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The

Poughkeepsie Recalls Liddy: Gung-Ho Deputy Prosecutor

By JAMES FERON

Special to The New York Times

POUGHKEEPSIE, July 11 —It was Easter Sunday last year in this quiet Hudson River city when a local woman was startled to see G. Gordon Liddy, a former assistant district attorney here, attending a party.

"The last we heard he was working for the Treasury," she said, "but now here he was, wound up even tighter than usual, saying he was working for the White House, for John Mitchell, for the Committee to Re-elect the President."

The woman smiled as she recalled the incident. Diagonally across Main and New Market Streets from the Double-O Donut Shop, where she sipped a cup of coffee, stood the Dutchess County Courthouse, where Liddy had worked.

"I had known him slightly," she said. "He was always pretty intense, but never like he was at that Easter party. It seemed connected with what he was doing in Washington."

"I remember one thing he said. It didn't mean much at the time, but it does now. He told us, 'I'm doing something down there that nobody else has the guts to do.'"

A Secret Kept

Precisely what Liddy did in Washington he has never disclosed and has said he never will. But enough of the story came out to send him to jail, along with six others involved in the Watergate bugging, for 6 to 20 years.

The convicted leader of the Watergate burglary ring remains a mystery man, who, if he told what he knew, could provide many of the answers the Senate Watergate investigation is now seeking at its televised hearings in Washington.

Several members of the ring were caught in the headquarters of the Democratic National Committee in the Watergate complex on June 17, 1972, 11 weeks after that Easter Sunday.

"When we heard what he had been up to," a local reporter said this week, "it seemed to fit his personality. He had a penchant for intrigue."

NEIGHBORS

Liddy's Poughkeepsie smiles when his name is mentioned these days, even though he spent only a few years here. Nobody can be found to condemn him, although some recall his activities critically. The majority will just grin and shake their heads, espe-

cially when his name appears in headlines as it did on Tuesday in The Poughkeepsie Journal: "Mitchell Rejected Liddy's 'Horror Story' Plans."

He got his start right here," a sheriff's deputy said in the corridor of the county courthouse. Gruff laughter filled the hall.

A Brief Crusade

Gordon Liddy came to Poughkeepsie, his wife's hometown, in 1966 and left in 1969, cutting a wide swath in that period as a crusading prosecutor, champion of law and order and a controversial political candidate. He disappeared almost as abruptly as he had appeared, but he could not have been forgotten.

Ramrod straight, clean-shaven, tough and self-assured, he parlayed an impressive law enforcement record into national fame, if not infamy.

"We haven't heard the last of Gordon Liddy, either," said a lawyer who once opposed him.

They were telling Liddy stories long before he was associated with the "White House horrors"—proposals that extended well beyond bugging, burglary and break-ins to include the planned kidnapping of anti-Republican radicals and the use of call girls to compromise Democratic convention delegates.

