

He Denies Any Role in Watergate

Haldeman Tells His Version

Washington

H. R. Haldeman, President Nixon's former chief of staff, has told Senate investigators that he took no part in planning the Watergate burglary and did not know of efforts to block the investigation and cover up the facts until March this year.

Haldeman's statements, in an interview with the staff of the Senate Watergate Committee on May 4, contradict the sworn testimony of other witnesses, including John W. Dean III, the former White House counsel; Jeb Stuart Magruder, once the deputy campaign director, and John N. Mitchell, former attorney general.

A 20-page report of the Haldeman interview that was prepared afterward by the committee's staff has been obtained by the New York Times.

Haldeman has also denied any involvement in the overall Watergate affair in public statements, in a civil deposition and in testimony given privately to a Senate subcommittee.

BELIEF

Nonetheless, federal prosecutors are known to believe that the former advertising executive, who was the President's closest adviser until he resigned April 30 in the wake of Watergate disclosures, played a major role in the coverup of the scandal.

The prosecutors are said to believe that Haldeman did so for two reasons: to protect the President's political position in the months before the 1972 election, and to prevent other illicit White House activities, such as the "Plumbers" operations, from coming to light.

In his interview with the Senate committee staff, Haldeman refused to discuss any conversations he had with the President or any knowledge he obtained in his position as a "conduit" of information intended for Mr. Nixon. He declared that the doctrine of executive privilege required him to withhold this material.

In his days of power at the White House, Haldeman was one of the few staff mem-

bers who had personal access to the President. Other officials of the administration and the election campaign were required to go through Haldeman to see or pass information to the President.

Haldeman gave the committee staff the following description of his concept of executive privilege:

"In a general sense, where I would not raise the question of privilege is where I was acting in effect as a principal on my own cognizance, not at the specific direction of the President, and where I did not transmit the information that I acquired back to the President.

"This is as contrasted to the area where, hypothetically, the President says, 'Haldeman, find out information on matter X,' and I call and see what the information is on matter X. He tells me and I go into the Presi-

dent and say this is what is happening on matter X. In that situation I am acting as a conduit."

PRIVILEGE

Executive privilege is the doctrine that the internal, advisory communications of the executive branch deserve protection from public disclosure to protect the President's frank recommendations, opinions and considerations.

Since Haldeman's interview, the White House position on executive privilege has changed, and present and former staff members have been instructed to tell all they know to the committee.

Haldeman, in his interview, made the following points that have been contradicted by other witnesses:

- He said he did not know until March 1973 that there was a White House coverup of the facts about the burglary of the Democratic national offices on June 17, 1972. Magruder swore to the Senate committee in public testimony last month that he gave Haldeman all the details of the break-in and the coverup in January.

- Haldeman said that he did not know that Herbert L. Porter, a campaign official, had been induced by Magruder to commit perjury at the Watergate trial. Magruder testified that he also told Haldeman in January about Porter.

- Haldeman stated that he did not "have occasion in September-October 1972, after the return of the indictments, to congratulate Dean for the job he had done."

Dean testified last month that on September 15, the day the original Watergate indictments were returned, he was called into the President's office and that the President, with Haldeman present, congratulated him for having seen to it that top campaign officials were not indicted.

- Haldeman's repeated statements that he took no part in the coverup contrasted with Mitchell's statement that Haldeman had participated in "a design not to have the stories come out" because they might have jeopardized Mr. Nixon's bid for re-election.

- Haldeman told the committee staff that it was possible that espionage reports were sent to his office before the Watergate burglary but that he did not recall seeing them and never ordered such material destroyed.

Gordon C. Strachan, who at the time was Haldeman's assistant in charge of political affairs, has told the committee staff that he sent information about the bugging operation to Haldeman and that, after the arrests, Haldeman ordered the espionage reports destroyed.

Haldeman acknowledged that, for a time, he controlled a \$350,000 cash fund and that, in January 1973 Strachan turned the money over to Frederick C. LaRue, an aide to Mitchell.

Haldeman also said that he knew that a "defense fund" was being raised to assist the Watergate defendants. But he told the committee staff that he did not know of any relationship between the cash fund and the "defense fund" and that he believed the "defense fund" was intended only to pay the defendants' legal fees.

Dean and others have said that a large share of the \$350,000 was used to buy the silence of the Watergate defendants.

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