

Mitchell Tells of Bug Talk

Claims Plans Were Rejected At Discussions

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By Carl Bernstein
and Bob Woodward

Washington Post Staff Writers

Former Attorney General John N. Mitchell conceded publicly yesterday that he had discussed plans to place the Democrats under illegal electronic surveillance but contended that "I never approved any such plans."

Acknowledging that he had attended meetings at which wiretapping plans were discussed, Mitchell said: "I have heard discussion of such plans. They've always been cut off by me at all times, and I would like to know who it was that kept bringing them back and back and back."

Mitchell testified for more than 2½ hours yesterday before the Watergate grand jury and, in several discussions with reporters, insisted he had no criminal knowledge of plans to bug the Democrats' headquarters.

Instead, said the former attorney general, he had given aspects of "an entire intelligence-gathering program" aimed at obtaining "every bit of information that you could about the opposing candidates and their operations."

But "the electronic surveillance was turned down and turned down and that was disposed of," Mitchell maintained.

Mitchell's statements yesterday were in sharp contrast to his previous insistence, dating back to the Watergate arrests on June 17, 1972, that the bugging operation was a complete surprise and mystery to him. Mitchell also had previously denied that he authorized any type widespread undercover intelligence-gathering activities against the Democrats.

Through his lawyer, Mitchell confirmed yesterday that he had attended three meetings at which the Watergate bugging plans were discussed

two of them held while he served as the nation's highest legal officer.

"He's a sophisticated man," attorney William G. Hundley said of his client. Each time Mitchell was told of the proposed bugging, "he cut it off."

Asked about charges that Mitchell had helped arrange for payments to buy the silence of the seven convicted Watergate conspirators, Hundley said, "We don't feel there's any hush money involved." However, Hundley refused to comment when asked if Mitchell knew of such cash payments to the conspirators and the identity of those who made them.

Mitchell, meanwhile, said "I have never met any of the defendants, I have never met any of the counsel and I never handled any of the money."

Reporters, who were aware of previous sworn statements by Mitchell that he had known at least two of the conspirators and that he had discussed the bugging with counsel for the Committee for the Re-election

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of the President, pressed for an explanation and were told: "I answered your question fully and completely."

Mitchell was followed on the grand jury witness stand yesterday by presidential counsel John W. Dean III, who — like the former attorney general — has been accused by former Presidential assistant Jeb Stuart Magruder of approving plans for the Watergate bugging and pay-offs to keep the convicted conspirators' lips sealed.

Dean declared on Thursday that he will not allow himself to become a scapegoat in the Watergate case, amid reliable reports that he was prepared to tell the grand jury all he knows about the Watergate bugging and to allege that there was a subsequent coverup by White House officials.

On Thursday, associates of Dean reported that he would swear under oath that White House chief of staff H. R. (Bob) Haldeman and other high White House officials actively participated in a coverup to hide the involvement of presidential aides in the bugging. Haldeman denied the charge.

Yesterday, the same associates said that Dean had preserved "documentary evidence" relating to both the bugging and alleged coverup, which they said Dean would present to the grand jury.

"Up to now John Dean has been a true blue soldier for the White House," one associate said, "and now the White House has decided they can send him up the river for being a good soldier. Well, he's going to take some lieutenants and captains with him."

Another associate said that Dean will implicate people "above and below himself" in the White House hierarchy when telling what he knows about the bugging and the alleged coverup.

Asked to comment on what the presidential counsel intended to tell the grand jury, Dean's attorney, Robert McCandless, said: "There have been too many statements from too many off-the-record sources on both sides. Mr. Dean has made his statement (about refusing to be a scapegoat in the case) and will stand on that."

Since the President announced his intervention in the Watergate case Tuesday, there has been a war of charges and countercharges and recrimination that is being fought among the men who — until the Watergate case broke wide open this week — were considered the epitome of team players, zealous believers in customary insistence on loyalty in the Nixon White House.

By midweek, reliable sources reported, that loyalty had been shattered, amid confusion about who might be indicted on the White House staff, who ordered what and who ordered whom, who would resign and who would be saved.

At the White House the mood was reportedly somber, with one midlevel official saying, "It's every man for himself — get a lawyer and blame everyone else."

In Key Biscayne, White House Press Secretary Ronald L. Ziegler said that President Nixon brought up the Watergate at a Cabinet meeting and told the Cabinet members that "the objective is to develop facts and the entire truth of the matter."

Asked if there have been any resignations from the White House staff, Ziegler said: "There is no change from what I said yesterday" when he said there had been none. In answer to another question, Ziegler said that White House chief of staff Haldeman has not resigned.

Two sources in the execu-

tive branch have said that the Watergate disclosures will probably lead to Haldeman's resignation.

Mitchell's comments yesterday expanded on his earlier public statements regarding the case as well as statements he made under oath to Democratic Party lawyers in a civil lawsuit stemming from the Watergate affair.

Hundley, his lawyer, said Mitchell knew certain people had intelligence plans that included bugging schemes and Mitchell acknowledged to reporters that he had "heard discussions of such (bugging) plans" but that they were always "cut off by me."

Hundley also confirmed in general a New York Times report yesterday that said Mitchell has told friends that he, Magruder and Liddy had three meetings last year at which plans to bug the Democrats were discussed but rejected by Mitchell.

Two of the meetings occurred in January and February, 1972, when Mitchell was still attorney general, and the third in March, 1972, after Mitchell had taken over as Mr. Nixon's campaign director, according to the Times' report.

The Washington Post reported earlier this week that Magruder has told federal prosecutors that he, Mitchell, Liddy and White House counsel Dean attended a meeting in Mitchell's office in February, 1972, at which bugging plans were discussed.