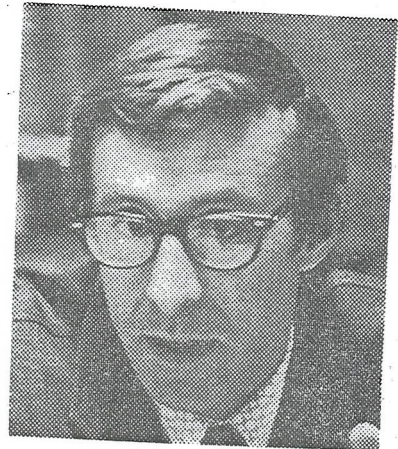
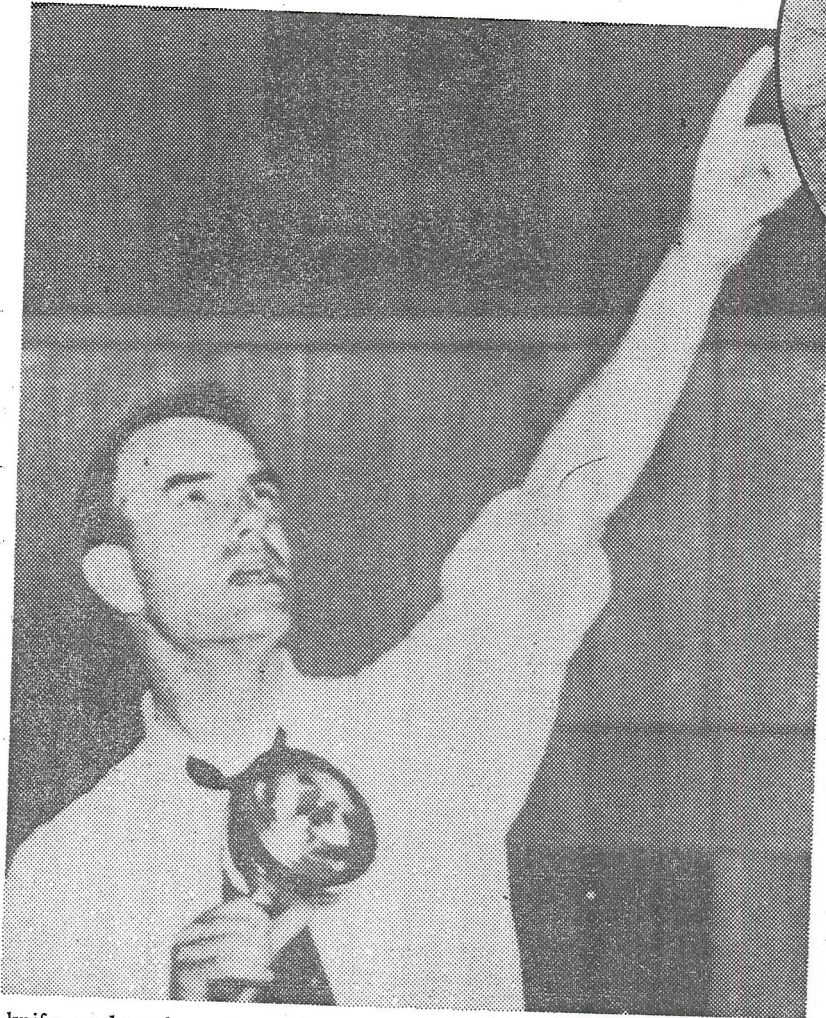
As an assistant district attorney in Poughkeepsie, Liddy led an unusual, even bizarre life. He liked to drive around town in a jeep. He carried a revolver at all times, even when prosecuting a case, and seemed to enjoy the kidding by sheriff's deputies who would outdraw him. He would spend his off hours cruising the city with policemen. He believed passionately in the dangers of drugs, criminals and Communists.

A Comparison

A lawyer associated Liddy's beliefs with those ascribed to former Attorney General Mitchell.

"They say Mitchell gives the impression that he'd do it all over again, that the main thing was to get Nixon re-elected," the lawyer said. "Well, that sure describes Liddy. He was really shaken by the radicals and the protesters. A lot of us were, although it's something else again to cook up the schemes he did in Washington."

Liddy's courtroom activities as prosecutor were occasionally a bit unsettling. On one occasion he waved a



knife under the noses of startled jurors (later overturned on the basis of that stunt, an opposing lawyer recalled), and another time he smashed a piece of wood over the jury rail while prosecuting an assault case involving the use of the plank.

The New York Times/William E. Sauro

G. Gordon Liddy in a photo showing him as assistant prosecutor, aiding police at riot in Poughkeepsie. Top right, Liddy at the Watergate conspiracy trial, in which he was convicted. He used the riot photo in campaign for District Attorney, but lost to Albert M. Rosenblatt, center right. John R. Heilman, bottom right, recalls him as an able prosecutor. Below, former Liddy home.

