

Most Everything Points to Haldeman



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AT THE CENTER of the Watergate web, investigators now believe, is the deposed White House major domo H. R. Haldeman. Most of the strings in the Watergate tangle seem to lead back to him.

- Most of the men implicated in the scandal belonged to his tight little circle. Such key Watergate figures as John Dean, Jeb Magruder, Dwight Chapin and Gordon Strachan reported directly to him.

- Haldeman was such a meticulous manager, investigators have concluded, that the Watergate operation couldn't have occurred without his knowledge. He stayed behind the scenes, using loyal aides to do the dirty work. He kept them on such a tight leash, as one insider put it, that "they couldn't sneeze without his permission." During a presidential appearance that Chapin scheduled, for instance, another aide asked Chapin to arrange for President Nixon to walk five feet out of his way to greet an important labor leader. Chapin said he couldn't do it without Haldeman's approval.

- Jeb Magruder has told prosecutors that ex-Attorney General John Mitchell opposed the waterbugging, although he went along reluctantly in the end. It was Dean, according to Magruder, who kept insisting on going ahead with the scheme. Dean, in turn, has said he took his directions from Haldeman.

- Haldeman controlled a \$350,000 cash

fund that apparently was used to bribe the Watergate defendants to keep their mouths shut. The money was delivered by Haldeman's assistant, Gordon Strachan, to the apartment of campaign aide Fred Larue. Like the others, Larue was also a Haldeman loyalist.

Not long after the waterbuggers were arrested, our White House sources tipped us off that the plot had Haldeman's imprint all over it. Although these sources had demonstrated their reliability in the past, we knew they disliked Haldeman intensely. We therefore investigated cautiously and could find no direct Haldeman involvement.

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IT TOOK US until February 25, 1973, before we could link Haldeman's name for the first time to Watergate. Still, we could only report that "the Watergate tracks (lead) right up to Haldeman's door." We noted that FBI agents had been forbidden from questioning him. "Yet," we wrote, "they were able to trace Watergate clues to Haldeman aides, who never make a move without asking Haldeman."

Then we described how he operated. "Haldeman exercises his power," we reported, "from behind the scenes, carefully staying in the darkest part of the President's shadow. He has surrounded himself with bright, disciplined, younger men who don't question his instructions."