

Strachan Tells of 'Orders' to Shred

Washington

A former aide to H. R. Haldeman testified yesterday that three days after the Watergate break-in, under what he believed to be orders from Haldeman, he destroyed documents indicating that Haldeman knew that G. Gordon Liddy was conducting a political intelligence operation with a sizable budget.

Gordon C. Strachan, who was Haldeman's political assistant until early this year, told the Senate Watergate committee that Haldeman, then the White House chief of staff, had instructed him after the burglary to "make sure our files are clean."

Strachan said that he had no doubt then and none now that his boss was telling him to destroy papers showing that Haldeman knew of the intelligence-gathering scheme, and Strachan testified that he did put such material through a paper shredder.

When he reported to Haldeman later that he had shredded the documents, Strachan recalled, Haldeman did not express surprise.

In his public statements, in a civil deposition and in his interviews with the staff of the Watergate committee, Haldeman has denied any foreknowledge of the burglary and any participation in efforts to cover up the scandal.

Strachan also said that as early as April 4, 1972, Haldeman, who was the White House staff member closest to President Nixon, had discussed the intelligence plan with John N. Mitchell, then the President's campaign director.

But Strachan produced no evidence showing that Haldeman knew that electronic eavesdropping and burglary were part of the political intelligence plan, and he said that he had no indication that Mr. Nixon knew anything about the plan.

CHARGES

Strachan was the last in a series of middle-level White House officials whose appearance before the committee came between the dramatic charges and denials of John W. Dean III, the former White House counsel, and Mitchell, on the one hand, and the testimony of Mr. Nixon's top assistants, John D. Ehrlichman and Haldeman, on the other.

Ehrlichman, the President's chief domestic adviser until he resigned April 30, is to be at the witness table when the hearings resume today. His testimony is expected to last several days and is to be followed by that of Haldeman.

Strachan, who will be 30 years old today, resembled in many ways the other young campaign officials

who have gone before the committee in the last two months. As had so many of the others, he said, he had become imbued with an "overwhelming and frequently inappropriate sense of loyalty."

EVIDENCE

The committee had granted him immunity from prosecution for anything he testified to before the committee. But the Watergate special prosecutor's office filed sealed evidence with the federal court before Strachan's committee appearance, and he could be brought to trial on the basis of that evidence.

Testifying in a high-pitched but smooth and measured voice, Strachan regularly downplayed his own importance in White House operations.

He was, he swore, merely a staff assistant who had "very little discretion" to take initiatives on his own. He reported everything he learned to Haldeman, whom he described as a "very, very tough staff man" and a "very organized individual."

Perhaps the most compelling part of Strachan's testi-

mony was his assessment of others in the White House and the Committee for the Re-Election of the President.

Dean, the former White House counsel, who testified last month that Mr. Nixon knew as early as September, 1972, about the Watergate coverup, was said by Strachan to have "a remarkable facility to remember facts." Strachan had the following exchange with a Democratic senator, Joseph M. Montoya of New Mexico:

Montoya: Well, you knew Dean for quite some time. Would you say he is a truthful man?

Strachan: Well, I don't think he ever lied to me.

Q. Now, would it be your opinion that if John Dean said he had told the President about Watergate and the coverup, would you say that Dean was telling the truth?

A. Well, this is my opinion based on my experience with John Dean, and my opinion would be that John Dean would be telling the truth.

Strachan, however, seemed to have a low opinion of Jeb Stuart Magruder, the former deputy campaign director, and he contradicted several points of Magruder's testimony.

Magruder did not, Strachan contended, report to him about a February meeting at which the burglary plan was outlined by Liddy, who is said to have been the mastermind of the Watergate break-in. Magruder testified that he has made such a report.

Strachan also denied that transcripts of the wiretap at Magruder had showed him, the Democratic headquarters. And Strachan testified, Magruder tried to persuade him last March to commit perjury before the Watergate grand jury, a suggestion Strachan said he rejected.

Asked why the committee should believe him and not Magruder, he replied that Magruder admitted perjury at the Watergate trial last January and went on to say that Magruder had often lied to him "during their days of working on the President's campaign."

As for his boss, Haldeman, Strachan said that he was a brutal taskmaster, who expected complete devotion

from the White House staff, and who often sharply rebuked his aides.

At one point, Strachan said, he had been working on a routine project to give certificates to White House staff members who had gone to the Republican National Convention in Miami last August.

As Strachan recalled the story, "one morning about 4 a.m., (Haldeman) called me from Air Force one and told me I had not performed and the project had been handled badly."

Strachan said that he thought at first the call had been a bad dream but that he confirmed the call with the White House communications office.

SCARED

Thus, when Strachan went in to see Haldeman on June 20, three days after the Watergate burglary, he was, he said, "scared to death" that Haldeman would discharge him for not having found out and told Haldeman in advance about the plans for the burglary.

Instead, he said, Haldeman appeared calm at the meeting, leading him to believe that his boss either had known about the burglary in advance or had not expected to be told about it. What Haldeman did tell Strachan at that meeting, the aide testified, was, "make sure our files are clean."

Among the documents Strachan then shredded, he said, were a memorandum he had sent to Haldeman describing briefly the Liddy intelligence plan and its budget and a "talking paper" mentioning the plan which Haldeman had used at a meeting with Mitchell in April, 1972.

A check mark by Haldeman on the memorandum and the lack of notation on the talking paper were parts of the shorthand that Haldeman and Strachan used to show which sections of papers had been read and discussed. They indicated, Strachan said, that the memorandum, prepared in March, 1972, had been read and that the intelligence scheme had been mentioned in the Mitchell meeting.

DESTROYED

Strachan said that he also destroyed documents that had been sent to Haldeman and that contained intelli-

gence information about democratic presidential candidates.

The aide said that he knew that Haldeman was aware of Liddy's intelligence activities because, in April, 1972,

he instructed Strachan to tell Liddy to "transfer his capabilities" from Senator Edmund S. Muskie to Senator George S. McGovern. By then, it had become apparent that Muskie was not like-

ly to become the Democratic presidential candidate and that McGovern was.

Strachan described Haldeman as being "particularly interested" in intelligence information about Senator

Edward M. Kennedy, and he recalled being instructed to tell Liddy to concentrate on the relationship between Kennedy and McGovern.

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