Continued on Page 40, Column 1



Continued From First Page
of Second Part

Liddy paid for the repair to the jury rail.

However, the incident that comes most quickly to mind of the people who knew Liddy was the day he fired a revolver in the courtroom. The presiding judge, Raymond C. Baratta, recalled:

"It went off, pow! I nearly fell off my chair."

He smiled, however, when he also recalled Liddy—"a gung-ho prosecutor, but a good one."

Liddy was hired as assistant district attorney by John R. Heilman, now Family Court Judge, who makes a point expressed by many others in this town:

The Revolver Incident

"You can look back and say, 'This guy was a kook from the very beginning,' but what if he had not become involved in Watergate? His courtroom manner would be seen differently. Take the revolver incident. It's a good example.

"Liddy was prosecuting a case where the defense had claimed the revolver was inoperable. If Clarence Darrow or Melvin Belli proceeded to put a couple of blanks in the gun and fire it and it did in fact work, well, that's the stuff legends are made of."

Others recall that Liddy extracted the maximum effect by firing it during the summation, long after the gun was introduced in evidence. Judge Baratta had swiveled his chair away and the jurors' minds may have been drifting. Liddy regained their attention in that event. It was his way.

Judge Heilman did not regard Liddy's driving a Jeep or carrying a gun as terribly unusual, either.

"We have a judge who drives a Jeep to work, and some of them have permits to carry revolvers," he said.

County Judge Edward J. Filipowicz keeps his gun on the bench. "I'm not going to be anybody's clay pigeon," Judge Filipowicz said.

Poughkeepsie is 300 years old and it still has the slight roughness of a river city that has seen a lot of history. City planners are working on downtown rehabilitation while on the outskirts modern shopping malls rise fast. For the most part, however, it feels like a small town, despite its 32,000 population, and people still wave to each other across Main Street.

Judge Heilman acknowledged that Liddy was "a different type of fellow—eccentric, you might say." He was a "law-and-order man, strict on enforcement, always willing to do anything for the police."

"He was in on the Leary raids in the mid-sixties and on the racial disturbances we had here in 1967," Judge Heilman said.

Liddy is accused of having sought to grab the limelight in the highly publicized raids conducted by Poughkeepsie law enforcement officials

against Dr. Timothy Leary, the LSD advocate who ran a commune on a vast estate in nearby Millbrook.

"He had very little to do with the raids, most of which were organized and conducted by the Sheriff's Department," a Poughkeepsie lawyer said.

Liddy, however, was in one Leary foray that they love to describe here.

It seems that Liddy and some policemen, complete with binoculars and walkie-talkie, were staked out in the bushes on the estate when a young woman stepped completely nude from one of the tents on the grounds.

"A lot of funny things were going on at that place," a deputy explained. "Anyway, they became so preoccupied with this girl that they gave their hide-out away and blew the whole bit."

The Formative Years

Poughkeepsie's relatively modest share of the riots that swept the nation in the late sixties also served as a crucial milestone in Liddy's career. Again the incident became a matter of controversy.

"One night he heard sirens, and following them downtown, found police trying to quell a riot," a reporter recalled. "He removed his jacket and began directing the cops."

Liddy was photographed doing so, and was so pleased with the picture that he used at later as a "law and order" campaign poster when he sought political office.

Liddy's three turbulent years in Poughkeepsie can be seen, in fact, as the formative stage for the planning that would lead to Operation Intercept, a bungled attempt he made as a Treasury De-

partment official to halt narcotics smuggling from Mexico, and to the later Waterbuggers and White House horrors.

His background in law and politics began even earlier. Liddy was born in New York City on Nov. 30, 1930, into a Roman Catholic family and was named ironically after a prominent lawyer and Tammany Hall leader, George Gordon Battle. Liddy's father, a lawyer who once served as Republican Mayor of West Caldwell, N.J., had worked with a law firm in which Battle was a partner. As a further coincidence, Liddy's namesake had also been an assistant district attorney.

