

Parkinson Says He Was Just

Watergate Defendant Asserts Involvement in Scandal

By George Lardner Jr.
Washington Post Staff Writers

Watergate cover-up defendant Kenneth Wells Parkinson insisted yesterday that his only involvement in the scandal was serving as a courier for message he didn't understand and passing notes he never read.

He did profess regrets, however, over his shredding of an insider's account of the Watergate bugging and break-in that Nixon campaign deputy director Jeb Stuart Magruder blurted out to him shortly after the burglars had been arrested.

"Looking back on it, it was a very serious mistake in judgment on my part," Parkinson said of his destruction of the notes he had scribbled down during his July 15, 1972, interview with Magruder.

A lawyer for the Nixon re-election committee until his indictment this year, Parkinson, 47, said Magruder had incriminated campaign officials and White House aides alike in the Watergate spy work at Democratic National Committee headquarters here.

The Washington lawyer kept the explosive notes until the 1972 Labor Day Weekend when he put them in one of the shredders at the headquarters of the Committee for the Re-Election of the President.

He said he destroyed the half-dozen pages because he was afraid that newsmen or other parties unknown might somehow get hold of them and make them public, a step that could have been "terribly destructive."

"I did not believe what Mr. Magruder had told me," Parkinson declared. He said Magruder had implicated not only himself, but also former Attorney General John N. Mitchell, White House Counsel John W. Dean III, White House aide Gordon Strachan and "by implication," White House chief of staff H. R. Haldeman, men whom Parkinson said he considered "innocent" at the time.

Magruder, who has said he was admonished by Mitchell not to be so candid again, changed his story at another meeting with Parkinson two days later and gave still another account in an FBI interview that Parkinson monitored on July 20, 1972.

At times contradicting his own testimony before the Watergate grand jury, Parkinson admitted that he never asked Magruder about the inconsistencies in his various stories. He maintained that it was none of his business to interfere with whatever Magruder wanted to say.

It was a scene that Parkinson repeated again and again in a long day on the witness stand. The essence of his defense was that he was no busy-

body.

Hired to defend the re-election committee against litigation stemming from the Watergate bugging, Parkinson said he frequently served as a go-between for messages from and to Watergate spy E. Howard Hunt Jr.'s lawyer, William O. Bittman. But Parkinson insisted that he never really knew what they were all about.

The Nixon campaign lawyer

said he first found himself in the middle around July 6, 1972, when he got a phone call at re-election committee headquarters from Bittman, whom he had just met.

Bittman told of "a mysterious phone call from a man named Rivers," Parkinson recalled, and wanted to know who he was. Parkinson said he "didn't have the slightest idea," but quickly checked with Nixon campaign strategist Frederick C. LaRue. He said LaRue told him to "tell Bill Bittman, Rivers is okay." The defendant said he got back to Bittman immediately and said, without using LaRue's name, that "I have it on competent authority that Rivers is okay to talk to."

"Rivers" was the code name for White House undercover agent Anthony Ulasewicz who left \$25,000 in cash for Bittman atop some phone books in the lobby of Bittman's office building on July 7, 1972.

Picturing himself as a man of sharply limited curiosity, Parkinson said he knew nothing of that.

"Did you ever ask what hap-

"Did you ever ask what happened to this man Rivers?" his defense lawyer, Jacob Stein, asked.

"No sir," Parkinson declared. "I had no interest in that."

Shortly afterward, Parkinson said he met with Bittman and his partner, Austin Mittler, in a car they parked outside Parkinson's law firm on L Street during rush hour. He said they were worried about the plight of the four Cuban-Americans arrested in the break-in who were still locked up at the D.C. Jail and reportedly "felt abandoned."

"Weren't you interested in the plight of the Cuban-Americans?" Stein asked.

"No sir," Parkinson said once again. "They were not my clients," he added starchy. "I had no interest in their plight."

Once again, Parkinson said, he met Bittman in a quiet nook of the Renwick Art Gallery near Nixon campaign headquarters sometime in September of 1972 for another conference that the Hunt lawyer had requested.

