

LaRue Pleads Guilty In Watergate Cover-Up

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Frederick C. LaRue, a former White House aide and high-ranking Nixon campaign strategist, pleaded guilty yesterday to conspiracy to obstruct justice in the Watergate scandal.

He admitted at a hastily called hearing before U.S. District Judge John J. Sirica that he took part in a cover-up scheme to destroy incriminating documents and to mislead both the FBI and the Watergate grand jury last year with false testimony.

A wealthy Mississippian who worked as former Attorney General John N. Mitchell's right-hand man at the Committee for the Re-Election of the President, LaRue also acknowledged funneling more than \$300,000 to buy silence of the

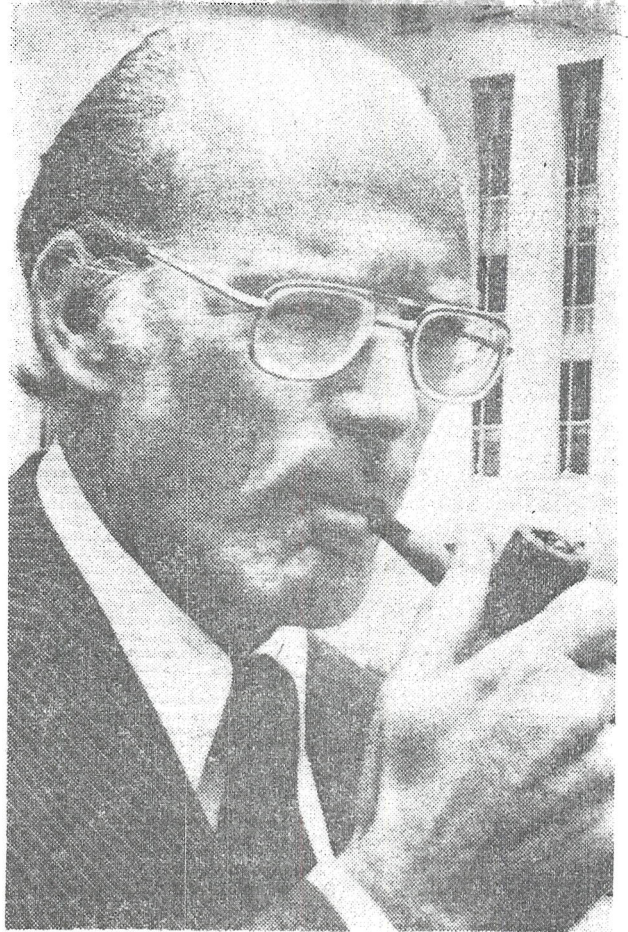
seven men initially arrested and convicted for the break-in and bugging of Democratic national headquarters.

The first to be charged in the cover-up, LaRue, 45, was permitted to plead guilty to a single conspiracy count in return for a promise of full cooperation with the Watergate special prosecution force headed by Archibald Cox.

Judge Sirica said he would postpone sentencing until after the trial of those whom LaRue has already implicated in statements to the prosecutors and testimony before the grand jury in recent weeks.

LaRue waived his own right to a grand jury indictment.

See LARUE, A13, Col. 1



United Press International

Frederick C. LaRue leaves court after pleading guilty.

LARUE, From A1

ment and instead entered his plea on a set of charges—or "information"—signed by Cox.

It amounted to a limited public confession centering on seven overt acts in furtherance of the conspiracy.

One of them involved a meeting on June 19, 1972—two days after the break-in which LaRue and "others unnamed herein" attended "at the apartment of a co-conspirator . . ."

LaRue said they agreed then on the destruction of "certain incriminating records relating to the break-in . . ."

Prosecutor James F. Neal, the special assistant Cox has assigned to direct the Watergate investigation here, told the court that the records included the logs or transcripts of the conversations between Democratic officials who had been bugged.

Both ousted White House counsel John W. Dean III and Jeb Stuart Magruder, deputy director of President Nixon's 1972 campaign, have told the Senate Watergate committee of a June 19 meeting in Mitchell's apartment with Mitchell, LaRue

and Robert C. Mardian, a former assistant attorney general and political director of the Nixon campaign.

According to Magruder, "one solution was recommended in which I was to, of course, destroy the Gemstone file" containing the results of the spy work at Democratic headquarters. He said, "It was generally concluded that the file should be destroyed."

In a short statement that he read to Judge Sirica, LaRue said he knew before the June 17, 1972, break-in "of a proposal to conduct political espionage by electronic surveillance." But he said he had "no personal knowledge of its approval by anyone."

Magruder has charged that Mitchell finally approved the DNC's bugging at a March 30, 1972, meeting in Key Biscayne with Mitchell and LaRue.

Magruder told the Senate "it was the last topic we discussed . . . and Mr. Mitchell agreed to approve the project." But he said LaRue was answering a flurry of phone calls that kept interrupting the meeting. . . . "I do not think Mr. LaRue was there at all or was not discussing this problem at all points . . ."

LaRue yesterday in effect disclaimed hearing Mitchell give the go-ahead. Standing at a lectern before Judge Sirica, he said he heard the proposal discussed and declared that "I recommended against the plan." Alluding to the March 30 meeting, he said "it was not approved in my presence."

