

'Third Man' Hazy On Mitchell Role

WASHINGTON — (AP) — Frederick C. LaRue, the third man at a critical meeting before the Watergate break-in, is reported ready to testify he can't be sure whether John Mitchell approved or rejected the Watergate bugging scheme.

Mitchell and Jeb Stuart Magruder, the other two at the meeting, have sworn before the Senate Watergate committee to opposite accounts. Magruder said Mitchell approved the plan; Mitchell said he rejected it.

There were three meetings at which G. Gordon Liddy's political espionage plans were discussed in the presence of Mitchell, President Nixon's campaign chief, and Magruder, the campaign deputy. Both said Liddy's plans were rejected at the first two meetings.

Bottom of Stack

LaRue attended only the third meeting, on March 30, 1972, at a house in Key Biscayne, Fla., where Mitchell was on vacation after resigning as attorney general and accepting the leadership of President Nixon's re-election campaign.

LaRue, a trusted aide, was staying in the house with Mitchell, and Magruder came down to go over a number of campaign matters that required the director's approval.

Harry Flemming, a special assistant to the President, had been in at the meeting the previous day, and LaRue has told investigators he put the sensitive Liddy plan at the bottom of the stack of decision papers because he didn't want Flemming to see it.

All three men agree that the matter came up toward the end of the meeting.

Magruder and Mitchell both testified that Liddy's first plan had called for a \$1 million budget to finance wiretapping, prostitute-spies, kidnaping of radicals,

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McCord Letters Auctioned Off

NEW YORK — (AP)—Six letters convicted Watergate burglar James W. McCord wrote while employed by the CIA brought \$950 at an auction.

The winning bidder, Alan Ackerman, said the letters may reveal something about McCord. They contain references to "overseas friends" and "personalities," he said.

clandestine photography and that everyone who heard about it was appalled.

\$250,000

The second plan was to cost half that amount and was limited to wiretapping and photography, Magruder said, but was still regarded as too expensive.

So the plan that came up on March 30 was for \$250,000 and according to Magruder was pared to a proposal to wiretap and search Democratic National Committee headquarters in the Watergate.

The proposal was typed on letter-size paper showing "the basics of the plan, the number of people (Liddy) would have to hire, the number of electronic surveillance equipment and amounts he would have to purchase and so on," Magruder testified.

Mitchell, he said, "did some markup on some of it — I cannot recall what he marked on these papers — indicated his approval, did not indicate it in any formal sense by initialing it or writing, just indicated the project was approved."

Was Discussed

But Mitchell, when asked what his recollection of his decision was, testified: "Well, it was very simple . . . 'We don't need this. I am

tired of hearing it. Out. Let's not discuss it any further.' . . . In my opinion, it was just as clear as that."

LaRue has not yet testified before the Senate Watergate committee, where the other two participants swore to opposite accounts of the crucial decision.

But in a brief courtroom statement on June 27, when he pleaded guilty to conspiring to obstruct justice in the Watergate cover-up, LaRue said the proposal was discussed at the meeting.

"I recommended against the plan," he said. "It was not approved in my presence, and I have no personal knowledge of its approval by anyone."

Phone Calls

The phrase "in my presence," however, is significant because Magruder testified that, although LaRue was in on part of the discussion of "pros and cons" of the plan, he "was acting as the telephone answering service at that time."

"Many calls came in to us at that time," Magruder said. ". . . I do not think Mr. LaRue was there at all or was not discussing this problem at all points in the time of our discussion."

Senate investigators say the account LaRue has given them leaves open the possibility he wasn't in the room at the moment of decision or was on the phone and didn't hear it.

LaRue recalled, the investigators said, that when Mitchell came to that item on the agenda he asked LaRue if he had read it, and LaRue replied he had.

Mitchell reportedly then asked LaRue what he thought of the proposal, and LaRue responded he didn't believe it was a matter that had to be decided immediately.

That exchange, according to investigators, is the last LaRue remembers hearing about the Liddy plan.