

G. Gordon Liddy: His Silence

By Paul Valentine

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G. Gordon Liddy, celebrated Watergate super sleuth, sits in his prison cell, mute and inscrutable.

But as the convicted conspirator pursues his vow of silence with the fervor of a Trappist monk, many of his former colleagues who have testified before the Senate Watergate committee have been more than loquacious in fleshing out the activities and personality of this exotic and perhaps central figure in the Watergate affair.

The cigar-chomping gun-toting ex-D.A. has been variously described as super spy, super sleuth, brilliant, inept and bizarre.

He has been depicted by people both above and beneath him in the hierarchy of the Nixon re-election apparatus as the architect of sundry covert operations to extract information from the Democrats.

Those above him said he initiated the operations—wiretapping, burglary, clandestine photography—often without specific authority. Those beneath him said they were simply following orders. All agree that the now silent Liddy was the instigator, the spark for much of the incredible array of heavy-handed political legerdemain that has come to be known generically as Watergate.

Liddy's silence amid the free-wheeling talk of others is rooted in an unflinching loyalty to his former employers and an almost fanatic commitment to the spy's professional requirement of nonrevelation, according to many Watergate observers.

He refused to testify at his own conspiracy trial last winter as well as before the Watergate grand jury this spring. He is serving a contempt-of-court sentence in

federal prison for the latter refusal.

He refused to talk with FBI investigators last summer after the Watergate break-in and has since refused to testify before a House Armed Services subcommittee investigating CIA involvement in the Watergate case.

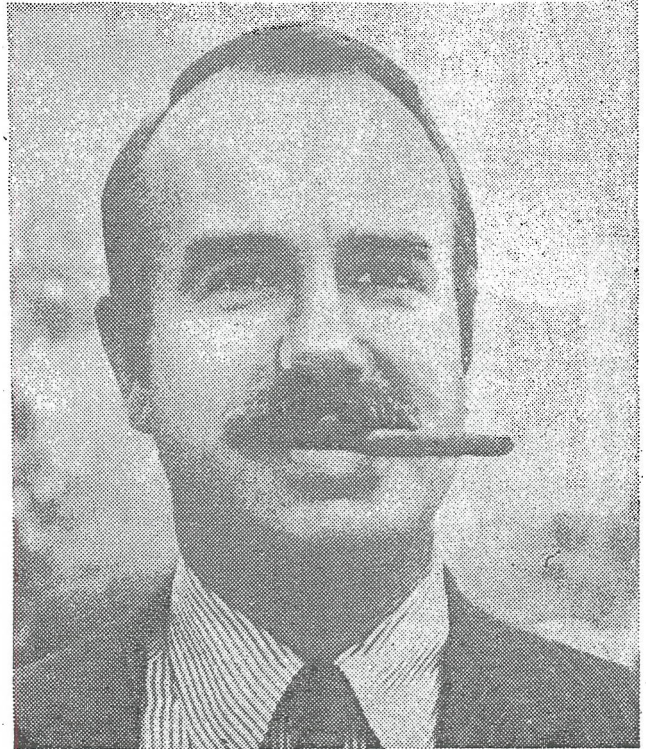
Likewise, he has declined to give a deposition in the Democratic National Committee's Watergate bugging civil suit against the Nixon re-election committee and has refused to cooperate with General Accounting Office auditors examining the books of the same committee.

Liddy's former associates continue to paint an elaborate image of him as an energetic, multifaceted man capable of performances ranging from writing brilliant legal briefs to shooting out the lights in an alley during a midnight inspection of the headquarters building of presidential hopeful Sen. George McGovern here last year.

Many of Liddy's more adventurous plans never came to fruition, Watergate committee witnesses have testified.

His original \$1 million intelligence and security offensive against the Democrats and dissidents in the nation included, for example, a Miami-based yacht wired for sound with call girls to lure delegates from the Democratic National Convention, plus a contingency plan to kidnap anti-war leaders and hold them in a place like Mexico until after the Republican convention. The kidnappings were proposed as a means of short-circuiting street demonstrations in Miami Beach, site of the GOP convention.

Nixon campaign chief John N. Mitchell was "appalled" at such propos-



Convicted Watergate conspirator Gordon Liddy has undergone a change in appearance since Sept. 19, 1972, when

als, recalled Jeb Stuart Magruder, deputy campaign manager of the Committee for the Re-Election of the President, and Liddy went back to the drawing boards to devise a more realistic plan.

Liddy once boasted, according to fellow Watergate conspirator James W. McCord, that a planned break-in at the offices of a Las Vegas newspaper publisher would be consummated by the break-in crew fleeing to Central America on a plane furnished by no one less than billionaire Howard Hughes.

"My impression of Mr. Liddy was that he may have been a very capable general counsel, but that he also occasionally did some fairly

bizarre things." Magruder aide Robert A. Reisner summed it up for the Watergate committee.

