

Aide to Claim Haldeman Was Sent Bug Plan

By Peter Osnos
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Gordon Strachan, a former aide to ex-White House Chief of Staff H. R. (Bob) Haldeman, is prepared to testify under oath that he sent Haldeman advance plans for the bugging of Democratic Party headquarters at the Watergate, informed sources said yesterday.

Strachan will testify before the Senate Select Watergate committee, according to these sources that "the things (Jeb Stuart) Magruder told him, he told Haldeman."

Magruder, former deputy director of the Nixon re-election campaign, testified before the Senate select committee last week that Strachan was fully briefed either by telephone or with documents at each stage of the planning of the Watergate operation. Magruder testified that he "assumed" Strachan had passed along that information to Haldeman.

"Strachan," said one high-ranking White House source, "can put ten ropes around Haldeman's neck." Strachan's lawyer, John Bray, declined to comment yesterday on his client's testimony.

Haldeman's lawyer, John J. Wilson, denied again yesterday that Haldeman had any advance knowledge of the Watergate bugging. "If Strachan had knowledge," Wilson said, "he did not transmit it to Haldeman." Haldeman denied in a television interview Friday any involvement in the "planning or the execution of Watergate."

In addition, Wilson yesterday disputed Magruder's Senate testimony on Thursday that he had told Haldeman at a meeting before the Watergate trial last January about the "whole Watergate situation" including all those included in the planning and the extent of the cover-up.

Wilson said Haldeman has tapes of three telephone conversations sometime in April—two between a Haldeman aide and Magruder and one between Haldeman himself and Magruder—in

which Magruder said that in no way would he be able to hurt Haldeman" in his Senate testimony. The calls were made, Wilson said, after Magruder had decided to plead guilty to a single fel-

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ony count and testify for the prosecution in any future Watergate criminal trials.

Wilson said he has given copies of the tapes to the Watergate prosecutors and to Senate investigators.

The prosecutors could not be reached for comment. Senate sources who have listened to the tapes said they were consistent with Magruder's testimony before the Watergate committee. The sources explained this seeming contradiction with Wilson's view of the tapes as essentially a difference between the interpretation given to the conversations by Haldeman and that given by Magruder and investigators.

Magruder did tell Haldeman and his aide Lawrence Higbee, according to Senate sources, that he had no personal knowledge that Haldeman knew about the bugging in advance, and could only tell the Senate committee that he had given the plans to Strachan. That, in fact, is what Magruder testified to on Thursday.

Secondly, Haldeman contends that his meeting with Magruder was primarily to discuss a job for Magruder in the second Nixon administration. Magruder testified that he also went to see Haldeman to tell him "what actually happened" in the Watergate affair.

Wilson said yesterday that

Haldeman's diary shows no record of a meeting with Magruder in January, but does record one on Feb. 14—after the Watergate trial was over—at which the job question was discussed along with Magruder's thoughts at that

time about running for political office in California.

Haldeman, Wilson said, did not learn about the Watergate cover-up until a meeting with Magruder and former Attorney General John N. Mitchell on March 28. The telephone calls from Magruder followed that meeting, Wilson said.

"It becomes a question of whose memory you trust and whatever corroboration you can get," said one Senate investigator. "It's our job to lay the facts out as best we can and let the public draw their own inferences."

Since no one else was present at the Haldeman-Magruder meetings, it is apparently one man's word against the other. But as to whether Haldeman knew in advance about the bugging, Strachan's testimony could

provide critical corroboration for Magruder's version of events and directly implicate Haldeman.

ter a meeting with Strachan's lawyer about 10 days ago, Strachan's lawyer about 10 days, voted unanimously to grant Strachan partial immunity from prosecution for his testimony. The Justice Department has invoked the statutory 30-day delay before Strachan can testify, meaning that the earliest he would appear at the Senate hearings would be in about three weeks.

The delay is to give the prosecutors the opportunity to prepare their case against Strachan, should they decide to indict him, without using whatever testimony he might give to the Senate. Under the immunity statutes, that testimony cannot

be used against Strachan in any criminal case.

Strachan, who left the White House last winter to become general counsel for the United States Information Agency, resigned from that job April 30. Haldeman resigned from his job at the White House on April 30.

At the Senate hearings last week, Magruder testified that in addition to sending Strachan all memos about the preparations for the Watergate bugging and communicating to him by telephone as development unfolded, he also showed Strachan the logs of wire-tapped conversations.

Strachan's job was to keep Haldeman fully advised on the operations of the Nixon campaign committee. Haldeman, in turn, was the liaison with President Nixon. Magruder said that if

Strachan did his job properly, he would have briefed Haldeman about the bugging. Magruder said under questioning that he believed Strachan (whose name is pronounced Strawn) was the kind of man who would do his job properly.

Meanwhile, former White House Counsel John W. Dean III, who is reportedly ready to testify under oath that President Nixon approved the Watergate cover-up, spent five hours yesterday behind closed doors with Senate investigators outlining his story about the Watergate affair for the first time under oath.

Dean will be the first witness when the nationally televised hearings of the Senate select Watergate committee resume Tuesday. His testimony is expected to take two or three days.