

Crossfire on Four Fronts

Although some Republican Governors warned against letting the Watergate scandal dribble out bit by sordid bit, that continued to happen last week. Witnesses before the Senate Select Committee on Presidential Campaign Activities added pungent details about the pressures to help smother the scandal. Depositions given by John Ehrlichman and H.R. Haldeman dug more deeply into the planning of Watergate and the cover-up. White House memos described efforts to set up an illegal security apparatus in 1970. CIA memos undermined the President's Watergate defense by showing that politics, far more than national security, motivated the White House attempt to sidetrack the investigation. As the scandal has unfolded, the Nixon team has disintegrated. Now out of work and in danger of indictment, each man is trying to save his own skin by blaming somebody else.

THE SENATE HEARINGS

As the week's crop of witnesses came before the committee, they summoned up a picture of the proper Nixonian apparatchik: gray-suited, pin-striped, self-

contained, admirably cool under fire and ever so slightly slow of wit. Obviously avoiding the counterculture and all its works, they suggested every parent's ideal of an obedient son—a trifle too obedient, as it turned out. They were treated paternally by Senator Sam Ervin, rather indulgently by the other committee members, who were doubtless mindful of the witnesses' lowly status and relative innocence in the Nixon campaign organization. They were followers rather than leaders, and could cast only an oblique light on the murky Watergate doings. Still, they exposed some new patches of chicanery.

The first witness of the week was not of the pattern. She was Sally Harmony, G. Gordon Liddy's secretary at the Committee for the Re-Election of the President. Though she displayed what Senator Joseph Montoya called a "hazy memory," she recalled that she had typed "maybe eight" Democratic telephone conversations that had been tapped at Watergate. When the plot was

C.R.P. SECRETARY SALLY HARMONY

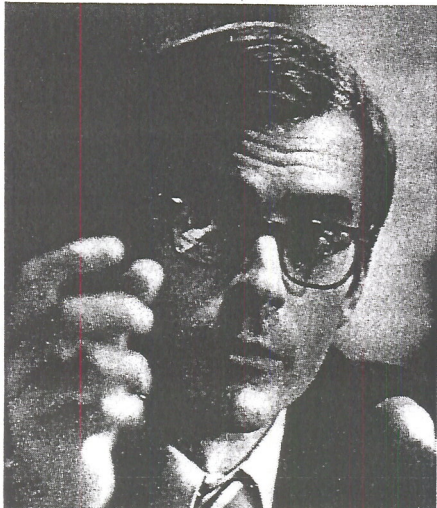


STEVE HORTHUP

CAMPAIGN ASSISTANT ROBERT REISNER



SCHEDULING DIRECTOR HERBERT PORTER



TREASURER HUGH SLOAN JR.

THE NATION

discovered, she helped her boss shred any paper with his handwriting on it. Then she fed her own notebook into the machine. But she testified that she could not remember ever saying that she had committed perjury for Liddy, as charged by two depositions in the Democrats' suit.

Robert A.F. Reisner, 26, the blandly earnest administrative assistant to C.R.P. Deputy Director Jeb Stuart Magruder, told the committee that he became aware of Watergate through odds and ends. The week before the June 17 arrests, he saw some Watergate material in a folder destined for C.R.P. Director John Mitchell. He also came across receipts for funds distributed to Liddy and an operative known as "Sedan Chair 2," who may have been a plant in Humphrey headquarters. Introduced by Magruder as a "super sleuth," Liddy once bounded into the office with a "great idea." He wanted to hire demonstrators to disrupt the Democratic Convention, including a woman who would undress.

After the Watergate break-in, Reisner was not asked a thing about his role in the case until he was subpoenaed by the Senate committee in March. By then he had decided to tell all he knew. Aware of his intentions, Magruder kept calling him to arrange a meeting. Reisner replied that it would be "improper." "Magruder," he said, became "extremely agitated and asked what I thought I was doing. 'Are you not going to be cooperative?' he queried. 'Everyone else has been cooperative.'"

Hugh W. Sloan Jr., 32, former treasurer of C.R.P., testified that he distributed campaign funds for secret purposes with some misgivings. Whenever he asked for an explanation, he was put off. He finally got his answer the day after Watergate. He bumped into Liddy, who exclaimed: "My boys got caught last night. I made a mistake. I used somebody from here which I told them I would never do. I'm afraid I'm going to lose my job." A few days later, Magruder asked Sloan if he would agree to say that he had paid Liddy less than he had. Replied Sloan: "I have no intention of perjuring myself." Said Magruder: "You may have to." Sloan later complained to Dean. If Magruder were ever nominated for an office requiring Senate confirmation, Sloan said, he would testify against him.

