

Haldeman Testifies Nixon Didn't Order a Full Report No Request for Formal Watergate Probe Until This Year, Ex-Aide Says

Associated Press

Washington

Former White House chief of staff H. R. Haldeman has testified that President Nixon didn't ask for a formal report on the Watergate affair until this year and that his chief worry about the scandal last year was that it might hurt his re-election chances.

"The principal source of information would be inquiries he would make of me or John Ehrlichman as to the status of the case . . . which I would subsequently direct to John Dean," Haldeman said. "In other words, I would relay the question to John and relay the answer back to the President."

Ehrlichman was Mr. Nixon's chief adviser on domestic affairs until April 30 when Haldeman and he resigned. Dean, White House counsel, was fired by Mr. Nixon the same day.

SUIT

Haldeman's testimony was in a deposition taken in connection with a civil suit filed by the Democratic National Committee in the aftermath of the bugging and burglary at the committee's Watergate headquarters last summer. While Haldeman testified about the Watergate incident, he refused on the advice of his lawyer to talk about any subsequent coverup.

Mr. Nixon never talked to Dean about the Watergate case face-to-face until a series of meetings beginning last February and even then did not ask Dean — or anyone else — for a formal investigation or report on the scandal until March 20, Haldeman said in his deposition.

For almost eight months the White House stood by President Nixon's statement of last August 29 that a probe by Dean had cleared all administration employees of involvement in Watergate.

"Under my direction . . . Mr. Dean has conducted a complete investigation of all leads which might involve any present members of the White House staff or anybody in the government," Mr. Nixon said then.

"I can say categorically that his investigation indicates that no one in the White House staff, no one in this administration, presently employed, was involved in this very bizarre incident."

On April 17, when Mr. Nixon declared he had found major developments in the case, the White House said

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the President's original statement had become "inoperative."

Haldeman also indicated that he may have been told before the Watergate incident that political wiretapping and espionage had been discussed at high-level campaign strategy meetings. But he said he later got conflicting reports on just what went on at the meetings.

Haldeman's deposition included statements that:

- He controlled a secret \$350,000 campaign fund which he said was intended for use in making private campaign polls for the President.

- He had been told about accused political saboteur Donald Segretti. But he wouldn't answer questions

about Segretti's operations because his lawyer claimed the information wasn't relevant to the lawsuit.

- Mr. Nixon was frustrated last summer and fall because whole story of the Watergate incident was not being made public.

- Former Attorney General John N. Mitchell, who was director of Mr. Nixon's re-election committee at the time of the break-in, told Haldeman as late as last March that it was possible deputy campaign director Jeb Magruder had engineered the break-in under pressure from White House officials to get information about the Democrats.

STRATEGY

It allegedly was at the high-level campaign strategy meetings to which Haldeman referred that the Watergate affair was spawned. The meetings took place in early 1972, Haldeman said.

He said he had no recollection of being told of the meetings during the time they were taking place, but would not dispute the statements of others that he did know about them.

Democratic National Committee lawyer Maurice Dunie asked Haldeman if it was possible that Dean had told him of the meetings at that time.

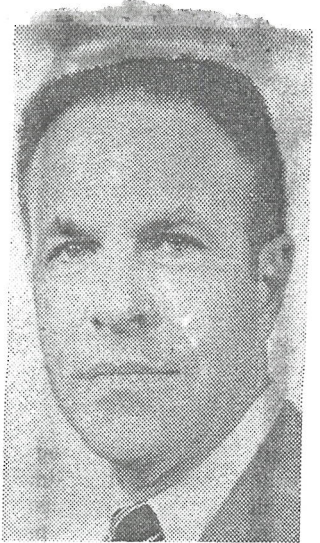
"I don't have a recollection of his giving me that report to my clear and present recollection; but I have no reason to question his statement that he did," Haldeman said. "I think I am willing to accept that as a possibility."

CONCERN

Mr. Nixon's political concern with the lingering Watergate scandal was apparent last summer and fall, Haldeman said.

"Whenever there was such a development there was a concern expressed on the President's part, usually to me, that we try to get the facts in this matter determined and made known," he said.

"There was a natural concern on his part being at that time up for re-election and conducting a campaign for re-election that the insinuations and allegations that were



AP Wirephoto

H. R. HALDEMAN
A sworn deposition

arising would be detrimental to that campaign effort and that there was a desire that the facts be known, cleared up and established in the public mind as well as legally so that those doubts would not persist."

REPORT

Haldeman said when Mr. Nixon asked him about new disclosures, he would ask Dean, but that he never, and to his knowledge no one else ever asked Dean for a formal report until March, 1973.

"On March 20, as I understand it the President directed John Dean to meet with him the next morning, March 21, and give him a complete report on everything that he could regarding the facts of the Watergate and regarding his opinions as to how those facts fit together and where they might lead," Haldeman said.

The next day, he said, Dean told the President that nobody in the White House had been involved and that he had been unable to find out who was responsible.

Mr. Nixon then ordered Dean to give him a full written report and sent him to the presidential retreat, Camp David, for several days so he could have seclusion in which to work.

Dean returned, still without a written report, Haldeman said.