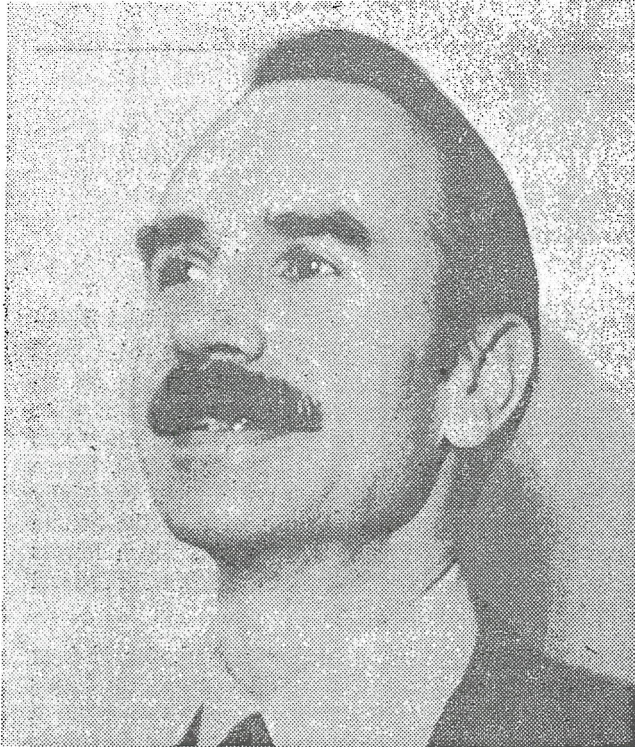
Even in his official capacity as general counsel, or attorney, for the re-election committee, Liddy had his problems.

When Magruder once put his hand on Liddy's shoulder and complained that Liddy was slow in getting a job done, Liddy "indicated he would kill me," Magruder said, if Magruder did not remove his hand.

Magruder stressed that he did not consider the threat a serious gesture but only one "Mr. Liddy's mannerisms."

Shortly thereafter, Liddy was relieved of his duties as general counsel for the committee and began concen-

Rooted in Unflinching Loyalty



United Press International

he appeared in District Court, left, and July 20, 1973, when he refused to even take oath at another hearing.

trating almost solely on intelligence gathering.

There, too, he ran into problems, according to Watergate testimony and interviews with government officials.

His early 1972 estimates that 250,000 antiwar demonstrators were poised to engulf the Republican National Convention, for example, went far beyond the range projected by local police, FBI and even the Republican National Committee. (About 3,000 to 5,000 demonstrators ultimately showed up in Miami Beach.)

Magruder testified that Liddy was authorized \$100,000 to implement an intelligence gathering operation against the various antiwar

groups planning to demonstrate against the convention.

If such an apparatus existed, said police, FBI and Republican National Committee security officials in interviews with The Washington Post, its operatives never established liaison with the rest of the intelligence community and produced no known reliable data.

In the Watergate hearings, Senate committee minority counsel Fred Thompson once asked Reisner if Liddy, with his flair for the melodramatic, had become known as "super sleuth or super spy."

"It was a joking reference," answered Reisner.

"It turned out to be incorrect, too, didn't it?" returned Thompson.

"It turned out to be incorrect," said Reisner.

The Watergate testimony is studded with descriptions of Liddy as a wild, unpredictable, off-the-wall character, bright but compulsive, eager but hard to restrain.

"I had an impression of him that he was certainly not an easy employee to have around," said Reisner.

Magruder said former White House aide Egil (Bud) Krogh admonished that "we should keep tight control over him, but he was very effective."

Liddy was too ready to jump directly into his own intelligence operations instead of directing them from afar, Magruder complained at another point.

"He was supposed to be the planner, not the executor of these activities," Magruder testified.

Even his planning, when it came to the call girls on the yacht and the abduction of anti-war leaders, got out of hand, Magruder confessed.

Former White House counsel John W. Dean III and "I were both concerned about the scope of Mr. Liddy's proposal," Magruder said. "I think we were trying to handle Mr. Liddy in an appropriate manner and we tried to say now, 'Gordon, you are just way out in left field here and you have got to come back in.'"

Herbert L. Porter, former scheduling director for the re-election committee quoted Magruder as saying after news broke of the June 17, 1972, Watergate break-in, "Doesn't that

sound like something stupid that Gordon would do?"

Watergate witnesses also characterized Liddy as obsessed with secrecy and security measures.

He once insisted on turning a radio on during a private talk with Mitchell aide Frederick C. LaRue and former Justice Department internal security chief Robert C. Mardian to garble any possible recording of the conversation, Mardian testified.

To show how thoroughly he covered his tracks after traveling to Los Angeles to supervise the burglary of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist's office, Mardian said, Liddy told him he destroyed the serialized \$100 bills given him as expense money and even shredded the wrappers from soap he had collected from hotels en route.

His ultimate gesture of loyalty, testified LaRue, was a professed willingness to have himself killed to prevent disclosure of his acts.

"Mr. Liddy assured us," said LaRue, "that in any event, he would never reveal any information about this in the course of any investigation, even if it led to him, but if we were not satisfied with that assurance, that though he was, I think personally or morally opposed to suicide, that if we would instruct him to be on any street corner at any time, he would be there and we could have him assassinated."

"In other words, he was willing to be rubbed out?" asked Watergate committee majority counsel Samuel Dash.

"Yes, sir," said LaRue.

"I take it nobody took him up on his offer?" said Dash.

"Not that I know of, no sir," replied LaRue.