Seeking guidance because the "campaign seemed to be falling apart" and FBI agents had arrived at his office to question him, Sloan went to John Mitchell, who offered the cryptic advice: "When the going gets tough, the tough get going." That prompted Ervin to ask slyly and rhetorically: "How long after that did Mitchell leave the campaign?" (In fact, it was a week later.) Then Sloan took his complaint to White House Appointments Secretary Dwight Chapin, who told him he was "overwrought" and should take a vacation. Ehrlichman counseled: "Do not tell me

the details. I do not want to know." Frederick LaRue suggested that Sloan take the Fifth Amendment to stay in the good graces of the campaign organization. Disgusted and disillusioned, Sloan resigned from the committee, eliciting from Ervin the homily "An honest man is the noblest work of God."

Unlike Sloan, Herbert Porter, 35, scheduling director for C.R.P., was told where the money was going. He passed funds from Sloan to Liddy, he testified, for "dirty tricks and other projects." After the break-in, Magruder asked him to "corroborate a story that the money



EX-WHITE HOUSE COUNSEL JOHN W. DEAN III

was authorized for something a little bit more legitimate-sounding than dirty tricks." Any day now, Magruder warned, all the office records might be subpoenaed. "I conjured up in my mind that scene and became rather excitable," said Porter. "I didn't want to see that." So he invented a story that the money he had issued to Liddy was used to pay agents to infiltrate radical groups. He told his phony story to the FBI, then to the federal grand jury and finally at the trial of the Watergate Seven, perjuring himself.

When Porter told Paul O'Brien, an attorney for C.R.P., that he wanted to talk to the prosecutors, O'Brien replied: "What do you want to do a stupid thing like that for?" He even fell asleep while listening to Porter. Magruder's attorney, said Porter, was equally unsympathetic. "He looked at me rather incredulously and said: 'My God, you are an ant. You are nothing. Do you realize the whole course of history is going to be changed?' I said no, I didn't, but I knew what my worries were."

In one of the more impassioned exchanges of a hearing that has been relatively subdued, Republican Senator Howard Baker asked Porter if he felt there was any impropriety in hiring people to do dirty tricks. Said Porter: "I was not the one to stand up in a meet-



JOHN MITCHELL IN NEW YORK

Checking off the bugging spots.

ing and say this should be stopped. I kind of drifted along."

But why didn't he speak up? Baker pressed him.

"In all honesty, probably because of the fear of group pressure that would ensue, of not being a team player."

Baker: "What caused you to abdicate your own conscience?"

Porter: "My loyalty to this man Richard Nixon goes back longer than any person that you will see sitting at this table."

Baker: "I have known Richard Nixon on probably longer than you have been alive, and I really expect that the greatest disservice that a man could do to a President of the U.S. would be to abdicate his conscience."

THE DEPOSITIONS

To judge from the depositions given by Haldeman and Ehrlichman in the Democratic Party's \$6.4 million civil suit against C.R.P., the Watergate conspiracy was sheer confusion. Nobody was sure what he was doing or what anyone else was doing before or after the break-in. Ehrlichman described an initial meeting of Mitchell, Dean, Magruder and Liddy in early 1972. An intelligence-gathering system proposed by Liddy was so "grandiose and extreme," said Ehrlichman, that it was turned down flat by the three others.

The group finally agreed on a more modest bugging of three places. Mitchell supposedly checked off the ones he wanted: Watergate, McGovern headquarters in Washington, Democratic offices at the Fontainebleau Hotel in Miami Beach. Said Ehrlichman: "Magruder described this as a non-decision; that nobody was terribly enthusiastic with the undertaking, but they had to do something to acquire general information about the opposition."

Liddy, meanwhile, was beginning to

get out of hand, according to Magruder. Known to carry a gun, he once threatened to kill Magruder, who then tried to fire him. But other White House operatives insisted that Liddy be kept on the job. Tongue-lashed by Mitchell for not producing, he decided to break into Watergate a second time. At this point, testified Ehrlichman, Liddy was acting on his own without specific instructions. When Hunt objected to the maneuver, so Ehrlichman was told, Liddy replied: "We can't call it off. We are doing this on Mr. Mitchell's order. We must go ahead."

