

Phone Call Last July-- FBI Chief 'Confused' By White House Role

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Washington Post Service

Washington

Former acting FBI director L. Patrick Gray III has told Senate investigators that last July he informed President Nixon that he was "confused" by the role of White House aides in the Watergate investigation and that their actions could lead to trouble for Mr. Nixon.

The President, according to Gray, replied only that Gray should continue to "go ahead and do your job." Gray also said that Mr. Nixon did not seek to learn more from Gray about Gray's misgivings.

On Thursday, ^{10 MAY} Gray met with Senate investigators and provided them with his account of a telephone conversation on July 6, 1972, with the President. Five different Senate sources provided almost identical accounts of Gray's statements about aspects of the Watergate investigation, including the conversation with Mr. Nixon.

CONFUSED

According to the sources, Gray said that he began getting "confused" about the Watergate investigation on June 28, 11 days after bugging of Democratic headquarters was discovered.

Gray, the sources said, had scheduled a meeting between CIA and FBI officials for that date because FBI agents were suspicious of CIA involvement in the bugging.

However, presidential assistant John D. Ehrlichman told Gray that morning that Gray could not hold the meeting and ordered him to cancel it. Senate sources said Gray told them.

The conversation with Ehrlichman, the sources said, occurred on the same

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day that Ehrlichman and presidential counsel John W. Dean reportedly handed the acting FBI director two file folders belonging to one of the Watergate conspirators and told Gray: "These should never see the light of day."

TELEPHONE

Gray told the senate investigators that on July 6, he telephoned Clark MacGregor, then President Nixon's campaign manager, and urged MacGregor to tell Mr. Nixon of the unusual behavior of Ehrlichman and other presidential aides.

Gray, the sources said, decided to call MacGregor after discussing Ehrlichman's action with a high CIA official. Gray and the CIA official "both decided they should try to tell some higher authority that the FBI and CIA were being damaged in their respective missions because of this White House interference by Ehrlichman," one of

the sources said. "They were concerned because somebody outside their organizations were calling the shots."

That same day, Gray told the investigators, he received a telephone call from Mr. Nixon, who opened the conversation by congratulating Gray on his handling of an airplane hijacking case.

Then, Gray reportedly said, he told Mr. Nixon that he was "confused" by what appeared to be CIA involvement in the bugging and by

certain actions he had been asked to take by presidential aides.

According to the sources, Gray told investigators he did not mention any specific names or instance to the President, and told him only that he could not understand some of the things he (Gray) was being asked to do.

WOUND

One of the sources said Gray told the President that he was particularly concerned with "White House involvement" in making investigative decisions normally reserved for the FBI and quoted Gray as telling Mr. Nixon: "It could wound you."

Gray, the same source said, quoted the President as replying: "Keep up with your vigorous investigation," at which point the conversation ended.

Another source who has talked with Gray about the Watergate said that Gray's testimony to the Senate investigators shows "more and more incidents" that indicated that the orders from the White House "were to conceal and not get to the final bottom."

The sources agreed that Gray said he has no evidence that the President had knowledge of a White House coverup of the Watergate investigation.

COVERUP

Some news accounts last night reported that Gray had told Senate investigators that he had explicitly told President Nixon that White House aides were trying to "impede" the investigation and warned of a "coverup" by the White House.

However, the Post's sources said that Gray did not point to any coverup.

In a statement issued Monday and personally approved by the President, the White House denied specifically that Mr. Nixon had participated in any activities to cover up the Watergate bugging case.

Deputy press secretary Gerald L. Warren said in Key Biscayne, Fla., that "any suggestion that the President participated in any coverup activity or activities is untrue."

On Tuesday, press secre-

tary Ronald L. Ziegler was told that the Warren statement did not deny "awareness" by Mr. Nixon of a coverup.

Ziegler replied that the original statement "was not drawn to make a distinction

between participation and awareness."

On Monday, Warren had been asked whether his statement was subject to being declared "inoperative," as Ziegler had described earlier White House statements about the Watergate case.

Warren replied: "That was different . . . This came from the President."

In his April 30 speech, Mr. Nixon said that he had remained convinced until March of this year that the charges of involvement by members of the White House staff were false, and the denials true.

ASKED

After setting in motion an investigation immediately after the break-in, Mr. Nixon said, he "repeatedly asked those that conducted the investigation whether there was any reason to believe that members of my administration were in any way involved.

"I received repeated assurance there were not," he said.

Mr. Nixon said that he discounted press reports that appeared to implicate officials of the administration or of his re-election committee because of the reassurances he received, because he believed the reports he was getting, and because he had faith in those who gave them.