

Panel Concentrates Efforts

By George Lardner Jr.

Washington Post Staff Writer

The new White House tapes the House Judiciary Committee is seeking suggest the most concentrated effort so far to find out whether President Nixon himself took part in the Watergate cover-up.

The conversations at issue involve discussions Mr. Nixon had with two indicted aides, H. R. (Bob) Haldeman and John D. Ehrlichman; with the chief government witness, John W. Dean III, and finally, with the overseers of the original Watergate investigation, Assistant Attorney General Henry E. Petersen and former Attorney General Richard G. Kleindienst.

By White House calculations, the House request amounts to a demand for 42 recordings, but the meetings and phone calls all took place on 11 days last winter and spring when the unraveling of the Watergate scandal began.

House investigators singled out:

- Conversations between the President and Haldeman on Feb. 20, 1973, concerning the possible appointment of Jeb Stuart Magruder, deputy director of the President's 1972 re-election effort, to a government post.

Magruder, who has since admitted helping plan the Watergate bugging of Democratic headquarters and then conspiring to cover up the scandal with false testimony, had already spoken to Haldeman about his plans for the future—on Feb. 14, 1973, by Haldeman's account.

Testifying before the Senate Watergate committee last summer, Haldeman said he told Magruder a White House post was "out of the question" until Watergate matters had been cleared up, but suggested that Magruder "look into other government possibilities" since

See EVENTS, A13, Col. 1

EVENTS, From A1

he wanted to stay in Washington.

Around the same time, in mid-February of 1973, Dean testified that he relayed to Haldeman a report that Magruder was claiming to have gotten his "final authoriza-

tion" for Watergate conspirator G. Gordon Liddy's activities from Haldeman's deputy, Gordon Strachan. Magruder was also reportedly saying that he understood "Haldeman had cleared the matter with the President."

"After I reported this information," Dean testified last summer, "the White House efforts to find a job for Magruder became intense."

The Judiciary Committee apparently is interested in determining if there was any talk at Haldeman's Feb. 20 meeting with Mr. Nixon of Magruder's role in the cover-up.

Dean has said that Haldeman asked him shortly after the Watergate bugging was discovered "if I thought Magruder would stand up if indicted, and I said, no."

Haldeman has said he met with Magruder again on March 2, 1973, and gave him a list of available government jobs compiled by the White House personnel office on Feb. 28. Magruder reportedly picked out a post at the Commerce Department, which was No. 1 on the list, and he was named director of the Office of Policy Development there on March 13, by Secretary of Commerce Frederick B. Dent.

- Conversations between Mr. Nixon, Haldeman and Ehrlichman on Feb. 27, 1973, concerning "the assignment of Mr. Dean to work directly with the President on Watergate and Watergate-related matters."

Dean has said that when he saw the President that day, Mr. Nixon told him Watergate was "taking too much time from Haldeman's and Ehrlichman's normal duties and he also told me that they were principals in the matter and I, therefore, could be more objective than they."

As the meeting came to an end, Dean said he and the President walked out of the office together. At that point, Dean testified, he told Mr. Nixon "that I had only managed to contain the matter during the campaign, but I was not sure it could be contained indefinitely." Dean said the Feb. 27 meeting was the first he had with the President on

Watergate since Sept. 15, 1972, when the original Watergate defendants were indicted.

- Conversations between the President and Dean on March 17, 1973, between 1:25 and 2:10 p.m. and on March 20, 1973, between 7:29 and 7:43 p.m.

According to a summary of Mr. Nixon's meetings with Dean that Senate Watergate investigators obtained from the White House, it was at the March 17 get-together that Dean "told the President of the

Ellsberg break-in, but that it had nothing to do with Watergate."

It was not until more than a month later that U.S. District Court Judge W. Matthew Byrne, presiding at Daniel Ellsberg's Pentagon Papers trial, was told that Liddy and E. Howard Hunt Jr., two of the convicted Watergate conspirators, had burglarized the offices of Ellsberg's psychiatrist in 1971.

In his prepared testimony about the March 20 meeting for the Senate Watergate committee, Dean described it as "a rambling conversation" which touched on the confirmation hearings for L. Patrick Gray III as FBI director and problems facing the White House concerning Mr. Nixon's statements on executive privilege and his willingness to go to court on the issue.

"He (the President) opined that he did not think that the Senate would be dumb enough to go for the bait he had given them, but he was hopeful that they might," Dean reported.

The March 20 conversation evidently concerns a phone call that evening from the President to Dean. Dean has said he had already been told of Hunt's new threats to expose the "seamy things" he had done for the White House if he didn't get more money. After deciding to lay it all out for the President, as he has put it, Dean said he told Mr. Nixon over the phone "that I wanted to talk to him as soon as possible about the Watergate matter because I did not think that he fully realized all the facts and the implication of those facts for people at the White House as well as himself."

Dean met with the President the next morning,

March 21, 1973, and told him "that there was a cancer growing on the presidency." Mr. Nixon acknowledged at his press conference last week that Dean also told him "that payments had been made to (Watergate) defendants for the purpose of keeping them quiet, not simply for their defense."

The President's admission has led to protests that he violated the law in not passing the information on to government prosecutors in the Watergate case. The original Watergate defendants were not sentenced until March 23 — two days after Dean's report to the President.

- Conversations between the President and Ehrlichman on March 27, 1973, from 11:10 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., and on March 30, 1973, from 12:02 to 12:18 p.m.

The President has said that following the March 21 meeting, he sent Dean to Camp David "to write a full report of everything he knew." When Dean did not produce the report, Mr. Nixon said he told Ehrlichman on March 30, 1973, "to conduct an independent investigation."

Haldeman's testimony, however, indicates that Dean was assigned only to prepare a report for public consumption.

- All conversations between the President and Haldeman and the President and Ehrlichman from April 14 through April 17, 1973.

The President said last week that it was on April 14 that Ehrlichman submitted his report. Dean has testified that the next day, on April 15, the President made remarks implicating himself in the Watergate cover-up, but the White House has since said that this conversation was never recorded.

- All conversations between the President and Kleindienst and the President and Petersen from April 15 through April 18, 1973.

The President had a drawn-out series of meetings and phone calls with the two Justice Department officials in the four-day period.

This story was written with the assistance of Washington Post researcher Bridget Gallagher.