In contrast, Mitchell has insisted in earlier statements since the break-in and bugging attempt last June 17 that he had absolutely no advance knowledge of the incident. For example, Mitchell last Sept. 1 told reporters that he had no idea who was behind the bugging attempt. "If I did, I certainly wouldn't be stating it for the press because criminal proceedings are going on," he said.

At that time, Liddy's name had surfaced in the case. Two weeks after Mitchell said he had no idea who was behind the bugging, Liddy was indicted in the case.

Mitchell's testimony under oath, taken by Democratic Party lawyers last September, contained a flat denial that he, during the time he was Nixon campaign director, heard of any plans for surveillance of Democratic Party headquarters. The exchange went like this:

Question: "Was there ever any discussion at which you were present, or about which

you heard when you were campaign director, concerning having any form of surveillance on the Democratic Party national headquarters?"

Mitchell: "No, sir, I can't imagine a less productive activity than that."

A key to the exchange may be the questioner's use of the phrase "when you were campaign director." Mitchell directed the Nixon re-election campaign between March 1 and July 2, 1972, when he resigned, and the question apparently would not apply to discussions held before March 1, 1972.

In another part of his sworn testimony to Democratic Party lawyers, Mitchell said that as campaign director he had "one or two meetings" with Liddy. Mitchell then described the meetings, making no mention of discussions to gather political intelligence or to bug the Democratic opposition.

Mitchell was then asked, "Did you ever have any discussions with Mr. Liddy concerning the security group or the functions of the security group for the committee—?"

Mitchell replied: "No, sir."

When Mitchell resigned as director of the Nixon re-election campaign, he said he was leaving politics to spend more time with his wife and daughter. Mitchell at the time denied

any link between his resignation and the Watergate break-in, which had occurred about two weeks earlier.

"Mr. Mitchell had absolutely no knowledge of the incident and has denounced it," a spokesman for the re-election committee said at the time.

Mitchell was asked yesterday why he did not come forward earlier with whatever information he had.

"That's a matter for discussion before the grand jury," he replied.

Meanwhile yesterday, U.S. District Chief Judge John J. Sirica denied a request by a Washington lawyer for a protective order that he not be held in contempt if he refuses to divulge a client's name before the grand jury.

The lawyer, Peter H. Wolf, had said his client, a campaign committee employee, was asked to take eight cartons of materials out of a White House office building the Sunday after the Watergate incident, and kept the cartons several months.

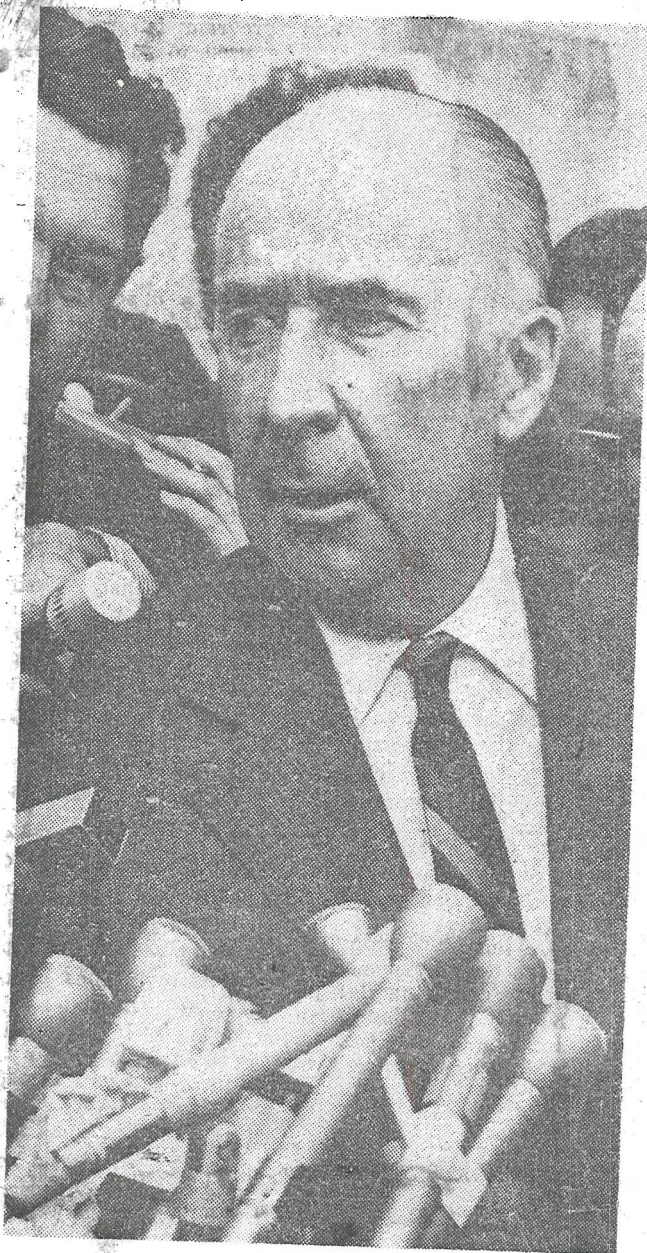
In denying the order, Judge Sirica left the way open for it to be filed again if Wolf invokes the attorney-client privilege at the time of his appearance before the grand jury.

William Wickens, a counsel to Weicker, said it was impossible to determine immediately whether anything was missing from the cabinet but that it was possible some of the records might have been photographed or copied. A Xerox machine is located about 5 feet from the cabinet, Wickens said.



John Mitchell, left center, is hemmed in by reporters.

Associated Press



By Joe Heiberger—The Washington Post

After talking to grand jury, John Mitchell meets media.