

Watergate Bombshell

I CAN SAY categorically that no one in the White House staff, no one in this administration, presently employed, was involved in this very bizarre incident."

It was at a news conference last August 29 that President Nixon had totally disavowed — on the basis of an investigation conducted by his counsel, John W. Dean III — any responsibility for or knowledge of the Watergate bugging incident by any member of the White House staff.

Mr. Nixon and his spokesmen had clung to that position throughout the 1972 electoral campaign, through thousands of newspaper and television reports questioning it and through increasingly by critical comments by office holders of both parties—until last Tuesday, when the President, somber and unsmiling, appeared in the West Wing press room.

Two Announcements

"I have two announcements to make," Mr. Nixon began. "Because of their technical nature I shall read both of the announcements to the members of the Press Corps."

In the first, he sharply reversed his previous position by pledging full cooperation with the current investigations of the Watergate conspiracy by a select Senate Committee. All members of the White House staff, he said, would appear voluntarily before the Senate committee to testify under oath and provide full answers to any "proper" questions.

Mr. Nixon, who accepted no question during his brief appearance before television film cameras in the White House briefing room, originally indicated that White House staffers would not be available to the Senate committee. He had consistently claimed such a procedure would violate the constitutional separation of powers between the executive and legislative branches.

The Nation

But last week, Mr. Nixon declared that as a result of negotiations between leaders of the Senate group and White House aides, "I believe now an agreement which is satisfactory to both sides" has been reached.

The President said that the Senate panel, headed by Senator Sam Ervin (Dem.-N.C.), had agreed it may hear some witnesses in executive session before they appear at televised public hearings and that witnesses from the executive branch will be allowed to invoke executive privilege if they feel such a move is called for by certain questions from the committee.

But the second announcement was even more startling. "There have been major developments in the

'Real progress has been made in the case'

case," Mr. Nixon declared — while adding that it would be improper to disclose them at this time. "Real progress has been made in finding the truth," he said.

The President explained that he had begun an intensive new investigation of his own into the Watergate affair after serious charges came to light on March 21.

The fact that he ordered a second investigation — and that White House press secretary Ronald Ziegler specifically refused to repeat his comment on March 24 in which he declared that the President retained "full confidence" in his counsel, John Dean — suggested a serious

loss of confidence in Dean and his original report.

The President did not explain precisely the significance of the March date for the re-opening of his own "investigation," but it was about that time that convicted Watergate conspirator James McCord Jr. disclosed that he would be willing to tell what he knew about the matter.

Since then the once taciturn-turned-talkative agent McCord had testified before the federal grand jury and before Ervin's Senate panel. Although his testimony was given in secret, reliable sources indicated that McCord offered hearsay testimony indicating that Dean, former Attorney General John Mitchell and the second-in-command at Nixon's re-election headquarters, Jeb Magruder, had advance knowledge of the bugging and related political espionage activities.

At any rate, only moments after the President's dramatic White House appearance, Ron Ziegler characterized Mr. Nixon's past statements denying any involvement by White House staff members as "inoperative."

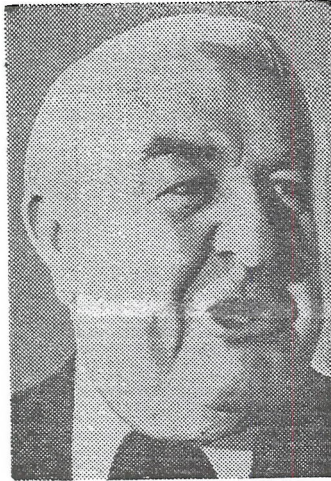
And the Los Angeles Times predicted that "The White House will make a dramatic admission within several days that one or more high level officials bear some responsibility for Watergate-type political espionage." There will be "sacrificial lambs," the Times suggested and "at least one official might be forced to resign."

On Thursday those "lambs" were formally identified. In the biggest bombshell in the case to date, President Nixon's former special assistant, Jeb Stuart Magruder, fingered both Mitchell and Dean as having approved and helped plan the Watergate bugging operation. According to Magruder, Mitchell and Dean later arranged to buy the silence of the seven convicted Watergate conspirators.



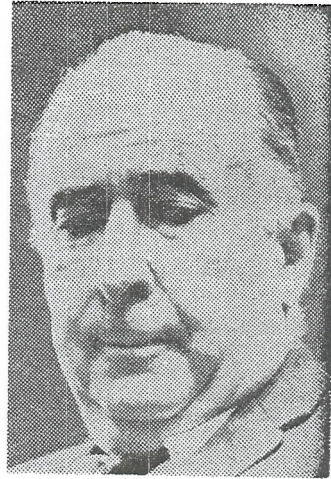
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DEAN



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ERVIN



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MITCHELL