

Key Watergate figure is booted at Treasury, ends at White House

WASHINGTON — G. Gordon Liddy, a central figure in the squalid Watergate case, was fired by the Treasury Department in July 1971 for insubordinate, unauthorized conduct on gun controls—and immediately found a cozy haven in the White House.

The official Nixon Administration version of this strange story, both then and now, is that this was nothing but a routine transfer.

In fact, however, high Treasury officials were flabbergasted and furious when they learned the man they had fired quickly landed a coveted staff job on the White House domestic council. From there, Liddy went to the Nixon re-election committee—and subsequent notoriety—without ever having his troubles at the Treasury aired.

This background points up two important facts about Liddy who was fired from the re-election committee June 28 when he refused to answer federal agents' questions about the June 17 break-in at the plush Watergate's Democratic national headquarters:

First, Liddy has a record of free-wheeling without regard for the desires of his superiors; second, he has been protected and supported by senior officials at the White House and has their blessing to this day.

Liddy came to the Treasury in 1969 with a background in law enforcement and right-wing politics in upstate New York. As assistant district attorney in Dutchess County, ex-FBI agent Liddy

ran for Congress in 1968 as a law-and-order candidate. Defeated in the Republican primary by Hamilton Fish, Liddy then ran an inactive campaign as a Conservative party nominee. His 9,000 votes nearly defeated Fish.

Nevertheless, freshman Rep. Fish endorsed Liddy's application for a job at the Treasury and so did other Republican politicians. Because of those endorsements and his 1968 role as Dutchess County chairman for Nixon-Agnew, Liddy was hired by Assistant Secretary Eugene Rossides as a special assistant. Although Nixon Administration sources now claim Rossides brought Liddy into the Treasury, the fact is they did not even meet until 1969.

Liddy quickly balked at taking orders particularly when it came to politically volatile gun control legislation. Rossides was trying to regulate the lethal "Saturday night special" pistols. But Liddy, an ardent gun fancier himself, was marching to a different drummer. High Treasury officials were angered when Liddy conferred privately and without authorization on gun controls with White House and Justice Department officials as well as anti-gun control lobbyists from the National Rifle Association (NRA).

The last straw was the 100th anniversary convention of the NRA here April 4, 1971, when Liddy—without authorization or approval—delivered a speech praising NRA goals and indicating a helping hand against gun controls by the Nixon Administration.