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H.R. (Bob) Haldeman: Man of Contradictions

By Leroy F. Aarons
Washington Post Staff Writer

This week, for the first time, elusive, once-feared Harry Robbins Haldeman—the deposed chief of staff for a President whose administration is bent under the weight of scandal—will be exposed to millions of Americans under the glare of television lights.

Whether the scrutiny afforded by several days of testimony before the Senate Watergate committee will "humanize" Haldeman for his audience is doubtful. Certainly most Americans for the first time will learn to distinguish between Haldeman and Ehrlichman, those White House "twins" whose identities, before Watergate, seemed hopelessly fused.

But will they come to distinguish between the Haldeman prior to the White House days (B.P.—before power) and the Haldeman of the Washington era? There



H. R. (BOB) HALDEMAN
... picture of an anomaly

are differences; an odd muddle of contradictions that emerged after a week of interviewing people who knew
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Bob Haldeman when—from the days of military school through UCLA, the ad agency years and as a member of California's Board of Regents, the state university governing body.

What emerges is a picture of an anomaly, a man who either was changed by power or whose instincts, suppressed in earlier years, flourished when granted the mace of authority.

Some examples:

- In the post-Watergate media image, Haldeman is depicted as a man suspicious of the press and insensitive to social problems. Yet, as president of the UCLA alumni he defended against strong opposition an editor's right to print an article about civil disobedience during the civil rights movement of the mid-'60s.

- Similarly tagged a Prussian, whose inclinations are military and authoritarian, Haldeman is remembered by a younger military schoolmate as one of the older student officers who was unusually kind to lower classmen.

- Described as paranoid about radicals and student demonstrators, Haldeman was among the few who "kept his cool" on two occasions when California regents were temporarily held hostage by campus protesters.

- Suspected of "dirty tricks," both in the 1962 Nixon campaign for governor and 10 years later in the presidential campaign, Haldeman was described in his ad agency years as scrupulously honest, the kind of person who would fire an underling for accepting a junket to Las Vegas.

The tendency, in the light of later events, might be to dismiss these as isolated examples. Except that the thread was consistent through nearly all of the interviews, whether the contacts were conservative, moderate or liberal, with close friends or those who would be expected to be antagonistic to Haldeman's views or his style.

Most were surprised by the recent events involving Haldeman, some shocked and many saddened, not unlike the neighbors of that quiet boy one so often reads about who suddenly, inexplicably gets into trouble.

There were two other threads: one, that Haldeman was bright but not brilliant, an organizer and administrator but not an originator; and the other, that his devotion to Mr. Nixon, from 1956, when he advanced the vice presidential campaign, was single-minded, if not fanatical.

Haldeman was born nearly 47 years ago, on Oct. 27, 1926, the child of well-to-do parents who had homes in Bel Air and Palm Springs and a quarter-horse ranch in Malibu. His father operated an air conditioning business, which is still in the family, and his grandfather founded one of the first anti-communist organizations, the Better American Foundation.

Although very bright (at age 6 he took a dictionary to

summer camp for spare-time reading), Haldeman was getting mostly D's in public school, so his parents switched him to the Harvard School, an Episcopalian-run military school in the San Fernando Valley. There he flourished, rising to the rank of captain in the school ROTC.

His friends remember him, not as the humorless martinet of contemporary image, but rather as a gregarious type, with an instinctive streak of power and authority.

John Leisure, a classmate, now an insurance agent, recalls Haldeman as "one of the funniest people I've known." Haldeman would break up his friends with mock readings from popular books of the day, like the comic novels of H. Allen Smith.

"He would be the center of everything, a natural leader," Leisure said. "When you wanted things organized, he would be the only one who could do it."

Ken Brown, another friend of those days, added, "He had a lot of power. I guess some people might have found him arrogant. In our group, he was top dog. He called the shots."

Another Harvard School alumnus, six years behind Haldeman, and a liberal Democrat who supported Sen. George McGovern in 1972, remembered that Haldeman was one of the senior student officers with a "benign" attitude toward lower classmen.

