

Watergate Testimony

On Ellsberg Break-in

Washington

Robert C. Mardian, a former assistant Attorney General, testified yesterday that a Watergate conspirator, G. Gordon Liddy, gave him the clear "impression" a year ago that President Nixon had authorized a 1971 burglary of the office of Daniel Ellsberg's former psychiatrist.

"I wish to be very careful here, because I don't know that he used the name of the President," Mardian said as he recited, for the Senate Watergate Committee, his interrogation of Liddy three

days after the Watergate break-in.

But he said Liddy had used words "clearly meant to imply that he was acting on the express authority of the President of the United States, with the assistance of the Central Intelligence Agency" in carrying out the burglary.

PRIOR

President Nixon and officials of the CIA have strenuously denied that they had prior knowledge of or involvement in the 1971 burglary carried out by Liddy and other agents of a secret

White House "plumbers" unit, and Liddy has refused to tell investigators anything about his covert activities.

Mardian's evident caution in reciting Liddy's belief that the "plumbers" unit—the group investigating leaks of security information—had been operating with the specific blessings of the President was underscored by Mardian's previous statements to newsmen that he was not a fan of Liddy and had once turned down his bid for a job in the Justice Department.

Mardian's account of what he learned about the Watergate scandal clashed directly and frequently with the testimony of five previous witnesses at the Senate hearings.

James Hamilton, an assistant counsel to the investigating committee, grilled Mardian so extensively about the conflicts his testimony presented that the former Justice Department official complained, at one point, that the questions resembled "an indictment."

SWORE

In one of the central conflicts, Mardian disputed the testimony last week by former Attorney General John N. Mitchell, who swore to the committee he had never approved Liddy's \$250,000 in-

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telligence gathering scheme that came to grief at the Watergate offices of the Democratic National Committee.

Mardian said yesterday under oath that he had related to Mitchell the account by Liddy that the electronic eavesdropping scheme had the former attorney general's approval and that Mitchell "didn't deny it."

Although he was a close personal friend of Mitchell, one of his proteges at the Department of Justice and an aide last year to Mitchell at the Committee for Re-election of the President, Mardian showed no emotion as he suggested, in effect, that the former attorney general had not told the truth.

Mardian, a trim, balding man, calmly denied the accounts of five earlier witnesses that he had been a central character in the Watergate coverup.

He insisted that his knowledge of the break-in and coverup was in a role as attorney for the re-election committee, that he was therefore obliged by an attorney-client ethic of confidentiality to withhold his information and that it had troubled him so much that he had felt as if he were "caught in quicksand."

In his testimony yesterday, Mardian said at var-

ious times that he had no knowledge of the Watergate affair until after the June 17, 1972, arrests.

On the next day, he recalled, Nixon campaign aide Jeb Magruder told him that the committee had a budget for such things as "dirty tricks and black advance."

Asked about the latter term, Mardian replied that he had never heard it before. "I assumed when they told me about it that it was for black advance men," he said. "I learned, however, that a black advance was a counter-advance that was carried on against the opposition candidates or persons operating in their behalf. In other words, an attempt to disrupt the advance schedule of the opposition." He gave no examples of the use of such tactics.

There was more discussion of budgets for dirty tricks, Mardian testified, when a few days later he tried to find out how much money Liddy had been given for his operations.

Magruder first told him \$40,000 had been authorized, Mardian said, but Hugh W. Sloan, Jr., the treasurer of the re-election committee and the man who actually disbursed the money, later told him the figure was actually nearly \$200,000.

Magruder, Mardian said, never admitted to him that this was the correct amount, and he himself has never been able to confirm it.

Before Mardian took the stand, Frederick LaRue expanded on the testimony he gave the committee on Wednesday about his role in the coverup following the break-in at the Watergate offices of the Democratic National Committee.

LaRue, in whose apartment Mardian interviewed Liddy, testified that he also was present at that meetings and also briefed Mitchell on it later that same evening. He said the date was June 20, however, and Mardian testified it took place June 21.

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