

Magruder's Testimony -- The Plot and the Coverup Campaign Deputy Says He, Mitchell and Dean Were Behind It All

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Jeb Stuart Magruder, the deputy director of President Nixon's 1972 re-election campaign, told a first-hand story yesterday of how he and other high-ranking officials had plotted the bugging of the Democrats and then tried to cover it up.

In 5½ hours of nationally televised testimony before the Senate Watergate committee, the 38-year-old Magruder confessed his own guilt and implicated a number of former administration officials — including John N. Mitchell, John W. Dean III and H. R. Haldeman — but not the President.

Magruder said that Mitchell, former attorney general, and Dean, former White House counsel, had been among those who planned the Watergate bugging as part of a broader espionage campaign. He said that he told Haldeman, the President's former chief of staff, the full story last January.

Magruder said that he did not know whether John D. Ehrlichman, Mr. Nixon's chief domestic affairs adviser, was aware of the break-in or coverup; that Maurice H. Stans, the campaign finance director, learned shortly after the burglary that it had been paid for with campaign funds; and that Charles W. Colson, a special White House counsel, had actively encouraged espionage activities, although not specifically the Watergate operation.

Many of the details provided by Magruder yesterday corroborated reports, based on anonymous sources, published over the last year.

COVERUP

The coverup effort was decided upon almost immediately after the arrests on June 17, 1972, of five men inside the Watergate headquarters of the Democratic

National Committee, Magruder testified, and among those who knew that he would lie to authorities about the case were Mitchell, Dean and Haldeman, the White House chief of staff.

Magruder said he had felt the President had no knowledge of the spying operation itself, but he added that he had been afraid Mr. Nixon's re-election "would be probably negated" if the story were revealed.

Senator Howard H. Baker of Tennessee, the Republican vice chairman of the committee, asked Magruder whether the decision on con-

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cealing the truth could have been made by the President himself.

"Sir, I can't comment as to whether he did or did not or was involved in it," Magruder testified. "I had no dealings directly with the President."

CONSPIRACY

The tanned and handsome witness traced for a closely listening audience the development of the conspiracy, which at one point included plans for kidnaping radicals and enticing Democrats with call girls operating on a yacht at Miami Beach.

He made it clear that a principal aim in wiretapping telephones at the Watergate was to cripple politically Lawrence F. O'Brien, then Democratic national chairman and a man who the Republicans thought "could be

very difficult in the coming campaign."

Magruder, once a rising White House figure with large political ambitions, testified readily, calmly and almost matter-of-factly about the events that finally broke his career.

Scattered through his testimony were glimpses of the personal relationships, the fascinating stresses and conflicts that finally led him to admit the truth in mid-April to the U.S. attorney's office.

He noted, for example, that tensions shot up on March 23 when chief Judge John J. Sirica of the U.S. District Court read a letter from convicted conspirator James W. McCord.

McCord indicated that it was a picture of Magruder and his handsome family, showing them in a relaxed pose during the Watergate trial, that contributed to his decision to tell what he knew about higher-ups in the plot.

WITNESS

Magruder, once reported to be badly shaken by the impending collapse of the coverup, said he had agreed to plead guilty to one count of conspiracy and to become a prosecution witness in the trial of others.

He has been granted immunity from prosecution on his testimony before the Senate, but this does not prevent criminal prosecution, and he told the committee that "for those errors in judgment that I made, I take full responsibility.

As early as September 1971, Magruder began, there were discussions of political intelligence operations with Dean. The talk began in earnest in December when G. Gordon Liddy arrived at the Committee for the Re-Election of the President.

Liddy, convicted with McCord in January, was to be the Nixon organization's lawyer, but Magruder testified that Liddy and Dean and unidentified others on the White House staff had been discussing a "broad-gauged intelligence plan."

MEETING

On Jan. 27, 1972, Liddy presented his plan at a meeting of Mitchell, Dean and Magruder in the then attorney general's office at the Department of Justice.

The projects included

"wiretapping, electronic surveillance, and photography (of documents)," Magruder said, and there were plans "relating to the abduction of individuals."

"Mr. Liddy had a plan where the leaders (of radical groups) would be abducted and detained in a place like Mexico, and that they would then be returned to this country at the end of the convention," Magruder said.

There were also the call girls, and Liddy "envisioned renting a yacht in Miami and having it set up for sound and photographs" during the Democratic National Convention there.

All this would cost \$1 million, Magruder said, and "all three of us were appalled" at the "scope and size of the project." Mitchell was said to have told Liddy to "go back to the drawing boards and come up with a more realistic plan."