"He was rather considerate of the little guys and a cordial fellow," he recalled. "I regarded him as rather warm, with no coldness in his personality. If, before all this White House mess, someone had come to me and said 'Bob Haldeman's in town, would you like to see him?' I would have made a special effort."

From Harvard School, Haldeman moved on to UCLA, with brief stopovers in the Navy V-12 program and a couple of other colleges. At UCLA, he joined Beta Theta Pi, known then as the elite fraternity for the socially acceptable.

It was at UCLA he met and befriended John Ehrlichman, and the two became involved in campus politics as "behind-the-scene men," supporting fraternity candidates for campus offices and serving later as advisers and consultants.

They were consistently conservative and remembered by classmates like Frank Mankiewicz as actively anti-communist, but there was no reflection of McCarthy-era red-baiting or fanaticism.

"I felt he was a prime mover," recalled Margie Hellman Muller, a classmate in the class of 1948. "He had a sharpness and perceptiveness that enabled him to promote people to success. Both he and John were kingmakers; they had a lot more to do with politics than people realized."

Ehrlichman, by all accounts, was the intellectual, bordering on the brilliant, removed from the fashionable campus mode. Haldeman, with his trademark crewcut, was more the oper-

ative than the policymaker. He managed the campaign of Ehrlichman's wife-to-be for student vice president. She lost to Margie Hellman.

"Bob played the role of rah, rah," said Mrs. Muller, "wearing saddle shoes, the V-neck sweater and open shirt, while a lot of the veterans would be wearing khaki surplus."

The difference between the two was reflected in the class yearbook. Bob "Happy Harry" Haldeman is listed as the chairman of homecoming and the organizer of the student sing "who proved he really has brains under that ever-visible scalp."

Ehrlichman is described as "pulling wires behind the scenes" and "a potent political power."

Nowhere is there any evidence that Haldeman or Ehrlichman played any of the dirty political tricks that some of the younger Nixon Californians became retroactively famous for at the University of Southern California. In fact, Mrs. Muller, who is vice president for public relations at Maryland National Bank, and a Democrat, still finds it difficult to believe "Bob could have done something dishonest or illegal."

After college, where he met and married his wife, Joanne Horton, Haldeman joined the J. Walter Thompson advertising agency, where he rose to vice president in the Los Angeles office and remained until 1968.

Beginning in 1956, he took frequent leaves of absence to become involved in various Nixon campaigns.

The firm didn't seem to mind, probably because Haldeman was a something of a star in the advertising field. Extremely efficient, all business, a non-drinker and Christian Scientist, he seemed a little strange to the hard-boozing advertising species, but he was highly respected.

"He's the only goddam honest man I knew in the

advertising business," said Russ Covert, retired account executive for the Boyle-Midway Co., whose multimillion-dollar account (for things like Sani-Flush and Aerowax) Haldeman obtained in a major advertising coup. "He never told a lie in his life to me or to us, and that's saying something in this business. I don't know how the hell he got mixed up in this Watergate. I go to Washington now and I never met so many people who hate Bob Haldeman. I blame Nixon, or maybe it was just too much power for a very young man."

Added Hoyt Adams, who worked for Haldeman at Thompson: "Bob was the original Boy Scout, the most straight-arrow guy I've ever seen in the agency business. With Bob, anybody who even accepted a trip to Vegas would be fired."

To at least one ad executive, Pat Shannon, of Newsweek's Los Angeles office, Haldeman even then fit the "Prussian general" image.

"There was never any real emotion to the man. You could never say Bob Haldeman was ever loose," Shannon said. "Some people look at you with their eyes, others through their eyes, with feeling. I don't think he ever looked through his eyes."

Haldeman's first involvement with Nixon was in the 1956 campaign, where he served as an advance man for the Vice President. By 1960, he was chief advance man under Robert Finch, Nixon's campaign manager. Finch remembered him then as "very competent, very button-downed, very organized. He brought in his own advance team, including Ehrlichman."

