

Haldeman Denies Role In Coverup

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Washington

H. R. Haldeman, once President Nixon's closest aide, denied "categorically" yesterday that he had participated in a Watergate coverup.

But Senators John O. Pastore and John L. McClellan, two of those who questioned Haldeman for more than two hours yesterday, said they are skeptical about some of his remarks.

Haldeman, the White House chief of staff until he resigned because of Watergate disclosures, testified in closed session before the Senate appropriations subcommittee on intelligence operations.

He also read a brief statement to newsmen but refused to answer questions.

STATEMENT

He began his statement by saying, "I can categorically state — and would like to — that at no time nor in any way did I suggest, participate in any coverup of the Watergate investigation."

He went on to declare, "I neither asked the CIA to participate in any Watergate coverup, nor did I ever suggest that the CIA take any responsibility for the Watergate break-in."

Haldeman concluded his statement as follows:

"I believe all of my actions were proper, in accord with the President's instructions and clearly in the national interest. Beyond that, I have nothing further to say at this time on this matter."

EHRlichman

According to senators who were at the hearing, Haldeman's testimony, for the most part, paralleled that given Wednesday by John D. Ehrlichman, the President's former adviser on domestic affairs.

The senators reported what Senator John O. Pas-

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store (Dem-R.I.) called "glaring inconsistencies" between the testimony of the two White House aides and that of CIA officials questioned by the subcommittee over the last three weeks.

The basic conflict is over what was said at a White House meeting on June 23 that was called on President Nixon's orders. At the meeting were Haldeman, Ehrlichman, Richard Helms, CIA director, and Helms' deputy Lieutenant General Vernon Walters.

ORDER

General Walters told congressional committees earlier this month that he had been ordered by Haldeman to try to get the FBI to stop investigating Mexican aspects of the Watergate case.

At that point, the bureau was looking into the manner in which \$89,000 had been passed from the President's re-election committee through a Mexican bank into the hands of the Watergate burglars.

Walters said that he was supposed to tell L. Patrick Gray III, then acting director of the FBI, that further investigation could compromise certain CIA activities and resources in Mexico.

VERSION

Haldeman, in his statement yesterday, gave his version of the conversation at the meeting as follows:

"General Walters was asked to meet with Director Gray to insure that any related covert operations of the CIA or any unrelated national security activities which had been previously undertaken by some of the Watergate principals not be

compromised in the process of the Watergate investigation and the attendant publicity and political furor.

"This was done with no intent or desire to impede or cover up an aspect of the Watergate investigation itself. Any other actions taken or suggestions made by others were without my knowledge and without the knowledge of the President."

INCREDULOUS

Senator John L. McClellan, the subcommittee's chairman, noted the "very substantial conflict" and seemed incredulous about some of Haldeman's testimony. For example, McClellan said he could not understand why, if their stories were accurate, Haldeman and Ehrlichman had not simply asked Helms whether CIA operations would be endangered.

McClellan noted that on June 22 — the day before the White House meeting — Helms had told Gray that the CIA was not involved in the Watergate burglary and that CIA operations in Mexico would not be endangered



H. R. HALDEMAN
He pointed to Dean

by the FBI investigation.

McClellan said that he had asked Haldeman about that conversation and that Haldeman's answer was "somewhat vague" and "not en-

tirely satisfactory."

"It seemed to me — and I want to be absolutely fair — it seemed to me that if the purpose of it was to find out about any involvement of the CIA or any adverse results to it by reason of continuation of this investigation, they had Helms there and they could have asked him directly."

REASON

Haldeman's testimony also brought out an additional reason for President Nixon's concern that CIA operations might be jeopardized by the Watergate investigation. The former presidential aide told the subcommittee,

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tee, according to McClellan, that CIA activities related to the Bay of Pigs invasion might be affected.

McClellan and Pastore said Haldeman had not made clear how the FBI investigation could have been related to the abortive CIA-sponsored invasion of Cuba in 1962 although some of those who participated in the Bay of Pigs invasion had also participated in the break-in of the Democratic national headquarters.

Pastore remarked afterward that he found the Bay of Pigs connection to the Watergate investigation "a little farfetched."

Haldeman seemed to try to attribute any Watergate coverup to John W. Dean III, former counsel to the President, who was dismissed on April 30, the day Haldeman and Ehrlichman resigned.

Haldeman said that Dean had first suggested the possibility of CIA involvement in the Watergate burglary and that it was because of Dean's suggestion that the meeting was called with Helms and General Walters.