

White House Aide Termed A Liddy-Segretti Contact

Strachan, Haldeman Ex-Assistant, Said to Have Given Californian's Telephone Number to Watergate Defendant

NYTimes

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Feb. 6—At least one White House official knew of and initially aided the political intelligence operations led by G. Gordon Liddy and E. Howard Hunt Jr. as early as February, 1972, four months before the Watergate arrests, according to Government sources.

A well-informed Government official said that Gordon C. Strachan, a former staff assistant to H. R. Haldeman, President Nixon's chief of staff, had served as the initial contact between Mr. Liddy's intelligence operations and the political espionage and sabotage campaign managed by Donald H. Segretti.

The charge was the first directly linking a White House official to the political intelligence operation headed by Liddy and Hunt, both members of the Watergate bugging team. White House officials have repeatedly denied any involve-

ment in or knowledge of such activities before the arrests at the Democratic National Headquarters last June 17.

Last Aug. 29, President Nixon told a news conference that a staff investigation ordered by him "indicates that no one in the White House staff, no one in this Administration, presently employed, was involved in this very bizarre incident."

"We are doing everything we can to take this incident and to investigate and not to cover it up," Mr. Nixon said. "We have cooperated completely."

Government sources said that Mr. Strachan, who joined Mr. Haldeman's staff in 1970 after working with Mudge, Rose, Guthrie & Alexander, the New York law firm of former Attorney General John N. Mitchell, supplied the Califor-

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nia telephone number of Mr. Segretti, to Liddy some time last February. He did so, one source said, after Liddy complained that the separate Segretti operation was "hurting us."

At the time of the Liddy contact, Mr. Strachan was working closely with Dwight C. Chapin, President Nixon's appointments secretary, who has acknowledged to Government investigators, a source said, that he and Mr. Strachan were White House contact points for Mr. Segretti.

Mr. Strachan, who was appointed general counsel of the United States Information Agency last December, could not be reached in his office, despite repeated telephone call. The White House told of The New York Times information, had no immediate comment.

One Government official who has been connected with the Watergate case since its inception said that Liddy was apparently having trouble recruiting intelligence agents in early 1972 because of previous contacts by Mr. Segretti, who began his operation in mid-1971.

"So," this official recounted, "Liddy called up Strachan and said, 'Someone in the field is hurting us. Who do you have out there?'"

After getting a description of Mr. Segretti's activities, Liddy was then quoted as saying that Mr. Segretti "wasn't the same person" he had run into. But Liddy asked for Mr. Segretti's telephone number, nonetheless, the official recalled, saying "I'd like to meet him anyhow."

'He Called Segretti'

"So he called Segretti," the official said of Liddy. "After that, Hunt took over."

The New York Times has previously reported that at least 19 telephone calls were made from Mr. Segretti's phone to Hunt's phone between mid-March and June of last year. At least six telephone calls from Mr. Segretti's phone were made to the White House switchboard and one call to Mr. Chapin's suburban Maryland home. But until today, the link between the Liddy-Hunt operation and Mr. Segretti was not known.

The White House announced last week that Mr. Chapin would leave the White House this spring for a job in industry. Some sources told The Times that he was being forced out against his wishes because of his connection to the Segretti operation.

According to one source, Mr. Chapin, Mr. Strachan and Mr. Segretti had all become friends in the early nineteen-sixties, during their undergraduate days together at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles. Later, Mr. Segretti and Mr. Strachan went to law school together.