Young Liddy attended St. Benedict's preparatory school in Newark, served as an Army lieutenant in Korea, studied law at Fordham University, as his father had, and joined the Federal Bureau of Investigation in 1957. He stayed with the bureau until 1962, and was reported to have left under pressure.

Nobody in Poughkeepsie knew Liddy well enough to recall the circumstances of his departure from the F.B.I. His later experience with the Treasury Department—after leaving Poughkeepsie—offers a clue, however.

Tried to 'Set Policy'

A Treasury official recalled earlier this year that Liddy has been a troublesome employe "who kept trying to set policy." The last straw apparently was a 1971 speech Liddy made against gun controls—this had been one of his favorite topics in Poughkeepsie — and he was dismissed, the officials said, because we couldn't control him."

Liddy married a Poughkeepsie woman, Frances Pur-

cell, in 1957—they have five children and still own a home here—and after working for a while in his father's law firm after leaving the F.B.I., Liddy came to Poughkeepsie to take the post of assistant district attorney.

His dramatic flair and predilections for publicity soon became a source of irritation for others in the District Attorney's office, especially another assistant, Albert M. Rosenblatt, a quieter man who became Liddy's rival for the post of District Attorney.

Mr. Rosenblatt, who became District Attorney, said Liddy's most distinctive quality was "his extraordinary ambition." Denis McClure, a Poughkeepsie lawyer who was also an assistant district attorney, and who testified as a character witness for Liddy at the Watergate trial, said Liddy had made Rosenblatt nervous "but he [Liddy] had a goal and wanted everyone to know it."

Liddy seized on the drug issue, patrolling with Lieut. Robert Berberich of the Police Department after office hours to conduct independent investigations and lecturing frequently on the subject. He spoke on one occasion of having learned that one suspect "had a contract" (a death threat) on himself and Lieutenant Berberich.

A reporter said Liddy knew the value of publicity.

"He would come into the paper, or meet you somewhere else, and outline everything," he reported. "But it was all so intense. He was not a guy you would ever see strolling somewhere, not someone who would sit with you over a couple of beers."

Noel Tepper, the lawyer who defended Dr. Leary and others involved in the Millbrook raids, faced Liddy in court many times.

"He was a character, very colorful," Mr. Tepper said. "Most prosecutors aren't worthy of the name, but he was. You never knew what he was going to do next."

"In one case he read an excerpt from J. Edgar Hoover's book that the jury absolutely ate up. It was totally irrelevant, of course, but it was dramatic. He was fun in court. You could ridicule him in front of the jury, and he never carried a grudge outside the courtroom."

"He also worked hard, prepared his cases well and presented them with a lot of ego. He just didn't seem to have the anxieties, fear, insecurities and uncertainties that the rest of us have. It was hard to visualize him sweating."

The grandiose plans that prompted former Attorney General Mitchell to regret not having thrown Liddy out his window, much less out his office door, were subtly evident — in retrospect — during his Poughkeepsie years.

"He was always expecting the big narcotics bust," Mr. Tepper said. "Gordon kept pushing, pushing, all the time. He probably bent the rules a bit now and then to collect evidence, but I can't recall anything specific."

Another lawyer said that the Public Defender's office had sought on one occasion to question a prisoner, only to discover that Liddy had transferred the accused man to another jail in the county.

On another occasion, a lo-

cal resident complained to the State Commission of Investigation about Liddy's actions, a reported case of brutality, which was later dropped for lack of evidence. The incident came toward the end of Liddy's time here, and it served to underline another milestone on his way to Washington.

The crusading prosecutor, then 38 years old, had decided to challenge Hamilton Fish Jr. for the Republican nomination in what was then New York's 28th Congressional District. Liddy, badly beaten, decided to run on the Conservative ticket. He quit as assistant district attorney to devote full time to politics.

