

Democrats' Prankster of Yore Takes Part Watergate Blame

WASHINGTON, July 2—Dick Tuck, the Democrat accused by President Nixon's supporters of having originated "dirty tricks" in American politics, is prepared to assume a share of the responsibility for the Watergate scandal.

"I'm not willing to assume the full blame," Mr. Tuck said by telephone the other day in Aspen, Colo., "but perhaps I should for having, over the years, teased Nixon. This may have caused a reaction last year and, as usual, The Republicans overreacted."

Mr. Tuck said that his most memorable efforts—he prefers to call them "dramatic effects"—were a far cry from Watergate. "There's a difference between funny messages in fortune cookies and forging diplomatic cables," asserted the former World War II marine frogman.

Mr. Tuck, who was born in Arizona 49 years ago and grew up in Los Angeles, began dabbling in politics at the University of California at Santa Barbara.

He managed six winning State Senate candidates in California throughout his career but failed in his own attempt seven years ago to win the Democratic nomination for the State Senate.

It was Mr. Tuck who planted messages in fortune cookies that poked fun at Senator William Knowland, a Republican, at a 1958 campaign dinner in California, on behalf of Mr. Knowland. Mr. Tuck also planted a woman operative on Barry Goldwater's 1964 Presidential campaign train to distribute newsletters belittling the Republican candidate's efforts.

Most of his pranks, however,

have been directed at Mr. Nixon. In 1960, right after the first debate between Mr. Nixon and John F. Kennedy, Mr. Tuck arranged for a little old lady to tell Mr. Nixon, "That's all right, you'll do better next time."

He provided placards in Chinese to call attention, at a 1962 Nixon rally in San Francisco's Chinatown, to a controversial loan from Howard Hughes to a relative of Mr. Nixon. Last summer, he published the private phone numbers of Nixon campaign officials at the Republican National Convention.

Mr. Tuck was unable to pull off his planned coup in the campaign last fall, however. He wanted to fly to Texas when John B. Connally, then Secretary of the Treasury and then a Democrat, introduced a number of wealthy Texans to Mr. Nixon. But the McGovern campaign refused to give Mr. Tuck the money for plane fare and the fee to rent a Brink's truck that he intended to park at the entrance to Mr. Connally's ranch.

According to Mr. Tuck, he was not surprised when witnesses at the Watergate hearings—Jeb Stuart Magruder and Herbert L. Porter—referred to "Dick Tuck-type dirty tricks," but he was offended when one of the witnesses, Mr. Porter, testified he didn't know who Mr. Tuck was.

He was last in Washington a few weeks ago, when he happened to encounter Mr. Halde-man outside a hearing room on Capitol Hill.

According to Mr. Tuck's account, the former White House chief of staff said in jest, "You started all this, Tuck," prompting Mr. Tuck to reply, "Yes, but you ran it in the ground."