals with Democratic powers, such as Mississippi's Senator James O. Eastland, rather than challenging them. Mr. LaRue was charged specifically with persuading the White House last year to undercut Senator Eastland's Republican opponent.

But it was also part of his power that he was an old and close friend of Mr. Eastland, who is chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee and was a staunch backer, among other things, of all President Nixon's court appointments.

'Magrue'

At the start of the 1972 re-election campaign, Mr. LaRue was a ranking member—with others such as Robert C. Mardian and Harry S. Flemming—of the "hard-core Mitchell group" at the headquarters. But he also got along well with Jeb Stuart Magruder, a representative of H. R. Haldeman's White House team who became the deputy campaign manager.

"It was a close, almost teacher-pupil relationship," Mr. Flemming remarked recently of the ties between the 44-year-old Mr. LaRue and the 38-year-old Mr. Magruder. The two men were often referred to by others in the organization as a single personality: "Magrue."

As it happened, on the night of the Watergate burglary arrests, June 17, 1972, Mr. Magruder and Mr. LaRue were on a California campaign swing with Mr. Mitchell and Mr. Mardian—all staying together in the Beverly Hills Hotel.

Army Warns Deserters Of Discharge in Absentia

WASHINGTON, June 27 (UPI)—The Army has sent letters to a third of its deserters living overseas saying it is prepared to discharge them, Pentagon records showed today.

A total of 677 men are listed as having disappeared from their units more than a year ago and taken up residence abroad. The Army reasons that they are not likely to return to the United States, where they could be prosecuted.

The discharge in absentia has been a rarity until now. Less than 10 a year were issued in the last seven years, the Pentagon said.

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