

J. Edgar, Is That You?

By Art Buchwald

Probably the worst part of John Ehrlichman's testimony last week in front of the Senate Watergate Committee was when he denigrated the FBI and its late great leader, J. Edgar Hoover.

I couldn't believe my ears when I heard Ehrlichman say that the reason the President set up the plumbers unit in the White House was because he couldn't trust the FBI to do a thorough investigation of the Ellsberg case.

The day after Ehrlichman finished testifying I went to visit J. Edgar Hoover's grave. It was quiet and peaceful and no one was there. I sat down on a stone bench and I said:

"J. Edgar, I know you're not going to believe this but people in the White House are saying terrible things about you. . . . Who? . . . Well, John Ehrlichman, for one. . . . No, he's not the thin guy with the brush hair. . . . that's Haldeman. Ehrlichman is the plump fellow with the big jaw who nods his head all the time whether you're asking him a question or not. . . . That's right, the baldish guy with the silly grin on his face. . . . Well, J. Edgar, he said President Nixon should have dismissed you early in his term because you couldn't do your job.

"I swear it, J. Edgar. I'll bring the record if you want to read it. Can you imagine someone from the White House saying that about you after what Nixon said at your funeral, that you were one of the greatest Americans of all time?

"I know you're asking why they would do such a thing, and I'll tell you why.

"They're beating a dead horse, if you'll excuse the expression, to justify setting up their crummy plumbers operation with G. Gordon Liddy and Howard Hunt. . . . Yeah, that's the one. . . . the one you wouldn't approve of because it involved breaking and entering, forgery, arson and God knows what else in the name of national security.

"The things Ehrlichman said about you would make your hair stand on end. He testified you 'papered

the files' and dragged your feet, and that your loyalty to your friends had priority over your loyalty to the country.

"I want to tell you that millions of patriotic, God-fearing Americans were shocked beyond belief when they heard those lies pouring out of his lips. Those of us who were brought up on your books and Reader's Digest and the television show. The FBI couldn't believe anyone would accuse you of being soft on Daniel Ellsberg.

"There isn't a gangster, Nazi or Commie in this country who could say you were soft on anybody. . . . I'd like to see Ehrlichman talk to John Dillinger about your dragging your feet. . . . I'll tell you my theory, J. Edgar. I think Ehrlichman is trying to save his own neck and that of the President's by using you to justify the White House break-in of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist. . . . Ehrlichman kept saying they had to do it for national security because you refused to do your job.

"I know that statement is going to make you roll over in your grave. But I figured someone had to tell you what's been going on, since they put you out here.

"But don't worry, sir. Ehrlichman won't get away with it. The American Legion, the veterans of Foreign Wars, the Daughters of the American Revolution and just plain old 100 per cent Americans like myself are going to see that your reputation as the greatest crime fighter of all time is protected. No arrogant White House flunky is going to drag your name in the mud.

"When your successor, L. Patrick Gray, was fighting for confirmation on the hill, Ehrlichman said he was just going to let Gray hang there and twist slowly, in the wind. Well that's exactly what we plan to do with Ehrlichman. We're going to let him hang there and twist slowly, slowly in the wind.

"I thought you'd like that, J. Edgar. . . . Well I have to be going now, but I'll come back and see you again. . . . Have a nice day."