Ehrlichman laid the blame for the Watergate cover-up on Dean. "In February, it was pretty clear that we were not getting the facts. He was not being forthcoming with us on the facts either because he didn't know the facts or because he didn't feel he could disclose them to us." Finally, said Ehrlichman, the President hit on a "device to smoke

the wave of bombings, shoot-outs and campus riots in the late 1960s. Some memos leaked to the *New York Times* last week showed that Nixon's plans were more ambitious than most people knew. They envisioned a permanent, extensive surveillance of suspect radical groups. A scheme was proposed to increase electronic bugging, to open mail, to allow for "surreptitious entry" or, plainly, burglary. The memos admitted that some of these activities were "illegal" and involved "serious risks."

The project was approved by everyone involved except J. Edgar Hoover, who, said a participant, "wanted to continue running the FBI any damned way he wanted." He insisted on appending his critical footnotes to the proposal. In another memo, Tom Charles Huston, then a 29-year-old White House assistant for domestic security affairs, complained: "The FBI in Hoover's younger years used to conduct such operations

THE CIA MEMOS

Though the President maintained that the White House interfered with the Watergate investigation only to protect national security, a series of CIA memos tell a different story. A memo from Lieut. General Vernon A. Walters, deputy director of the CIA, for example, describes a June 23 meeting with Ehrlichman and Haldeman that he attended with then CIA Director Richard Helms. "Haldeman said the 'bugging' affair at the Democratic National Committee headquarters had made a lot of noise and that the Democrats are trying to maximize it," Walters wrote. "The FBI had been called in and was investigating the matter. The investigation was leading to a lot of important people and this could get worse. Haldeman said the whole affair was getting embarrassing, and it was the President's wish that Walters call on Gray and suggest to him that, since the five suspects had been arrested, this should be sufficient and that it was not advantageous to have the inquiry pushed, especially in Mexico."

Continued the Walters memo: "Director Helms said he had talked to Gray on the previous day and made plain to him that ... none of his investigations was touching any covert projects of the agency, current or ongoing."

Yet despite the fact that Haldeman, Ehrlichman and Gray had now been informed by the highest CIA authority that no FBI investigation could harm the CIA, the matter was not dropped. Declared the Walters memo: "Haldeman then stated that I could tell Gray that I had talked to the White House and suggested that the investigation not be pushed further." Walters agreed to do so the very same day.

The Walters memo on his meeting with Gray shows that Gray was aware of the political stakes. "Gray said that this was a most awkward matter to come up during an election year and he would see what he could do."

Walters contends that he next heard from Nixon Counsel John Dean three days later. Dean summoned Walters to the Executive Office Building and suggested that some of the arrested Watergate burglars "were getting scared and wobbling." Dean wondered if the CIA could pay their bail or, if they were convicted, pay them salaries while in prison. Walters said that Helms would never agree to such political activities.

Walters later noted that Gray had told him the FBI investigation could be limited only if Walters gave him a letter saying that national security would be endangered. Walters said his position was that "I had a long association with the President and was as desirous as anyone of protecting him. I did not believe that a letter from the agency asking the FBI to lay off this investigation on the spurious ground that it would uncover covert operations would serve the President." A cover-up, in short, was objected to not in principle but on grounds that it would not work.



FORMER WHITE HOUSE AIDES H.R. HALDEMAN & JOHN EHRLICHMAN AT CAPITOL
Every man for himself when the tightly knit team disintegrated.

him out." He ordered Dean to "hole up" at Camp David until he produced a report. Dean returned empty-handed.

On the face of it, Haldeman's testimony seemed to support that of Ehrlichman, but there were some significant variations. Contradicting both Ehrlichman and the President, Haldeman denied that Dean was "supposed to be the chief investigator of the Watergate case." The "principal sources" of information for the President, he testified, were Ehrlichman and himself. He even reported a conversation in which Dean had described Liddy's break-in plan as "incredible" and "unacceptable." Dean's attorneys were pleased by this unexpected boost from Haldeman.

THE 1970 SECRET PLAN

In his statement last month defending his Watergate policies on grounds of national security, the President mentioned an intelligence unit he had tried to set up in the White House to respond to

with great success and no exposure." But Hoover is "getting old and he's worried about his legend." Huston advised the President to invite the director to a "stroking" session and overrule him.

When Hoover learned that Nixon had approved the plan despite his objections, he "went through the roof," said an observer. He marched over to Attorney General John Mitchell, and together they forced the President to back down only five days later. Shortly after, Huston was relieved of his security job and replaced by John Dean. Though dormant, the plan was not dead. By one account, U.S. Assistant Attorney General Robert Mardian later tried to revive it, with himself at the head of the operation. But by then, all the intelligence agencies had cooled to the idea; once again it fell through. The White House had to settle for the plumbers—E. Howard Hunt, G. Gordon Liddy & Co.—to handle security matters.