"He then began complaining

Courier

Was Limited

about legal fees," Parkinson testified. He said Bittman told him of \$40,000 in unpaid work for Hunt at that point.

Asked if that stirred his sympathy, Parkinson said no again. "I wasn't concerned about his legal fees," he declared.

Despite that, Parkinson admitted relaying what Bittman told him not only to LaRue but also to White House counsel Dean and to Paul O'Brien, another lawyer for the Nixon re-election committee. Another envelope containing \$20,000 in cash was delivered to Bittman's office in mid-October.

Sometime in late November of 1972, Parkinson told the jurors, Bittman called again. "He said he had a very important memo or item that would be of importance to my client," the defendant said.

Parkinson said he told Bittman he didn't "like the idea of carrying messages," but reluctantly agreed to take the one-

page document that Bittman brought over. The cover-up defendant said he Xeroxed a copy, put it in his pocket and gave the original back to Bittman, but did all of this, he insisted, without once looking at what it said.

"I didn't feel it was any of my business," Parkinson said. According to other testimony, the memo was a "laundry list" of the expected financial needs of the original Watergate defendants. Parkinson said he quickly delivered it to Dean at a meeting that O'Brien and LaRue also attended.

Parkinson said Dean read it, "made some noncommittal remark," and handed it back. "I then handed it to Fred LaRue and he kept it," Parkinson said.

Admittedly concerned by now about what was going on, Parkinson acknowledged that Bittman had told him several times of "some commitment" that Hunt claimed had been made to him, but he contended that Bittman claimed not to know just what it was or who had made it.

Sharply challenging those claims on cross-examination, Assistant Watergate Prosecutor Jill Wine Volner confronted Parkinson later in the day with his own testimony before the Watergate grand jury on Aug. 1, 1973. He said then that Bittman had told him "the commitments were for payment of money and living expenses."

Parkinson also told the grand jury that Bittman had "also talked about executive clemency."

Yesterday, however, Parkinson maintained that Bittman never spelled all this out in terms of "commitments." The tall, round faced defendant said he just "assumed" that this was what they were.

On trial for both conspiracy and obstruction of justice, Parkinson said he finally took the issue up with Dean in late September of 1972.

"Dean said, 'Well look, Ken, he keeps talking about a commitment. Say simply that you don't know anything about commitments, but if they were made, they would be honored.'"

The account conflicted squarely with that of Dean who said he told Parkinson bluntly, "Ken, these people have been promised the moon I don't know if we'll be able to deliver everything. But you'd better tell them there are commitments."

Parkinson said he gave the assurances to Bittman over a Sunday lunch at the Mayflower Hotel on Oct. 1, 1972, but protesting all the while that he really didn't know whether any commitments had actually been made or not.

Under steady questioning by Mrs. Volner about the confession Magruder had made to him, Parkinson found himself quarreling at one point with still other grand jury testimony he had given. She reminded him that Parkinson had told the grand jurors last year that the story Magruder gave the FBI was plainly "inconsistent" with his earlier disclosures to Parkinson.

Yesterday, however, Parkinson insisted that "inconsistent" was too strong a word, "a gross oversimplification of the situation."

Mrs. Volner handed Parkinson an account of the FBI interview with Magruder that Parkinson had attended.

"Does that say anything about his (Magruder's) being guilty?" she demanded.

Parkinson conceded it did not.

Q. "Does it say anything about Mr. Mitchell being involved?"

A. "No."

Q. "Mr. Strachan?"

A. "No."

Q. "Mr. Haldeman?"

A. "No."

Q. "Mr. Dean?"

A. "No."

The last of the five cover-up defendants to take the stand, Parkinson repeatedly implicated former Assistant Attorney General Robert C. Mardian during yesterday's session. Mardian had acknowledged earlier in the week that Watergate spy G. Gordon Liddy had given him a lengthy confession around June 21, 1972, but Mardian maintained that he had been bound by the lawyer-client privilege not to tell Parkinson about Liddy's disclosures.



Watergate defendant Kenneth Wells Parkinson, left, arrives at U.S. District Court here with his wife and son, Jeff, and his defense attorney, Jacob Stein.

Associated Press