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New Report Ties Colson To Break-In

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Charles W. Colson, former special counsel to President Nixon, knew of the Watergate bugging plans before they were executed and urged that the illegal electronic surveillance be expedited, federal prosecutors have been told by two top officials of Mr. Nixon's re-election campaign.

The two officials, former White House aides Jeb Stuart Magruder and Frederick C. LaRue, both have told prosecutors in the Watergate case that Colson made a telephone call to Magruder in early 1972 expressing dissatisfaction that the bugging had not yet been carried out, according to highly reliable sources.

Colson, who resigned his White House post last month to enter private law practice, repeatedly has denied that he had advance knowledge of the bugging and recently said he had taken a lie detector test which supported that assertion.

IMPLICATION

Time magazine, in this week's editions, first reported that Colson had been implicated in the bugging through statements by Magruder, the deputy director of the Nixon re-election campaign. Additional details of Magruder's allegations, and those by LaRue, were subsequently obtained by the Washington Post.

Time also reported that Colson recruited young men during last year's presidential campaign to pose as homosexual supporters of Senator George McGovern

in an attempt to link the Democratic nominee with the gay liberation cause.

In the bugging case, according to highly reliable sources, Magruder has told federal prosecutors that Colson telephoned him in February, 1972, and asked: "When the hell are we going to get this bugging plan approved and into operation?"

Following Magruder's meeting with the prosecutors, the sources reported, LaRue — a principal deputy to former Attorney General John N. Mitchell, the Nixon

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campaign manager — confirmed that Colson had made the telephone call to Magruder, but said that it came in March, not February.

Federal investigators told the Washington Post last summer that Colson and convicted Watergate conspirator E. Howard Hunt Jr. directed an extensive "dirty tricks" operation of political sabotage against Democratic candidates during the 1972 presidential campaign.

Convicted Watergate conspirator James W. McCord Jr. has testified under oath that, on the basis of his conversation with Hunt, he received the impression that Colson had advance knowledge of the plans to bug Democratic headquarters.

According to earlier reports of Magruder's allegations, the former White House aide told prosecutors that the bugging plans had been approved by then-Attorney General Mitchell, presidential counsel John W. Dean and himself during a series of three meetings in February and March.

Mitchell has since acknowledged discussing the bugging plans at the three meetings, two of them held while he was still the nation's highest law enforcement officer, but maintains that he vetoed the idea of employing electronic surveillance.

Following his appearance before the Watergate grand jury on April 20, Mitchell told reporters the bugging plans had "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."

An associate of Mitchell said yesterday that the former attorney general was implicitly referring to Colson in that remark, as well as when he told the grand jury that he did not believe Magruder could have gone ahead with the bugging plans unless he went around Mitchell to unnamed officials at the White House.

Magruder, according to reliable sources, told the Watergate prosecutors that he interpreted Colson's phone call as a sign of impatience that the Watergate bugging plans had not yet been implemented.

Magruder reportedly told the prosecutors, was made before the third meeting — held in Key Biscayne — at which the bugging was discussed.

LaRue, however, reportedly told the prosecutors that Colson's call came after the Key Biscayne meeting, at which both LaRue and Mitchell insisted the bugging plans were voted for a final time.

The timing of such a phone call could be of legal importance in either supporting or refuting Mitchell's contention that he vetoed the bugging plans.

If such a call came after the Key Biscayne meeting, one person involved in the federal investigation said yesterday, it might lend support to Mitchell's assertion that the bugging was ordered by White House officials — namely Colson and perhaps others — after Mitchell had turned down the plans.

VETOED?