

The damning of Mitchell and

By Arthur Everett
Associated Press

NEW YORK—Like pieces in a jigsaw puzzle, witness after witness testified for the government as it methodically built its criminal conspiracy case against former Attorney General John N. Mitchell and one-time Commerce Secretary Maurice H. Stans.

Then, this week, two witnesses filled out the missing slots and the puzzle pattern appeared all but complete, the government's case buttressed by testimony depicting lies upon lies and criminal wrongdoing in the highest halls of government.

First came boyish-looking 35 year old John W. Dean III, who lost his job as White House counsel in the aftermath of the Watergate scandal, pointing the damning finger at the gruff, 62 year old Mitchell, his former boss and the man responsible for his movement into the White House.

Then there was little-known George Bradford Cook, the 36 year old son of a rich Republican father, the main accuser of the 65 year old Stans, a man who earned his own fortune, who went duck hunting with the younger Cook and recommended that he become chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission.

The government says Cook was the SEC chairman who Stans manipulated in behalf of financier Robert L. Vesco. Cook was a self-admitted

liar in his every appearance under oath up to the present trial.

Mitchell and Stans are accused of obstructing a massive SEC fraud investigation into the affairs of the wheeling, dealing financial czar Vesco, in return for the latter's secret \$200,000 cash contribution to President Nixon's reelection campaign.

The indictment charges that as part of the conspiracy, Mitchell caused Dean to seek postponement of subpoenas from SEC investigators so Vesco's under-the-table contribution wouldn't come to light on the eve of the 1972 election and embarrass the President. This also constituted one of three charges of obstructing justice, and one of six perjury counts against Mitchell.

Referring to a meeting in late October, 1972, Dean, who spelled out his version of the Watergate coverup before the Senate Watergate committee this summer, testified:

"Mr. Mitchell told me that a number of individuals with Vesco had been subpoenaed by the SEC. He told me it was a further example of harassment and said it was politically motivated. Mr. Mitchell said, 'The whole thing is something we just don't need before the election.'"

Dean said he called Cook's predecessor as SEC chairman, William Casey, but got nowhere in efforts to post-

pone the return date of the subpoenas. However, his efforts proved unnecessary—the four Vesco aides took the Fifth Amendment and the Vesco contribution remained secret for several more months.

One perjury count accuses Stans of falsely testifying before the grand jury that he never had any conversation with Dean about the Vesco matter, "other than the issue of whether to return the contribution."

Not so, said Dean, recounting a conversation in which he quoted Stans as saying he had masked the Vesco contribution in his records under the initials of John Mitchell, after he had "a conversation with Mr. Mitchell."

The defense drew from Dean an admission that at no time did either defendant ask him to "fix" the SEC case against Vesco.

Dean was followed to the stand by Cook, another cool witness, although he displayed an occasional uneasiness not evident in Dean's demeanor.

While Dean's testimony dealt largely with Mitchell, Cook's applied almost entirely to Stans — a neat juxtaposition on the government's part.

He told of having coffee in a basement mess in the White House on March 7, 1973, with Stans and testified:

"He stated that he had appeared before the grand

jury in connection with the Vesco matter. Then he looked at me and said, 'Brad, let's have one of those conversations that never took place.'

He proceeded to tell me what he said at the grand jury. He stated there that he had not discussed the Vesco matter with me until after the complaint was filed.

"I looked into my coffee cup and he said, 'Well, Brad, that's the way it happened and there is no sense in getting everybody embarrassed. We didn't do anything wrong. The gift was a legal gift. Your suit was brought. It would only be embarrassing to everybody.'

"I said, 'Well, if that's the way it's going to be, that's the way it's going to be.'"

Cook said he twice lied to the Mitchell-Stans grand jury as a result of this conversation with Stans, to cover up the Vesco contribution. On the morning of his third appearance, May 7, 1973, he testified that Stans called him on the phone at 7:30 a.m. and suggested they needed to discuss the Vesco case further. Cook said he demurred, adding:

"He said, 'Nothing has been changed, has there?' I said, 'For me there has been, yes.' He said, 'That

Stans

could mean trouble: what do you mean?' I said, 'I'm going to tell it like it was.'"

But far from telling it like it was, Cook said under cross examination that he lied anew in his third grand jury appearance, and on two other occasions before congressional committees of inquiry — a total of five times in all that he lied under oath. He quit as SEC chairman six days after Mitchell and Stans were indicted.