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Watergate Defense Strategy Is 'Blame Dean,' U.S. Asserts

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By George Lardner Jr.
Washington Post Staff Writer

The chief prosecutor at the Watergate cover-up trial charged yesterday that the last desperate strategy of the conspiracy had been fashioned in the Oval Office of the White House and carried right into the courtroom.

President Nixon and his top aides decided long ago to put the blame on "mean John Dean" and the cover-up defendants were still doing it "on through today," prosecutor James F. Neal said in a stinging, dramatic windup of the government's case.

Mimicking the defendants and at times drawing spurts of laughter even from some of the jurors, Neal harked back repeatedly to the White House tapes recordings that showed nothing but praise for presidential counsel Dean until it finally became clear in the spring of 1973 that he was go-

ing to tell Watergate investigators everything he knew.

"Their line ever since has been to blame John Dean," Neal declared, calling it "one of the saddest things" about the scandal.

So long as he took part in the cover-up, the prosecutor said scornfully, Dean was just "a fine fella," complimented by Nixon again and again for plugging up leaks, putting out the fires, carrying a "heavy load," and doing his best to keep the scandal under control.

Even on March 21, 1973, when Dean warned Nixon of a "cancer growing on the Presidency," Neal said, the President told White House special counsel Charles W. Colson of the fine work Dean had been doing.

So long as "he did what he



JAMES F. NEAL
... sums up powerfully

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had to do," the prosecutor said, starting to pat an imaginary waist-high head with his hand, "it's good John Dean... fine John Dean ... because he's doing the dirty work ... He was patted on the head from every source."

"Suddenly," Neal said, snatching his hand back, "good John Dean becomes mean John Dean," the villain of the entire scandal.

The five defendants—former White House aides H.R. (Bob) Haldeman and John D. Ehrlichman, former Attorney General John N. Mitchell, and former re-election committee advisers Robert C. Mardian and Kenneth Wells Parkinson

—sat silently as the prosecutor continued a summation that even defense lawyers openly described as powerful.

By now, Neal said, the finger-pointing has been embellished somewhat. "Now, in the courtroom," he said, "they've spread it out a little. The blame and the finger-pointing goes beyond Dean. Mitchell blames Colson. Ehrlichman blames the President. Mardian blames the White House.

"And Mr. Haldeman," the prosecutor charged sarcastically, "can't recall enough to blame anybody."

Haldeman's chief counsel, John J. Wilson, followed Neal to the lectern later in the day to urge in a grandfatherly manner that both Dean and Nixon campaign deputy Jeb Stuart Magruder—both key prosecution witnesses—should indeed be regarded with suspicion. Wilson charged that they both had become "professional liars," supported by selected portions of White House tapes that had been torn out of context.

In his peroration, Neal urged the jurors to listen to the recordings again when they start their deliberations and decide for themselves. He especially recommended to them a tape of one April 14, 1973, meeting when Nixon began speaking of "cutting your losses" and perhaps sacrificing Dean.

"I mean, give 'em an hors d'oeuvre and maybe they don't come back for the main course," the President had told Ehrlichman and Haldeman. "Go out, John Dean."

Perhaps, "uniquely . . . in the history of litigation," Neal told the jurors, "you have heard the voices on tape of three of these defendants (Haldeman, Ehrlichman and Mitchell). You have heard

them talk as the cover-up begins to crumble. You've heard them scramble for position and develop lines and scenarios.

"Members of the jury," the prosecutor said solemnly, "tragically these conspiratorial conversations have happened in the hallowed halls of the White House of the United States—where once strode such giants as Jefferson, Jackson, Lincoln, the two Roosevelts, Eisenhower, Kennedy.

"Can you compare the White House perhaps when Jefferson was drafting his second inaugural or Lincoln writing 'With malice towards none and charity for all' with the tapes you've heard in this courtroom? Or Roosevelt saying, 'We have nothing to fear but fear itself' with the statement 'Give them an hors d'oeuvre and maybe they won't come back for the main dish'?"

The powerfully voiced prosecutor acknowledged that Mardian, who allegedly helped concoct initial cover-up strategy after the June 17, 1972, Watergate bugging, and Parkinson, who stands accused of serving as a go-between for hush-money messages, played lesser roles than those of the other defendants.

But, he emphasized, "all of us, I'm sure, have been to symphonies, band concerts and those sort of things. You see the strings, the violins and the horns . . . You hear the sounds of those instruments often.

"Only once in a while," Neal added softly, "do you hear back there the man who clashes those cymbals. But ladies and gentlemen, the man who clashes those cymbals is a part of the orchestra and if a piece of music calls for it, he's a necessary part of the symphony."

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