

# A Crew-Cut 'Dragon' Acts More Like a Polite Scout

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WASHINGTON, July 31 — Whether it was former White House associates talking or critics within or without the Nixon Administration, H. R. Haldeman usually seemed to be portrayed as the tough guy — a sort of crew-cut dragon breathing fire outside the gates to the President's Oval Office.

Today, as he underwent his first interrogation by the Senate Watergate committee, Mr. Haldeman came on like a friendly puppy, or an Eagle scout with merit badges in smiling and politeness.

Unlike his old friend and

colleague, John D. Ehrlichman, who preceded him on the stand and exuded a ready combativeness during much of his five-day testimony, Mr. Haldeman was soft-spoken and deferential.

They both said pretty much the same things, which, boiled down, meant that they and the President had been just too busy to pay close attention to the Watergate affair and that John W. Dean 3d, former counsel to Mr. Nixon, had misled them.

But Mr. Haldeman said them in a softer way.

In fact, his testimony was so muted that there were some who knew him in his

former role as White House chief of staff who suspected that the one-time advertising man had watched Mr. Ehrlichman's appearance on national television and had decided that that was not the way to handle the product.

A recent Administration co-worker, describing Mr. Ehrlichman last week as frequently "relaxed and easy," added by way of contrast that "he's no Haldeman."

And an observer who knows both men said after watching Mr. Haldeman on television today:

"What they're saying at the White House is that Ehrlichman did what they ex-

pected Haldeman to do and now Haldeman's doing what they would have expected Ehrlichman to do."

For whatever reason, the mood in the crowded hearing room was markedly different during the opening questioning of the two men.

Mr. Ehrlichman and Samuel Dash, chief counsel for the Senate committee, struck sparks off each other early on, and the spectators, who filter in and out all day, became so partisan and vocal in their opposition to the President's former assistant for domestic affairs that Senator Sam J. Ervin Jr., the committee chairman, had to admonish them over and over.

Today, as Mr. Haldeman, who read an 89-page opening statement just before the hearing was recessed last night, underwent questioning, the crowd was hushed and attentive.

Spared the hostility that pervaded the marble-pillared room during Mr. Ehrlichman's appearance, the 46-year-old Mr. Haldeman, athletic-looking and sporting a Newport Beach tan, repeatedly flashed a boyish grin as he testified in an evenly modulated voice that seemed made for television.

## How Tight a Ship

Could this have been the man who, as the committee had been told, once called an assistant at 4 A.M. from Air Force One to chastise him for having failed to complete a minor chore.

Apparently he had Mr. Dash wondering.

"As chief of staff, Mr. Haldeman," the baldish committee counsel asked, "could you tell us how tight a ship you ran in the White House?"

"Well, it has been amply reported here as being a tight ship," said Mr. Haldeman smiling, "and I tried to run a tight ship, and I think successfully most of the time."

"And would it be fair to say that you were a ..."



Mr. Haldeman sitting quietly by as Mr. Wilson, his counsel, argued in his behalf



taskmaster and often cracked the whip?" inquired Mr. Dash. "I don't know," Mr. Haldeman replied, "I felt I was a just taskmaster, but I guess some who didn't rise to the task felt that whip was cracked sometimes."

#### Issue of Perspective

Both Mr. Haldeman and Mr. Ehrlichman spokes at length of the endless burdens of the Presidency, explaining that much responsibility had to be delegated in the busy White House.

Mr. Ehrlichman suggested that the committee had a "shrunken perspective" if it believed that the White House viewed the Watergate affair as of overweening importance in a world beset by problems.

Mr. Haldeman was more poetic in asking the committee to "keep a sense of perspective as to where things fit."

"The harmless eye of a fly viewed under a microscope can become a terrifying object in spite of its actual insignificance," he said in his opening statement.

Insisting that he was not trying to "minimize the importance" of getting at the truth, he said contended that "Watergate viewed under the microscope of this hearing and the intensive coverage of all of its aspects can become a terrifying sight if one loses track of the perspective in which it should be viewed."