His campaign platform had three planks: taxes ("too much going to Washington"), crime ("God help us all if the thin blue line of protection crumbles") and Vietnam ("I support our commitment but not our conduct of the war").

In the meantime, the County Board of Representatives said it intended to follow through on the complaint against Liddy, since dropped by the S.C.I. Liddy countered with a \$1.5-million libel suit against the complainant and against board members, including the county Republican chairman, George Reid.

A Political Switch

Then, in a switch characterized by some in the town as a sellout, Liddy announced that he would support Mr. Fish and drop his own candidacy, although his name remained on the ballot. The Board of Representatives dropped its investigation, and Liddy abandoned his libel suit. Mr. Reid recommended Liddy for chairman of the Dutchess County "Citizens for Nixon-Agnew," a post he

accepted.

"It was a deal, pure and simple," a lawyer said.

A leading Republican put it this way at the time:

"So good luck to you, Mr. Liddy, in your Nixon-Agnew campaign, but forget the District Attorney job for now. Patience is a virtue many of us must learn, and the sad truth is that some of us never learn it until it is too late."

For G. Gordon Liddy it was the beginning, however not the end. He spent several months practicing law with Peter L. Maroulis, who was to represent him later at the Watergate trial. Then in April, 1969, he was appointed special assistant for organized crime to the Secretary of the Treasury.

Liddy went to Washington, returning only occasionally to Poughkeepsie. His eventual disappearance into the shadows of the corridors of pre-election surveillance was interrupted only once, as far as the home folks were concerned, with a story of local boy makes good: "Liddy Helps in U. S. Effort to Slow Drugs From Mexico."

Treasury Department officials, working with the Attorney General's office, were to crack down on drug smuggling across the Mexican border. What better expert could be found than a former F.B.I. agent with experience in the Timothy Leary drug case? Gordon Liddy was asked to organize Operation Intercept.

Liddy's plan apparently created great chaos and accomplished little. Border communities were disrupted by lengthy searches, traffic across the frontier was halted for hours, tourism suffered. Liddy sought to justify the

confusion with patriotic speeches in the local communities. He was dismissed as a Treasury man in 1971, but continued to move upward—this time to the White House.

George Gordon Battle Liddy is now in the five-story, century-old District of Columbia jail, serving a contempt-of-court sentence for refusing to testify before a grand jury as well as the Six-to-20-year Federal term for the Watergate break-in.

Liddy's personality, nevertheless, continues to shine through. He hit a cellmate a few months ago for taking his hair brush, demanding a transfer to a maximum-security area to avoid E. Howard Hunt Jr., a fellow conspirator who talked, and has become a folk hero to the other inmates for his colorful exploits.

Last month, John D. Ehrlichman, one of the former senior White House aides, said that he had heard that Liddy had threatened the life of Jeb Stuart Magruder, Mr. Mitchell's deputy in the re-election committee.

Liddy's wife and children apparently remain in their Oxon Hill, Md., home, although the story in Poughkeepsie is that Mrs. Liddy may be coming home soon to resume a teaching career.

In Poughkeepsie, some still talk of Gordon Liddy with affection, or perhaps nostalgia.

"He used to say what a lot of us felt at the time," a woman in her 30's said. "Don't forget, those were the days of the protesters and we were frightened. You forget what those placards said about overthrowing the Government and so forth."

From same story, as
carried by SFChronicle
18 Jul 73:

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"Poughkeepsie hasn't been the same since Liddy and Leary left," said Tepper. "It's funny how much they had in common, when you think of it.

"They both needed a following, both were in pursuit of public acclaim. Each could bend the rules, neither one was contrite, both were articulate, bright, good looking, and professionally accomplished.

"The fun thing for both of them was the process, not the result. Both had a real ideological basis however. They came here around the same time in 1966 and left in 1969. A couple of carpetbaggers who had a great impact on the community, and now they're both in jail."