

Two Nixon Tapes Heard First Time

Washington

Two White House tapes in which President Nixon discussed trying to limit the Watergate investigation were played yesterday at the Watergate coverup trial.

The two conversations took place on March 17 and March 21, 1973. The first was between Mr. Nixon and his White House counsel, John W. Dean III. The second one involved Mr. Nixon, Dean and H.R. Haldeman.

On March 17, Mr. Nixon told Dean during a discussion of the Watergate investigation that "what you've got to do . . . is cut her off at the pass."

Mr. Nixon was referring to limiting disclosure of the involvement of White House or campaign aides to no one higher than G. Gordon Liddy, who had already been convicted in the Watergate break-in case.

It was the first time the text of the March 17 conver-

sation was made public.

The March 17 tape also revealed that, contrary to Mr. Nixon's frequent protestations, the former president actually knew on that date of his aides' alleged involvement in the coverup plot.

The March 21 conversation was one of the most crucial in Mr. Nixon's fight to save his presidency. During that long battle Mr. Nixon maintained that he didn't learn of the involvement of his aides in the Watergate break-in until Dean laid it out for him on March 21.

The text of that conversation was released previously, first by the White House and then by the House Judiciary Committee. But it was not until it was played yesterday that any member of the public had a chance to hear the conversation.

Mr. Nixon's and Dean's voices are heard clearly on the tape as Dean reviewed his knowledge of how the break-in occurred and the subsequent efforts to contain the investigation.

Dean mentioned break-in defendant E. Howard Hunt's continuing demands for financial assistance. "How much money do you need?" Mr. Nixon asked.

Dean replied he thought it would cost \$1 million.

Then, in a very matter-of-fact tone, Mr. Nixon replied. "We could get that."

A moment later, also in a matter-of-fact tone, Mr. Nixon

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on is heard on the tape saying:

"What I mean is, you could, you could get a million dollars. And you could get it in cash. I, I know where it could be gotten."

Later, Mr. Nixon is heard saying, "After all, you've got to keep the cap on the bottle that much in order to have any options."

When he first made public an edited transcript of the March 21 conversation, Mr. Nixon acknowledged it was open to varying interpretations, and the tape played in court bore that out.

For while Mr. Nixon sounded like he readily accepted the idea of meeting Hunt's demands, at another point he asked Dean, "Are you going to put out a complete disclosure? Isn't that the best plan . . . That'd be my view on it."

Despite Mr. Nixon's contention while still in office that he knew nothing of the involvement of his aides until March 21, during the March 17 tape he is heard saying to Dean:

"It's your view the vulnerabilities are basically, Mitchell, Colson, Haldeman, indirectly, possibly directly . . ."

He was referring to former Attorney General John N. Mitchell, former White House counsel Charles W. Colson, and Haldeman, Mr. Nixon's top aide.

Mitchell and Haldeman are among the five defendants charged with conspiracy to obstruct justice in the coverup case. A similar charge against Colson was dropped after he pleaded guilty in a related matter.

The other three defendants are John D. Ehrlichman, another former White House aide, former Assistant Attorney General Robert C. Mardian and Kenneth W. Parkinson, a former attorney for the Nixon re-election committee.

Dean, who pleaded guilty a year ago to the same charge, took the stand

Wednesday as the first prosecution witness. He currently is serving a one-to-four-year prison term.

On the March 17 tape played for the jury of nine women and three men, Dean said he also ought to be listed among the vulnerables."

"You, why?" Mr. Nixon asked.

Dean: "Well, because I've been all over this thing like a blanket."

Nixon: "I know, I know, but you know all about it, but you didn't, you were in it after the deed was done."

Dean: "That's correct, that I have no foreknowledge"

Nixon: "Here's the whole point, here's the whole point. My point is that your problem is you, you have no problem. All the others that have participated in the god-

damned thing, and therefore are potentially subject to criminal liability. You're not. That's the difference."

Dean and Mr. Nixon also discussed what might have prompted the break-in.

Dean said he thought Jeb Stuart Magruder, deputy director of Mr. Nixon's campaign committee, "is the most responsible man for the whole incident."

Dean said he had talked to Liddy.

"I said, 'Well why in the hell did this happen,' and he said, 'Magruder pushed me without mercy to go in there. Magruder said I had to go in there,'" Dean told Mr. Nixon.

The President asked, "Who pushed Magruder?"

He asked Dean if it might be Colson. And when Dean said he didn't think so, Mr. Nixon asked, "Think Halde-

man pushed him?"

Dean replied, "No, I think Strachan did."

He referred to Haldeman aide Gordon Strachan, another of the coverup defendants who has been granted a separate trial.

The March 17 and 21 conversations were the third and fourth tapes played at the trial.

As with the first two, judge, jury, defendants, lawyers and spectators all had earphones for listening to the conversation.

In testimony yesterday, Dean told how early in January, 1973, Hunt wanted to

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plead guilty in the Watergate break-in case but wanted assurances he wouldn't "go to jail for the rest of his life."

Hunt wanted the assurances from Colson, who was reluctant to meet with the Watergate conspirator.

At Ehrlichman's urging, according to Dean, Colson met with William O. Bittman, Hunt's attorney, and gave him the following message for Hunt: "A year is a long time and clemency is generally considered around Christmas."

Colson reported on this to Dean and Ehrlichman in Ehrlichman's White House office.

Later, said Dean, as he and Colson were walking together back to their own offices, Colson told Dean, "I felt this was a matter I should take up with the President himself."

"And did he say he took it up with the President?" Neal asked.

"Yes, he did," Dean replied.

A similar message was sent to James W. McCord, another of the break-in defendants, Dean said.

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