LIAISON

Magruder reported the "general nature" of the Liddy plans to Gordon Strachan, who worked for Haldeman as liaison to the campaign committee. Magruder did not know for a fact that Strachan relayed the reports to Haldeman but said it would have been part of Strachan's duties to do so. Magruder also showed the written "Gemstone" reports of bugged Democratic conversations to Strachan.

The committee has voted to seek immunity for Strachan, but the Department of Justice has delayed his appearance on Capitol Hill for 30 days.

Magruder said he, Mitchell and Dean gathered again on Feb. 4, 1972, and that Liddy presented them with a \$500,000 plan, trimmed of everything but wiretapping and photography.

The four men talked over prospective "targets," Magruder said, and these included the Democratic National Committee headquarters at the Fontainebleau Hotel in Miami Beach and Democratic presidential campaign offices.

ENTRY

Either Mitchell or Dean — Magruder said he couldn't remember who — talked about the "potential for an entry" at the offices of Hank

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Greenspan, publisher of the Las Vegas Sun. He was thought to have information relating to Senator Edmund S. Muskie, then a leading presidential contender.

Samuel Dash, the Senate committee's chief counsel asked Magruder about the object of the plan. At the time, the witness said, there was concern about O'Brien. He said:

"I think there was a general concern that if he was allowed to continue as Democratic national chairman — because he was certainly their most professional, at least from our standpoint, their most professional political operator — that he could be very difficult in the coming campaign. So we had hoped that information might discredit him."

INTEREST

Despite this increasing interest, Magruder said that Mitchell still "just didn't feel comfortable" with the plan, even at the reduced level. But Liddy was encouraged to keep trying.

Sometime after the February 4 meeting, Magruder

testified, he received a telephone call from Colson, then special counsel to the President.

"(He) called me one evening and asked me in a sense to . . . get off the stick and get the budget approved for Liddy's plans, that we needed information, particularly on Mr. O'Brien," Magruder said.

FLORIDA

Finally, on March 30, 1972, Magruder took Liddy's third proposal to Key Biscayne, Fla., and discussed it with Mitchell and Frederick C. LaRue, an assistant to the former attorney general.

Liddy had cut the cost to \$250,000, with the wiretapping and photography projects retained. No one was "particularly overwhelmed," Magruder said, but he quoted Mitchell as giving his approval as follows:

"OK, let's give him a quarter of a million dollars and let's see what he (Liddy) can come up with." Magruder came back to Washington "and notified the parties of Mr. Mitchell's ap-

proval." Liddy and Strachan were informed, Magruder said.

Mitchell has acknowledged that the bugging plans were presented to him at various times, but he was insisted that he disapproved them on each occasion. The former attorney general made no comment yesterday.

LOGS

The logs of the wiretapped conversations and photographs of documents in the Democratic files came to Magruder in two packages, the first one a week or so after the tap was installed late in May, he testified.

Mitchell was shown the illicitly gathered information, Magruder said, and the former attorney general "reviewed the documents" and reacted as follows:

"He simply indicated that this was not satisfactory and it was worthless and not worth the money that he (Liddy) had been paid for it . . . There was no information relating to any of the subjects he hoped to receive."

Strachan came over from the White House to examine the data, Magruder said, and he too talked about "the lack of substance" in them.

A second tap at the Watergate worked, but the one on O'Brien's telephone did not, and early on the morning of June 17 five men, under Liddy's direction, broke in again to fix things.

NEWS

Magruder was in Los Angeles when the news of the arrests came through later that day, he said. He was having breakfast when Liddy called to say "there had been a problem the night before."

Haldeman called the next day, Liddy said, "and asked me the basic background of the break-in and what happened." Haldeman said "I should get back to Washington immediately," Magruder added.

Efforts to draw from Magruder an assessment of whether Haldeman had been aware of Nixon committee complicity in the affair were essentially unsuccessful.

APARTMENT

He said that he returned

to Washington on June 19 and met that evening in Mitchell's apartment at the Watergate with the former attorney general, LaRue, Dean and Robert Mardian, a re-election committee aide. Magruder said:

"There were, from the time of the break-in to . . . September (when the first indictments were handed up by a federal grand jury naming none of the principals but Liddy) a series of meetings.

"The main participants typically were Mr. Mitchell, Mr. LaRue, Mr. Mardian, Mr. Dean, although many other people . . . met in these meetings.

"You know, it is very hard for me to pinpoint exactly when and how we came up with the cover up story, but it became apparent when we found out the sums were in the \$200,000 range that we had to come up with a very good story to justify why Mr. Liddy would have spent that amount of money on legal activities.