

## Duels With Prosecutor

Washington

In the bitterest exchange yet in the Watergate cover-up trial, former Attorney General John N. Mitchell testified yesterday he did not volunteer information to investigators because he wanted to ensure the re-election of President Richard M. Nixon.

He testified he had not "for obvious reasons" volunteered information about high-level involvement in the Watergate burglary.

"What obvious reasons?" asked prosecutor James O. Neal.

"The re-election of the President of the United States," Mitchell replied.

Near the end of four hours of their caustic give-and-take, Neal asked Mitchell about a meeting with Mr. Nixon March 22, 1973.

"You remember him telling you to stonewall it?" Neal asked in reference to Mr. Nixon's instructions concerning the Watergate burglary.

"I remember it very well," Mitchell replied.

"You have stonewalled it, haven't you?" Neal asked.

"No, Mr. Neal, you are again confusing apples and pears," Mitchell said, explaining that he and the President were discussing strategy on how to handle the forthcoming Senate Watergate investigation.

Neal told Mitchell that he had permitted perjury, had testified falsely before the

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grand jury and had assisted in the payment of money to ensure the silence of the original Watergate defendants.

"You did all of this because you wanted to keep the lid on in order to re-elect the President and because you were afraid the White House horrors' would come out," Neal said.

"Mr. Neal, your premises are absolutely incorrect," Mitchell said, raising his voice. "I accept, none of your premises."

Neal leaned forward on the podium, pushed his glasses on his forehead, and unleashed a staccato of questions. Mitchell leaned back in his chair and offered terse, laconic replies.

Mitchell steadfastly contended he was not involved in the Watergate planning or coverup and that his answers to the questions of the grand jury and Senate Watergate investigators were "literally true."

After Mitchell conceded he did not volunteer information to Watergate investigators, Neal said: "So you concealed the truth?"

Mitchell: "I did not conceal it. I responded to their questions."

In his second day on the witness stand, Mitchell steadfastly denied any involvement in the break-in at Democratic National Headquarters or its coverup.

Neal failed to shake Mitchell during a number of heated exchanges, some of them so bitter that U.S. District Judge John J. Sirica interrupted to admonish the two men.

At one point Neal told Mitchell, "If you'll just answer my questions, then we can move along."

"Mr. Neal," Mitchell replied, "We'll answer your questions my way and then we'll go on."

"Let's not argue," Sirica said.

Later in the questioning, Mitchell — with obvious sarcasm — said, "I have an urge, Mr. Neal, to get to the truth."

"Your urge to get to the truth did not include telling

the agents what we have been going over," Neal said, referring to an FBI interview with Mitchell two weeks after the June 17, 1972, Watergate breakin.

Mitchell, then Mr. Nixon's campaign manager, said two FBI agents came to his office "almost scared to death," asked him a couple of questions and left. He said he did not volunteer information to them "for obvious reasons."

Mitchell said that a meeting of campaign aides held in his apartment three days after the breakin was "totally a meeting to cover the public relations aspects of it."

"Cover or cover up?" Neal asked.

"To cover various aspects of it," Mitchell said, emphasizing the word "cover."

Mitchell denied that his deputy campaign director, Jeb Stuart Magruder, told him in the summer of 1972 that he was going to commit perjury in testimony to a grand jury investigating Watergate. He said Magruder did not use the term perjury, but instead "laid out what his testimony was going to be."

Neal: "You knew it to be false?"

Mitchell: "I had some suspicions that it was false."

Neal asked Mitchell why he had not fired G. Gordon Liddy when he first presented a bizarre million-dollar political disruption plan, which included the bugging and burglary of Democratic National Committee headquarters.

Mitchell: "He wasn't working for me."

Mitchell, one of the five former Nixon aides on trial for seeking to conceal high-level involvement in the burglary, will return to the witness stand tomorrow for an estimated additional half-hour of testimony. Former White House chief of staff H. R. Haldeman will follow him to the stand.

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