

Strachan Says Haldeman Wanted Files Destroyed

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By DAVID E. ROSENBAUM

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WASHINGTON, July 23—Gordon C. Strachan, a former aide to H. R. Haldeman, testified today that three days after the Watergate break-in, under what he believed to be orders from Mr. Haldeman, he destroyed documents indicating that Mr. Haldeman knew that G. Gordon Liddy was conducting a political intelligence operation with a sizable budget.

Mr. Strachan, who was Mr. Haldeman's political assistant

Excerpts from testimony on Watergate, Pages 19 and 20.

until early this year, told the Senate Watergate committee that Mr. Haldeman, then the White House chief of staff, had instructed him, after the burglary at Democratic national headquarters on June 17, 1972, to "make sure our files are clean."

He said that he had no doubt then and none now that his boss was telling him to destroy papers showing that Mr. Haldeman knew of the intelligence-gathering scheme, and Mr. Strachan testified that he did put such material through a paper shredder.

When he reported to Mr. Haldeman later that he had shredded the documents, he recalled, Mr. Haldeman did not express surprise.

In his public statements, in a civil deposition and in his interviews with the staff of the Watergate committee, Mr. Haldeman has denied any foreknowledge of the burglary and any participation in efforts to cover up the scandal.

Mr. Strachan also said that as early as April 4, 1972, Mr. Haldeman, who was the White House staff member

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closest to President Nixon, discussed the intelligence plan with John N. Mitchell, then the President's campaign director.

But he produced no evidence showing that Mr. Haldeman knew that electronic eavesdropping and burglary were part of the political intelligence plan, and he said that he had no indication that Mr. Nixon knew anything about the scheme.

Mr. Strachan was the last in a series of middle-level White House officials whose appearance before the committee came between the dramatic charges and denials of John W. Dean 3d, the former White House counsel, and Mr. Mitchell, on the one hand, and the testimony of Mr. Nixon's top assistants, John D. Ehrlichman and Mr. Haldeman, on the other.

Mr. Ehrlichman, the President's chief domestic adviser until he resigned April 30, is to be at the witness table when the hearings resume tomorrow. His testimony is expected to last several days and is to be followed by that of Mr. Haldeman.

Shorthand Checked

Mr. Strachan, who will be 30 years old tomorrow, resembled in many ways the other young campaign officials who have come before the committee in the last two months. As had so many of the others, he said, he had become imbued with an "overwhelming and frequently inappropriate sense of loyalty."

The committee had granted him immunity from prosecution for anything he testified to before the panel. But the Watergate special prosecutor's office filed sealed evidence with the Federal court before Mr. Strachan's committee appearance, and he could be brought to trial on the basis of that evidence.

Testifying in a high-pitched but smooth and measured voice, with shoulder-length blond hair framing his sun-

tanned, angular face, Mr. Strachan regularly disparaged his own importance in White House operations.

He was, he said, merely a staff assistant who had "very little discretion" to take initiatives on his own. He reported everything he learned to Mr. Haldeman, whom he described as a "very, very tough staff man" and a "very organized individual."

Perhaps the most compelling part of Mr. Strachan's testimony was his assessment of others in the White House and the Committee for the Re-election of the President.

Tough Staff Man

Mr. Dean, who testified last month that Mr. Nixon knew as early as September, 1972, about the Watergate cover-up, was said by Mr. Strachan to have "a remarkable faculty to remember facts." Mr. Strachan had the following exchange with Senator Joseph M. Montoya, Democrat of New Mexico:

SENATOR Montoya: Well, you knew Mr. Dean for quite some time. Would you say he is a truthful man?

MR. STRACHAN: Well, I don't think he ever lied to me.

Q: Now, would it be your opinion that if John Dean said he had told the President about Watergate and the cover-up, would you say that Dean was telling the truth?

A: Well, this is my opinion based on my experience with John Dean, and my opinion would be that John Dean would be telling the truth.

Mr. Strachan, however, seemed to have a low opinion of Jeb Stuart Magruder, the former deputy campaign director, and he contradicted several points of Mr. Magruder's testimony.

Mr. Magruder did not, he contended, report to him about a February meeting at which the burglary plan was outlined by Liddy, who is said to have been the mastermind of the Watergate break-in. Mr. Magruder testified that he had made such a report.

Mr. Strachan also denied that Mr. Magruder had showed him transcripts of the wiretap at the Democratic headquarters. And, last March, he testified, Mr. Magruder tried to persuade him to commit perjury before the Watergate grand jury, a suggestion Mr. Strachan said he rejected.

As for his boss, Mr. Haldeman, Mr. Strachan said he was a brutal taskmaster who expected complete devotion from the White House staff and who often sharply rebuked his aides.

At one point, he said, he was working on a routine project to give certificates to White House staff members who had gone to the Republican National Convention in Miami last August.

As he recalled the story, "One morning about 4 A.M., [Mr. Haldeman called me from Air Force 1 and told me I had not performed and the project had been handled badly."

Mr. Strachan said that he had thought at first the call from the Presidential plane had been a bad dream but that he confirmed the call with the White House communications office.

Thus, when he went in to see Mr. Haldeman on June 20, three days after the Watergate burglary, he was, he said, "scared to death" that Mr. Haldeman would discharge him for not having found out and told Mr. Haldeman in advance about the plans for the burglary.

Instead, he said, Mr. Haldeman appeared calm at the meeting, leading him to believe that his boss either had known about the burglary in advance or had not expected to be told about it. What Mr. Haldeman did tell him at that meeting, the aide testified, was, "Make sure our files are clean."

Among the documents Mr. Strachan then shredded, he said, were a memorandum he had sent to Mr. Haldeman describing briefly the Liddy intelligence plan and its budget and a "talking paper" mentioning the plan that Mr. Haldeman had used at a meeting with Mr. Mitchell in April, 1972.

A check mark by Mr. Haldeman on the memorandum and the lack of notation on the talking paper were part of the shorthand that he and Mr. Strachan used to show which sections of papers had been read and discussed. They indicated, Mr. Strachan said, that the memorandum, prepared in March, 1972, had been read and that the intelligence scheme had been mentioned in the Mitchell meeting.

He said that he had also destroyed documents sent to Mr. Haldeman that contained intelligence information about Democratic Presidential candidates.

He said that he knew that Mr. Haldeman was aware of Liddy's intelligence activities because, in April, 1972, he instructed Mr. Strachan to tell Liddy to "transfer his capabilities" from Senator Edmund S. Muskie of Maine to Senator George McGovern of South Dakota. By then it had become apparent that Mr. Muskie was not likely to become the Democratic Presidential nominee and that Mr. McGovern was.

Mr. Strachan described Mr. Haldeman as being "particularly interested" in intelligence information about Senator Edward M. Kennedy of Massachusetts, and he recalled being instructed to tell Liddy to concentrate on the relationship between Senator Kennedy and Senator McGovern.

Mr. Haldeman was described as having had an intricate telephone monitoring system in his own office. When he wanted an aide to listen in on a call, he would press a button on his phone that would ring a buzzer on the aide's phone and would thus notify the aide to listen to the conversation, according to Mr. Strachan.

Other White House officials, including Charles W. Colson, former special counsel to the President, and Lawrence M. Higby, an assistant to Mr. Haldeman, had tape-recording devices attached to their telephones that would enable them to record conversations as they wished, Mr. Strachan testified.