

# AIDES SAY REPORT TO NIXON ABSOLVING HIS STAFF CAME FROM EHRLICHMAN ORALLY

## WATERGATE STUDY

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### President Didn't Talk Directly With Dean

#### About Inquiry NYTimes

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WASHINGTON, May 15—The only report that President Nixon received last year on possible staff involvement in the Watergate break-in was an informal oral report from John D. Ehrlichman, senior White House official reported today.

Shortly after the June 17 break-in, the sources said, the President ordered Mr. Ehrlichman, then his chief domestic

*Excerpts from the briefing  
by Ziegler are on Page 26.*

adviser, to set in motion an investigation to determine whether any member of the White House staff had been involved.

Mr. Ehrlichman delegated John W. Dean 3d, then the Presidential counsel, to conduct the investigation, the sources said, and Mr. Ehrlichman, subsequently delivered an oral report to the President.

#### Assurances Cited

The sources said that it was on the basis of Mr. Ehrlichman's assurances that Mr. Nixon said in his news conference Aug. 29 that Mr. Dean had conducted "a complete investigation of all leads," and that he could assure the country that "no one in this Administration, presently employed, was involved in this very bizarre incident."

The sources said that this account of the situation was based on conversations with the President within the last 48 hours.

In keeping with the White House staff system, the sources explained, the President did not talk directly with Mr. Dean

about the inquiry either before the investigation or after it.

#### Assumption Was Made

"The word was passed through Ehrlichman," said one White House staff member, "and we all assumed that Dean was carrying out his orders."

Since then, the sources continued, the President has concluded, without identifying anyone as the culprit, that the investigation—and Mr. Ehrlichman's report on it—was a seriously deficient effort.

The sources supplied Mr. Nixon's account of the investigation—a crucial element in the attempt to determine whether the President had any knowledge of the Watergate episode and the subsequent attempt to cover it up—after Mr. Dean had been widely quoted as saying that he had never submitted a report.

#### Assertion Not Challenged

None of the sources challenge that assertion, but they said that there was no question that an investigation had been ordered. Furthermore, they asserted, Mr. Nixon had operated on the assumption, as he said in his televised speech of April 30, that his orders had been totally complied with.

Until today, persons retaining the President's confidence had been reluctant to supply his version of the episode, either publicly or privately. Ronald L. Ziegler, the White House press secretary, had turned aside all questions on the subject on the ground that he could not make statements that might interfere with anyone's civil liberties.

However, after a news briefing this morning in which he was bombarded with questions

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—the climax of a series of such briefings that, according to correspondents, have surpassed all earlier ones in acrimony—the sources agreed to set forth the President's position.

Their accounts pictured Mr. Nixon, as have his public utterances, as the victim of inept

investigations.

The sources also disclosed that Mr. Dean, Mr. Ehrlichman and H. R. Haldeman, all of whom resigned from the White House staff on April 30, would leave the Federal payroll as of this evening.

Mr. Zeigler had said in response to daily questions, that the three men were continuing to report to their office each day to assist with "transitional duties." It was learned, however, that Mr. Dean has not visited or telephoned the White House since his resignation, which had been demanded by Mr. Nixon, and that he has in fact performed no duties since that date.

The sources said that the men had been kept on full salary until the expiration of the current pay period. With the concurrence of the President, it was said, the men were paid on a "compassionate basis," much as those discharged from prizes are usually paid for two corporations or other enterprises or a month after their departure.

Mr. Dean was paid even though—unlike the two others—he did not appear at his office, the sources explained, because Mr. Nixon did not want to point an accusatory finger at him by treating him differently from his colleagues.

In discussing the present situation with regard to the Watergate affair an associated activities, the sources were unable to supply an account of the activities within the White House between the time that Judge William Matthew Byrne Jr., presiding at the Pentagon papers trial in Los Angeles, learned of widespread wiretaps

on reporters and Government officials and the discovery of wiretap logs in the office safe of Mr. Ehrlichman last Friday.

Mr. Ziegler said that President Nixon had not known that the papers were in Mr. Ehrlichman's safe until after their discovery.

When asked why Mr. Ehrlichman, who presumably knew that the documents were there, had not alerted the President or others when he learned that Judge Byrne was asking for them, he said that he was not authorized to reply to such questions.

The existence of the wiretaps was disclosed on Thursday morning, and the docu-

ments were discovered some 24 hours later. In the interim, the Pentagon papers case was dismissed by Judge Byrne, in part because he could not obtain the logs or summaries of the taps.

There is no evidence that Mr. Ehrlichman made any effort to steer the Federal Bureau of Investigation, which was conducting the search, to his office safe.

Among the questions that Mr. Ziegler turned aside, despite insistent questioning, were the following:

¶Whom did Mr. Nixon order to conduct the Watergate investigation last year? Who reported to him? Was the report in written or oral form?

¶Why was Mr. Dean still being paid? Didn't Mr. Ehrlichman alert the White House that the wiretap logs were in his safe? Why was it in the public interest to maintain on the payrolls people discharged in connection with the Watergate tapes?

¶Had anyone broken the law in ordering the wiretaps placed on the phones of reporters and Government employees?

Also, what was the White House reaction to the decision of Judge John J. Sirica to take custody of White House papers placed in a bank safety box by Mr. Dean? When will Mr. Nixon hold a news conference to answer these questions?