

# Probe Turns on Prosecutor

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N.Y. Times Service

## Washington

The Watergate special prosecution team has decided to investigate the conduct of Henry F. Petersen, the assistant attorney general who supervised the Watergate inquiry for nearly a year and was placed in sole charge by President Nixon in mid-April.

Sources close to special prosecutor Archibald Cox said that the team's review of the Watergate record thus far had left "no question" that Petersen was, at best, totally misled by his superiors in the White House. At issue, these sources said, is whether Petersen was involved in the coverup.

Other investigators, citing Petersen's record for integrity during 25 years of government service and the fact that he was one of the highest-ranking Democrats in the Nixon administration,

said that they believe he was a "victim" who was, as one official put it, "gulled" by the White House.

On April 17, the White House announced that Mr. Nixon had taken personal command of what was depicted as a "new investigation" into the Watergate case. It was subsequently disclosed that the President had decided to work directly with Petersen. Over the next few weeks the two men often discussed the case by telephone.

In a telephone interview yesterday, Petersen vigorously denied any involvement in a coverup and said, "I did not compromise this investigation with anybody at all."

But he also acknowledged that he was furious with the Nixon administration for its handling of the case. He would immediately retire from government service, Petersen said angrily, except that "everybody would



HENRY E. PETERSEN  
'I did not compromise'

report that 'another Watergate figure left the government today.'"

One government investigator said that the evidence collected thus far showed that John W. Dean III, the former White House counsel,

was the official who had dealt most directly with Petersen, and the official who — either of his own volition or at the direction of others — had most misled him.

It was Dean, Justice Department sources said, who requested and received from Petersen last year information about the theory and scope of the department's criminal investigation and then utilized that information to help steer the White House cover-up through potential trouble areas.

Dean was quoted by associates as believing that his superiors had been pleased at his ability to "keep the lid on." Only the five men seized inside the Democratic National Committee offices in the Watergate complex and their two immediate superiors, E. Howard Hunt Jr., and G. Gordon Liddy, were accused in the indictment of involvement.

Asked about this, Petersen

said: "If you are asking me whether I discussed this investigation with Dean, the answer is yes. But I didn't give him any details. Hell, I hardly had to. He had the (FBI) investigative reports himself."

"Dean never tried to pressure me," Petersen added. "But did I feel the pressure in this case? The answer is yes."

He said he realized higher-ups were involved in the Watergate bugging within days of the break-in and arrests last June 17. At one point, he related, he went to Richard G. Kleindienst, then the attorney general and his immediate superior in the Justice Department, and warned:

"Brother Dick, keep one thing in mind. I ain't going to jail for this, and if you're smart, you'll stay out of this, one yourself."

It is the fact that Petersen and other high-level Justice Department officials sus-

Tues., June 5, 1973 ★★ San Francisco Chronicle 11  
pected that high political figures were behind the burglaries that has prompted suspi-

cion among Cox and his investigators about Petersen's role.