

Nixon's 'hush money'

statements contradict

Knight News Services

WASHINGTON — President Nixon's newest recollection of his now-famous meeting with John Dean last March 21 is sharply different from a version he produced in an official statement last Aug. 15.

In his latest recollection, at a news conference Wednesday night, the President said Dean told him that payments "had been made to the (Watergate) defendants for the purpose of keeping them quiet, not simply for their defense"

In other words, Dean told him that "hush money" — payoffs to buy silence — had been delivered to the Watergate burglars.

But last Aug. 15, in one of many official Watergate statements, the President told a different story.

"It was on March 21," he said in that statement, "that I was given new information that indicated that the reports I had been getting were not true. . .

"I was told then that funds had been raised for payments to the defendants, with the knowledge and approval of persons both on the White House staff and the re-election committee.

"But I was only told that the money had been used for attorneys' fees and family support, not that it had been paid to procure silence from recipients."

The discrepancy in the President's versions on the "hush money" question is one of the sharpest to emerge thus far in Presidential statements on the Watergate case.

He commented on the meeting on at least two oth-

er occasions — in a "White Paper" issued last May 22 and in a news conference Aug. 22.

The meeting has raised crucial issues in the Watergate investigation, which boil down to essential questions involving how much the President knew and whether he authorized illegal, hush-money payoffs.

Dean and former White House chief of state H.R. Haldeman were present at the meeting.

Dean told the Senate Watergate Committee the President approved of executive clemency and hush money demands.

Haldeman told the committee that the President had done no such thing; indeed, that the President said it would be "wrong" to do so.

A federal grand jury, however, which heard recorded tapes of the March 21 dis-

cussion, indicted Haldeman on a charge of perjury for that statement.

In the White Paper of May 22, the President addressed the issue of whether he had been aware of the clemency and hush money efforts:

"It now seems that later, through whatever complex of individual motives and possible misunderstandings, there were apparently wide-ranging efforts to limit the investigation or to conceal the possible involvement of members of the Administration and the campaign committee.

"I was not aware of any such efforts at the time. Neither, until after I began my own investigation, was I aware of any fund-raising for defendants convicted of the break-in at Democratic headquarters, much less authorize any such fund-raising. Nor did I authorize any offer of executive clemency for any of the defendants."

Later in the same paper, the President wrote: "At no time did I authorize or know about any offer of executive clemency for the Watergate defendants. Nei-

ther did I know until the time of my own investigation of any efforts to provide them with funds."

On Aug. 22, at a news conference in San Clemente, the President was asked:

"Could you tell us your recollection of what you told John Dean on March 21 on the subject of raising funds for the Watergate defendants?"

The President replied:

"Certainly. Mr. Haldeman has testified to that, and his statement is accurate.

"Basically, what Mr. Dean was concerned about on March 21 was not so much the raising of money for the defendants but the raising of money for the defendants for the purpose of keeping them still — in other words, so-called hush money. The one would be legal—in other words, raising a defense fund for any group, any individual, as you know, is perfectly legal and it is done all the time. But if you raise funds for the purpose of keeping an individual from talking, that is obstruction of justice."