

Sought to Scrap Watergate Tapes, Nixon Discloses

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By Austin Scott
Washington Post Staff Writer

Richard M. Nixon has confirmed that in 1973 he asked H.R. Haldeman to destroy some of the White House tapes that helped force him from office, and he says he now wishes Haldeman had done so.

The former President, in the fifth telecast produced from his interviews with British TV personality David Frost, also says if he had thought there were criminal conversations on the tapes he "sure as the . . . dickens" would have destroyed them.

And in a long monologue of sympathy for his former law partner and Attorney General, he says John Mitchell's concern for his late wife Martha's mental and emotional problems allowed the Watergate scandal to happen.

"If it hadn't been for Martha, there'd have been no Watergate, because John wasn't mindin' that store," Nixon said. "He was practically out of his mind about Martha in the spring of 1972. He was letting [Jeb Stuart] Magruder and all these boys, these kids, these nuts run this thing. The point is that if John had been watchin' that store, Watergate would never have happened."

The 90-minute telecast, to be aired at varying times in more than 50 different localities beginning tonight and continuing through September, was assembled from the same 11 interviews with Nixon that Frost turned into four previous programs. It will be broadcast at 7:30 p.m. Thursday on WTTG.

Frost noted in introductory remarks that his interviews contained "a great deal of material that we felt should not be excluded from the record simply because, in some cases, it didn't fit" into the themes of the first four programs, aired last May.

Nixon, very serious and unsmiling

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NIXON, From A1

through most of the show, makes the following points, among others:

- In April, 1969, he "tilted" toward a recommendation from Henry Kissinger, then his national security adviser, that he order the wiping out of "two or three North Korean airfields" in retaliation for North Korea's downing of a U.S. reconnaissance plane over the Sea of Japan.

- He doesn't know how to explain the 18½ minute gap in the tape of the first conversation between himself and Haldeman, then his chief of staff about Watergate. "I didn't do it," he said, and he doesn't believe anybody would have erased the tape deliberately.

- He thinks his nomination of G. Harrold Carswell to the Supreme Court was a mistake because "his legal credentials and intellectual credentials, as I look at them in retrospect, were not equal" to those of his other appointees. The Senate rejected both Carswell and another of his appointees, W. Clement Haynsworth.

- He thinks he would have had more power as president of a broadcasting network or head of The Washington Post than he did as President, and he supposes that "one of the reasons that the press' attitude toward me through the years has been at times not too favorable" is that "I'm not a very lovable man."

- Both the United States and the Soviet Union have reached the point in the arms race where the numbers of weapons on each side "don't make that much differences," because each has enough so that "regardless of

what either does to the other on a first strike, it can respond with a strike that the other cannot accept."

The program opens with Frost saying his first question at the first interview with Nixon was, "Why didn't you burn the tapes?"

Nixon, seated in a yellow armchair in a book-lined study, replied:

"Now as a matter of fact, curiously enough, I did not only consider, but I even suggested and I believe, directed, that Mr. Haldeman take the taping system out, ah, not take it out, but go through the tapes and, as I put it to him, to make the search that would be necessary to retain all those that had historical value, and to destroy those that had no historical value . . ."

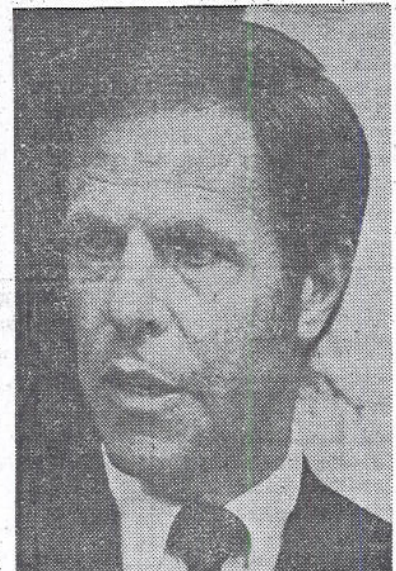
Those to be destroyed, Nixon explained, would be those involving his family, political or other friends, "those that really shouldn't be in the public domain."

He said the time was around early April in 1973, "before we were considering, for example, the possibility of Haldeman or Erlichman resigning." Both Haldeman and John D. Ehrlichman, his domestic affairs adviser, were convicted of Watergate-related crimes, as was Mitchell. All three are now serving jail terms.

Of the taping system, Nixon went on to say he understands that Haldeman "didn't feel that he had been ordered to take it out." Haldeman, in a March, 1975, interview with CBS-TV, said he gave Nixon "a strong recommendation . . . that they should not be destroyed" when Nixon raised the issue.

"... I even suggested and I believe, directed, that Mr. Haldeman . . . destroy t h o e s (tapes) that had no historical value..."

—Former President Nixon



H.R. HALDEMAN

"On the other hand," Nixon said, "if I had thought that on those tapes, with the possibility, which there always was, that they would come out, that there was conversation that was criminal, I sure as the dickens—I could use stronger expletives but not before this home audience—I sure as the dickens would have destroyed them."

During a long denial that he knows anything about the 18½-minute gap in one tape, Nixon referred to "hours

and hours of testimony and the circus that was put on in [Watergate Judge John] Sirica's court on this. . .

He said that when he testified under oath before two members of a Watergate grand jury in San Clemente, Calif., in June, 1975, he "swore both as to my own non-involvement," and his belief that his longtime secretary, Rose Mary Woods, was not responsible.

In discussing his relationship with former Secretary of State Kissinger,

Nixon said he "came down hard" during the reconnaissance plane crisis.

He said that the Russians . . . or the North Koreans were testing us," Nixon said. "If the Russians weren't testing us, the North Koreans and the Chinese and the Vietnamese are all going to be watching to see how we reacted to this . . .

"And he advocated the option of taking out two or three North Korean airfields as a result of this. I considered the option. Frankly, I tilted toward it." But he rejected it, he said, partly because "taking out an airfield might escalate into a war, and I figured having one war on our hands [Vietnam] was enough."

Nixon repeated his belief that the news media have too much power, and spent several minutes discussing that.

He displayed the most emotion, softening his serious demeanor and the deliberately measured pace of his voice, when he talked about John and Martha Mitchell.

"You see, John's problem was not Watergate. It was Martha," he said. And it's one of the personal tragedies of our time."

Nixon said he and Rose Mary Woods were the only ones in his administration who knew that Mitchell "had to send Martha away for about five or six weeks during the 1968 election campaign: "She was an emotionally disturbed person."

Mitchell was strong, Nixon said, "but I just didn't know what was going to break the man, or her. . . I'm convinced that if it hadn't been for Martha, and God rest her soul because she, in her heart, was a good

person. She just had a mental and emotional problem that nobody knew about. If it hadn't been for Martha, there'd have been no Watergate, because John wasn't mindin' that store."

A bit later Nixon said, "Now am I saying here, at this late juncture, that Watergate is, should be, blamed on Martha Mitchell? Of course not. It might have happened anyway. Other things might have brought it on. Who knows? . . ."

Mitchell was "too smart to ever get involved in a stupid, jackass thing like Watergate," Nixon said. "And John Mitchell also knew, he was smart enough to know the dangers of cover-ups and that sort of thing. On the other hand, John Mitchell could only think of that poor Martha and that lovely child," his daughter Marty, whom Nixon called "Marnie."

"And so, that's the human side of this story," the former President concluded, "which. . . I know that you and the press, you can't be interested in that. You can only be interested in 'Who shot John.' Well, go ahead."