

Today's Watergate Witness

Strachan's Life in Politics

Washington

Gordon Creighton Strachan's infatuation with politics started 24 years ago when he was elected president of his kindergarten class in Santa Rosa, Calif.

At the University of Southern California he was introduced to a larger political environment. Strachan was considered a "nugget" pledge — personable, bright, a fairly good-looking young guy who handled himself well — by the many fraternities that rushed him.

He was popular. His fraternity brothers at Phi Kappa Sigma remember him as the big blond guy who taught them the "Stomp," the latest dance craze.

He made good grades. He belonged to the right organizations, such as the Trojan Knights and the Squires, described by one USC graduate as the "rahhah" groups on campus.

It was through these clubs that Strachan (pronounced "Strawn") first made the acquaintance — or friendship, depending on who's telling the story — of men who would later join him on the White House staff roster and on the list of characters in the Watergate scandal.

CLASSMATES

His classmates included Ronald L. Ziegler, now the President's press secretary, and Dwight L. Chapin, the former appointments secretary for Mr. Nixon. Strachan and Chapin were the ones who last year picked Donald H. Segretti, Strachan's fraternity brother, to work against the Democrats.

However, Strachan was not called before the Senate Watergate committee to talk about his old college friends, but to disclose whether H. R. Haldeman, the President's former chief of staff, knew

or the plans and cover-up of the Watergate scandal.

As an aide to Haldeman, Strachan was the liaison between the White House and the President's campaign organization.

He was responsible for keeping Haldeman informed on the over-all workings of the Committee for the Re-election of the President. His days were occupied by meetings and telephone conversations with scores of staff directors at the committee in order to keep up with the latest information on such things as polling data or advertising — or plans to bug the Democratic national committee headquarters.

QUESTION

"He had to know where all the pieces of paper were" when Haldeman asked a question, said one former member of the re-election committee.

Strachan has told the Senate committee's investigators, through his lawyer, that he knew of the political intelligence-gathering plan that came to grief at Watergate and that he relayed the information to his superior, Haldeman. On Friday he began to tell the story to the Senators — and to the nation — himself. His testimony resumes this morning.

Jeb Stuart Magruder, former deputy director of the committee, has testified that he kept Strachan informed of the bugging plans.

John W. Dean III, the President's former counsel, testified that he had been told by Strachan that under Haldeman's orders, Strachan had destroyed documents dealing with political intelligence.

The relationship between Haldeman and his young aide, who could directly implicate him in the Watergate plot, is subject to diverse

opinions among White House staffers.

Some say Strachan had great admiration for Haldeman. Others recall animosity derived from Haldeman's insistence that his aide wear a beeper so he could be reached at all times. Strachan has said he hated the way Haldeman made him feel guilty for taking a three-day vacation.

White House staffers agree that Strachan played a subservient role on the staff, some labeling him "Haldeman's Go-Fer" while others call him "respectful."

After graduating from USC in 1965 with a degree in international relations, Strachan ignored politics for a few years.

Returning to Berkeley (where he was born July 24, 1943) he entered Boalt Hall, the University of California law school, with his bride, Kristine, who proved to be a better student than he by making the Law Review.

They studied and skied at Lake Tahoe and Sun Valley. One summer Strachan, an expert sailor, crewed on his father-in-law's boat in the Transpacific, a major sailing race from Los Angeles to Hawaii.

While some cite Strachan's friendship with Dwight Chapin as his entree to the White House, others point to another friend, Jeffrey Donfeld, a former White House aide and an escort of Tricia Nixon before she was married.

TENNIS

Donfeld, who worked at the law firm of Mudge, Rose, Guthrie and Alexander during his summers off from Boalt Hall, said he was the one who "suggested" to his friend that he join the President's old law firm.

"He wasn't thinking about politics" when he went to the New York law firm, said Donfeld, who is still Strachan's weekly tennis partner. Certainly one element in Strachan's choice of law firms was that his wife had been asked to join another

prestigious Wall Street law firm, Sullivan and Cromwell.

Once settled into Mudge, Rose, Strachan began to mix his work in estates and trusts with a taste of politics. During the 1970 campaign, he did some advance work for the President.

In 1970 Herbert G. Klein, the former White House communications director, asked Strachan to join his staff, but Strachan soon moved to Haldeman's staff.

In the fashion of many White House staffers whose names were tied to Watergate, Strachan left the White House. He became general counsel at the U.S. Information Agency last December.

Since Strachan resigned from the administration on April 30, he has been unemployed.

During the past months he

has spent his hours at home in suburban Maryland, preparing his testimony for the Senate committee, cherishing the time with his tiny daughter, Lauren, barbecuing in the back yard and listening to rock music.

"Gordon will be 30 next week," said his mother, "and this is the first time in his life I've ever had a concern about him."

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AP Wirephoto
GORDON STRACHAN
He got an early start