Mitchell has maintained publicly that he rejected the Watergate espionage proposal at that meeting and at two earlier ones where it was broached. He suggested to reporters in April that high White House officials must have overruled him.

LaRue's disclaimer appears to leave both Mitchell and Magruder without any corroboration for their conflicting accounts. The former Attorney General is expected to testify before the Senate Watergate Committee July 10.

A balding man of medium height, LaRue, one of a handful with Mitchell who planned and programmed Mr. Nixon's political comeback in 1968, will probably be called by the Senate committee after Mitchell completes his testimony.

Assigned to lure Southern votes away from George Wallace in the 1968 cam-

paign, LaRue devised a strategy that included country and Western ballads about how Mr. Nixon would "bring our country back" to the "good" and "decent" life. He worked in the '72 campaign as a "senior adviser and special assistant" to Mitchell and to Mitchell's successor as campaign director, Clark MacGregor.

Despite what he described as only nodding familiarity with the Watergate bugging proposal before the June 17 arrests, LaRue told Judge Sirica that "my knowledge and involvement increased" immediately after that. He said G. Gordon Liddy told him on June 20 that he "had in fact been involved in this fiasco."

"I later sat in on meetings with Mr. Magruder and others at which the protective story he had evolved was discussed," LaRue testified, "and I joined in that cover-up, at least by acquiescence."

He added that he picked up "several deliveries of cash which, at various times, I was called upon to distribute to a number of persons in satisfaction of commitments made by others to the defendants in the Watergate trial."

The information filed by Cox added some details, but it seemed tailored to avoid mention of anyone who faces full-dress prosecution. The only ones singled out by name, in addition to LaRue himself, were Magruder, who has already agreed to plead guilty to a single conspiracy count, and the President's former personal attorney, Herbert M. Kalmbach, who has also been reportedly talking to government prosecutors.

Backing up Magruder's account of how he came to lie to the Watergate grand jury last Aug. 16 with a cover story designed to put the blame on Liddy and hide the involvement of higher-ups, LaRue admitted attending meetings at Nixon reelection headquarters to discuss the "false, misleading and deceptive" account—which Magruder had already given in preliminary fashion to the FBI.

Cox's allegations, however, did not mention who else attended these sessions. Magruder has said he was briefed and interrogated in dry runs with Mardian, Dean and Mitchell, among others.

Turning to the hush money for the seven origi-

nal Watergate defendants, LaRue admitted delivering unspecified sums of cash to Kalmbach on July 19, 1972, in an office at the old Executive Office Building and again at another meeting somewhere in Washington on July 26.

LaRue also acknowledged picking up \$29,900 in cash last Sept. 19 and another \$280,000 last Dec. 1 for delivery to the restive Watergate conspirators.

Some of the money, LaRue has reportedly told the Watergate grand jury, came from a \$350,000 cash fund that former White House chief of staff H. R. Halde- man maintained. In addition, Kalmbach has reportedly agreed to testify that former presidential adviser John D. Ehrlichman directed him to raise funds last summer to help keep the Watergate spies quiet.

Prosecutor Neal declined to comment when asked by newsmen whether the open mention of Kalmbach in the charges against LaRue was a signal that plea-bargaining involving the President's old lawyer was also under way.

There were strong indications, however, that others besides LaRue may be en-

tering similar guilty pleas in the weeks ahead.

Questioned closely by Judge Sirica about any inducements that might have led to his decision to plead guilty, LaRue hesitated briefly and cited a June 12 letter that his attorney, Fred M. Vinson Jr., received from Cox.

Read in court by Neal, it represented an offer to accept a guilty plea to one count of conspiracy, which would then dispose of "all other potential charges." In turn, Cox wrote, LaRue would be expected to tell all he knows and testify as a government witness "in any and all cases" where he might be needed. The court would be notified of his cooperation before LaRue is sentenced.

Hands gripping the lectern in front of him, LaRue listened intently as Judge Sirica asked him: "Do you understand . . . you may be sentenced to a prison term for as much as five years and a fine of \$10,000, or both? You understand that is the maximum?"

"Yes sir," LaRue replied.

He was released on his own recognizance with restrictions laid down by the

judge later in the day. Under them, LaRue may travel only to Mississippi or New York without court permission; he must also give up his passport and report weekly to the D.C. Bail Agency.

The conspiracy, according to Cox's charges, lasted until March 23, the day Watergate burglar James McCord's charges of a wide-ranging cover-up were made public in a letter to Judge Sirica.

A shadowy White House aide without portfolio before he joined the President's campaign organization, LaRue worked at the Committee for the Re-election of the President from January, 1972, through March of 1973. He started talking to prosecutors "voluntarily" in April, his attorney, Vinson, told reporters.

Both Vinson and Neal, however, declined to elaborate on why LaRue was pleading guilty now. Asked whether it was aimed at putting pressure on others to come forward, Neal only smiled and said, "The other possible witnesses will have to make their own decisions . . . I don't know what the benefits will be of this."