

Nixon Maps Fight on Watergate

CAMP DAVID, Md., July 21 (UPI)—President Nixon called in key aides today to map what a White House official privately called a major counterattack against his Watergate critics.

The chief target appeared to be the select Senate investigating committee headed by Sam J. Ervin Jr. (D-N.C.).

The officials said the opening round would be fired Monday in the form of a letter from the President to Ervin turning down the committee's request for access to tapes of presidential conversations with aides which might shed light on the Watergate scandal.

Sources familiar with the letter said it would inform Ervin that since the President's decision on this matter was "irrevocable," no useful purpose would be served by the private meeting Ervin has requested to talk informally about procedures under which the committee could examine specific tapes to clear up conflicting testimony by various former Nixon aides.

White House sources also confirmed that Mr. Nixon ordered the tape system turned off following disclosure of the recording practice last Monday.

J. Fred Buzhardt and Leonard Garment, Mr. Nixon's two Watergate lawyers, drove to the Camp David presidential retreat around noon today, along with Chief of Staff Alexander M. Haig, Jr., press secretary Ronald L. Ziegler and Rose Mary Woods, Mr. Nixon's confidential secretary.

The President, apparently near full recovery from the viral pneumonia that kept him hospitalized for eight days, arrived here Friday with his friend C. G. (Bebe) Rebozo and was joined later by Mrs. Nixon.

Mr. Nixon's aides said he would base his refusal to yield the tapes on his constitutional duty to protect the power and prerogatives of the presidency as an equal branch of the government.

White House officials say the President is well aware that his refusal to divulge recordings of his conversations with John W. Dean III, H. R. Haldeman, John D. Ehrlichman and other Watergate principals will leave him open to criticism that he is trying to cover up his own involvement.

But they described him as being "very disturbed" about the conduct of the investigation and its challenge to his authority to conduct the business of his office. They described him as determined to meet the challenge head-on.

In the forthcoming issue of *The New Republic* magazine, John Osborne, the magazine's White House correspondent, reports that he has been told that "evidence on tapes was mixed and confusing."

"Some of it supported the President's contentions and recollections. Some of it, often on the same tape, could be interpreted if read alone to dispute his contentions and make him out a liar. Absolute truth, I am told, is no more likely to be found on the Nixon tapes, even if they were released by the Ervin committee, than it is to be found elsewhere in the Watergate welter," the report says.

The White House yesterday declined comment on the Osborne assertions.