



At left, Mayday demonstrators are ordered to break camp at West Potomac Park. At right, national guardsmen deploy at Key Bridge.

High-Level Strategy Used to Contain 'Mayday'

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As a ragged army of anti-war demonstrators made its way into Washington with bedrolls and carijana stashes, a group of top police, military and legal officials met in tense sessions in a fifth floor conference room at the U.S. Justice Department to make plans for coping with the invasion. The date was Saturday, May 1, 1971, two

days before Mayday '71 — the massive and unprecedented attempt by thousands of antiwar protesters to stop the government by blocking roadways into the city.

The officials, numbering some 25 men ranging from then Deputy Attorney General Richard G. Kleindienst to D.C. Police Chief Jerry V. Wilson, examined confidential intelligence reports and debated what action to take. They quibbled over different — and often

inaccurate — intelligence estimates on the protesters' strength. They weighed possible political and public reaction to various levels of police-military action against the protesters.

Meanwhile, the movement of the demonstrators, who were swarming into West Potomac Park near the Lincoln Memorial, was being recorded closely by uniformed police, under-

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cover informers, helicopter surveillance teams and agents monitoring the protest organization's two-way radio system.

A basic decision was made: disperse the gathering crowd prematurely, a day before Mayday, thus fragmenting its numbers, then produce a strong police-military show of force on Mayday to control those demonstrators remaining.

This decision-making process and the crucial surveillance that influenced it are described in government documents recently ordered disclosed by a federal judge here. The documents, detailed memoranda of six Justice Department strategy sessions prior to and during the Mayday demonstrations, provide a rare glimpse into the way the government gathered and evaluated intelligence and political reports in preparation for the massive protest action.

The documents were ordered released over last week by U.S. District Judge William B. Bryant to lawyers representing people arrested May 1 who claim in a civil suit they were illegally arrested during Mayday and in other demonstrations about that time. Arrests during the demonstrations totaled 12,000.

The private government strategy meetings were attended by Wilson and his assistants plus top Pentagon military advisers, key Justice officials and White House aides, some of who are now familiar Watergate figures.

Generally, Justice officials led by Kleindienst and internal security division chief Robert Mardian took a more alarmist view, predicting widespread violence by unrestrained mobs. Wilson and Pentagon officials appeared less fearful and more confident that the violent elements within the crowd would be small and isolated.

In a 9:30 a.m. meeting Saturday, May 1, 1971, two days before the planned mass traffic disruptions, Mardian said his intelligence reports showed the demonstrators planned to cut and shoot tires of motorists to obstruct traffic, pour oil at intersections and set it afire, release balloons and kites to foul military helicopter operations and march against the

CIA and South Vietnamese embassy, targets not publicly announced by protest organizers.

Wilson countered that the demonstrators, with a few notable exceptions, were poorly organized, lacked leadership and were not interested in escalating their civil disobedience style traffic blockade to general violence.

Lt. Gen. Hugh M. Exton, director of military support for the Department of the Army, echoed many of Wilson's sentiments and said he "did not visualize a riot situation unless it (the crowd) became stirred up."

It was generally agreed, however, that early crowd estimates by the government had been low and some 20,000 to 40,000 youthful demonstrators were pouring into the city and camping in West Potomac Park in preparation for Mayday.

By late Saturday afternoon, May 1, the crowd had swollen to 50,000, according to an estimate based on photographs taken from a helicopter over the park, Kleindienst said at a second meeting Saturday evening.

Mardian said government observers were monitoring a citizens band radio network operated by protest organizers and "information as to the protesters' codes and communications" was known.

At another point, Mardian indicated that most groups within the Peoples Coalition for Peace and Justice, the loose umbrella organization of radicals, pacifists and others sponsoring the protest, were infiltrated by informers.

The demonstration plans and targets of the groups were generally known, he said, but "the only target that was not known was that of the Gay Liberation group."

With the sudden influx of 50,000 protesters on Saturday, officials at the Justice Department agreed on two basic moves, according to the memorandums:

- Dispersal of the 50,000 from their West Potomac Park encampment on Sunday, one day before Mayday, to fragment and weaken the demonstration.

- Preposition federal troops at key points in the city on Mayday to assist police and keep the streets open.

The idea of dispersing the crowd from West Potomac Park was first proposed by John Ehrlichman, former White House domestic affairs adviser, at the Justice Department strategy meeting Saturday morning, May 1, according to the memoranda.

By late Saturday afternoon, it had become a firm decision of the strategy group and was made formal at dawn on Sunday, May 2, by the Justice and Interior departments' revoking the permit for the protest crowd to stay in the park. The crowd was ordered to disperse.

There were no legal difficulties with revoking the permit, Kleindienst noted, because of "open, blatant and notorious" violations of the permit by the protesters, especially marijuana smoking.

Ehrlichman described the dispersal plan as a "psychological maneuver," and Wilson predicted it "would probably reduce by 75 per cent the number that would be here by Monday (Mayday)."

Thus, at dawn on Sunday, May 2, bleary-eyed from an all-night rock concert, the crowd in the park suddenly awoke to face a line of 1,200 helmeted D.C. policemen

and were ordered out of the park.

While the police stood by, most of the 50,000 stumbled away and melted into the city. About 300 remained and were quietly arrested.

At a strategy meeting that afternoon, Wilson estimated only 3,000 to 5,000 demonstrators would remain for Mayday and only 2,000 of them would try to disrupt the city.

Gen. Exton of the Army said 10,000 federal troops were in and near the city, poised for Mayday.

The presence of troops on the streets had been a sensitive issue at previous strategy meetings, with some officials wondering if a large

military presence would trigger hostile reaction by demonstrators and make containment more difficult. Exton suggested the troops be kept in buildings out of sight unless needed.

At a Saturday meeting, Kleindienst "discounted the idea that the troops would be a trigger to the situation," according to one memorandum.

"Mr. Mardian," the memorandum continued, "stated that much mail is being received which is critical of the government position and that if violence erupts the public will expect appropriate action. He stated that in his opinion, prepositioning was necessary and some-

thing should be done to counteract the demonstrators' planned activities."

Ehrlichman then said a "lot of questions were being raised as to why the government was permitting pot and violations of the law," adding that "the President was ready to go further than had been discussed up to now in this meeting."

Kleindienst and Ehrlichman set the tone from then on, and the final decision was to pre-position the troops conspicuously at crucial bridges and intersections in the city.

By late Sunday, May 2, new intelligence reports coming into the Justice Department indicated more

demonstrators were staying in the city than originally estimated after the West Potomac Park dispersal.

At a 5 p.m. meeting, Wilson estimated 10,000 were still here with 4,000 at Georgetown University and 700 to 1,000 at American University.

Mardian estimated 15,000 were still in the city with 4,000 at George Washington University, 3,000 at Georgetown University and 2,000 to 3,000 at American.

Monday morning, Mayday, came with 10,000 federal troops, 1,400 D.C. National Guardsmen and virtually the entire force of 6,000 D.C. park and capital police at their stations.