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The Solitary Role Of John Dean

By Mary McGrory
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Washington

When John W. Dean III goes into the caucus room next week to tell all he knows about the Watergate and the President's part in it, he will be in one respect different from the other young men who have testified in that glaring lit forum.

John Dean will blame nobody but himself for what he did.

Jeb Magruder, the handsome blue-eyed deputy campaign director, cited his former ethics professor, William Sloane Coffin, the anti-war activist, for leading him into lawlessness. Bart Porter, the squirming young perjurer, accused himself only of loyalty to Richard Nixon.

BLAME

But Dean said in a Watergate anniversary interview in his riverfront Alexandria home, "I don't blame anyone else. It wasn't loyalty. That would be John Dean saying he did not know what he was doing when he got into it. I knew what I was doing. It just took me too long to stop doing it."

He was alternately relaxed and edgy. He is, in all events, ready.

Does he expect the sena-

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tors to believe him, to take his word against Richard Nixon's?

"I don't care for the word credibility," says the President's boyish, brown-eyed former counsel. "I prefer honesty. I think they will believe me because I've got the facts — and the documents, papers the President sent to me and papers I sent to him.

"John Dean stands nothing to gain by going up there and laying all this out and facing several days of intense questioning. They will try to impeach me any way they can."

His footprints are all over the case, recorded in a stream of depositions, memos and testimony from other Ervin committee witnesses.

MEETINGS

Dean attended, according to Magruder, two of the planning meetings for the break-in, although not the crucial third, when John Casper gave the green light.

He entreated the CIA to take the rap. He prepped Magruder for perjured testimony before the grand jury. He signaled Patrick Gray, the short-term director-designate of the FBI, to destroy "political dynamite" found in Howard Hunt's safe. He passed the word to defendant James McCord about executive clemency before the first Watergate trial.

It does not constitute a character reference for the bright, young man who was one of the comers of Washington until April 30 when the President publicly fired him.

VIEW

"I don't think I have lied to anyone," Dean said, sitting on the sofa of his living room with his wife, Maureen, and his lawyer, Robert McCandless. "I would characterize what I did as stupid. I knew what I was doing. I didn't like doing it. Obviously, I wouldn't be fighting for immunity if I hadn't been involved.

"But it was of lesser magnitude than what others did. I could have left. I didn't have the White House syndrome. I didn't want a White House car. I stayed on because I'd never seen a presidential campaign from with-

in. And I will say that I did put off more crazy, illegal wild schemes that came to me than anyone else. In my quiet way, I stopped some things."

HOME

Dean passed the anniversary of the Watergate break-in as he has every day since he informed the President last March that he was "going the other way."

He was in the basement of his house, among political signs and mementos, including pictures of the President, going over his records and putting the finishing touches on a 150-page document he intends to read before the Ervin committee.

Much of it is now at the typists, being organized like a politician's speech, triple-spaced in all capitals, for easy reading.

It will take four hours to read, and it is replete with "atmospherics" of life at the White House, as requested by the Senate committee.

"I don't look forward to doing it. It's a hard thing to point a finger at the President and wash all that dirty linen in public. But I talked to some older, wiser men in the Republican party, some of them good friends of the President and they advised me to tell everything I know. I'll never tell their names, but they said we had to get it over with and dispel this black cloud that is hanging over Washington."

DETAIL

The Ervin Committee staff heard Dean's tale for five hours on Saturday. They were said to be impressed with the "meticulous and vivid" detail of his recital.

They advised him to get a haircut — he's been too busy with his files, "triple checking everything and walking along the river to remember exactly the way it was."

They told him to get some sleep — he says he only looks exhausted but he isn't.

When Dean takes the witness chair, he will sit alone. It will dramatize his position as the only man from the administration "willing to tell the whole truth," and will accent the loneliness of a 34-year-old who is taking on the leader of the Western World.

"I'm not looking forward to it," he said quietly. "I wish that last June 19 when I returned from the Far

East I had never left San Francisco. I did nothing illegal before June 17. After that I did things I kept thinking somebody else would stop.

"The White House is another world. Expediency is everything, and excessive concern with problems and excessive concern with solving problems by a do-it-yourself staff. I began to wonder last July if I was being set up.

"Some people said, 'It wouldn't be you — you don't make waves around here.' But others said, 'It is always possible.'

"The decision to stop was an evolving decision that started in early February. I knew we couldn't go on forever compounding things. Every move that was made was a compounding move making the situation that much more difficult to deal with," he said.

"I realize it just couldn't go on. I began to talk to others. I finally found myself in a position where I could do something about it. Everybody was going one way, and I was going the other. I was swimming upstream, and I still am. I have never had a less pleasant year of my life than from June 19 until today."

DOCUMENTS

Some of the documents Dean will present to the Senate were brought to him by his secretary last March at Camp David, where he was sent to write the famous "Dean Report," invoked by the President on August 29, not written then and not written now.

"Some of those documents never got back to the White House," he says.

Others he examined in the basement of the White House, under the watchful eye of a Secret Service man, after his April 30 resignation.

He will not say if he has the famous letter the President pushed across the desk to him last March, a letter of confession and resignation which Dean refused to sign.

"I understand he wrote it himself," Dean said.

Dean does not expect to go to jail — at least not any time soon, although the federal prosecutors have said they have enough to indict him. If he does, he will not go alone.

He declared last April 19 that he would not be a scapegoat and that negative ambition will almost surely be operative.

Now he puts before the nation the awful question of Watergate. Is he telling the truth or is it Richard Nixon?