Others who became involved in 1960 and 1962 were Ron Ziegler, Dwight Chapin and Bruce Kehrli, all of whom eventually worked under Haldeman at J. Walter Thompson before they made it to the White House.

Another campaign aide in

1960 found Haldeman to be "a tough yes man, yes to the boss and no in spades to anybody else."

By 1962, Haldeman had become a Nixon favorite, and was chosen to run the ultimately disastrous California gubernatorial campaign. It was afterward, in a little-publicized lawsuit, that a judge found that Haldeman and Nixon had been involved in a phony postcard poll scheme to lure Democrats away from Gov. Edmund (Pat) Brown and siphon campaign money into the Republican fold. While Haldeman was cited, the judge noted, significantly, that the postcard scheme was "reviewed, amended and finally approved by Mr. Nixon personally." Haldeman's first known dirty trick was not unsupervised.

Between campaigns, Haldeman continued at the ad agency and was active in UCLA alumni affairs. In 1965, he led the successful drive to raise \$1 million for a new building, and in 1966 became alumni chairman, succeeding Tom Davis.

He took office during a controversy over an issue

of the alumni magazine devoted to civil rights. Davis had objected to a story about five UCLA professors involved in a freedom march on Montgomery, Ala. Nancy Naylor, editor of the magazine, remembered that Haldeman read the article and declared, "run it, it's great!"

"He thought it was important for me to have more support," said Ms. Naylor, "I thought he was an excellent leader. He had a very strict attitude, unsmiling, but we needed that at the time. When all this recent stuff happened, up to the last minute I couldn't believe it. I couldn't believe he was anything but honest and upright. I've concluded he must have two faces. It's very sad for me."

After the alumni stint, and Republican Gov. Ronald Reagan's 1966 election, Haldeman was named to the state Board of Regents at Finch's recommendation. ("I think he showed great qualities of compassion," said Finch, "much at variance with what appears to be the image of a cold, mechanistic guy.")

Haldeman's term began at a time of turmoil for the university system. Students were demonstrating, police with tear gas and guns were common on campuses, and Reagan was determined to purge the so-called bleeding hearts who countenance disruption. While he voted consistently with the conservative bloc, Haldeman is remembered mostly as a broker between factions, a conciliatory factor.

Noted Fred Dutton, a regent and political adviser to the Kennedys and McGovern, "We were twice under siege by students on campuses. In fact, at UCLA once, police were called in. Haldeman never got up tight, he kept his cool. Reagan was getting red in the face and wanted to call the guard out, but Haldeman was always patient, more apt to say, 'how ridiculous.' He made an attempt to be a bridge. I saw him as a bridging, mollifying functionary, always very agreeable and pleasant."

"He was not an initiator, not a signal-caller," added Dutton, speculating that this, too, may have been his White House role. "How much did he take hold, and how much was he a creature of Nixon?"

Finch, the man who faltered as HEW Secretary and fell out of favor with Ehrlichman and Haldeman in the White House, supplied some of the answer in a recent interview.

"Back in 1968, in the Pierre Hotel, when we were outlining the administration, Nixon said repeatedly he did not want another Sherman Adams in the chief staff job. (Adams, as chief aide to President Eisenhower, had enormous policy influence and was later forced to resign in the vicuna coat scandal.) Bob deliberately tried not to get into that role. From the beginning with Nixon, he conceived his job was to serve totally and inclusively. He subordinated his impulses totally. He didn't see his role as going in and arguing, as Ehrlichman saw his role. Haldeman quite deliberately tried to subordinate his instincts."

"I don't see Bob originating ideas of surveillance. I can see him adopting something, I don't see him initiating

dirty tricks. If anything, I think he would try to protect the President. The whole thing that has surfaced now, that he would tolerate it, astonishes me. His public relations sense should have alerted him. On the other hand, I see him knowing and opting not to get in and kill it. But I don't see him having conceived it."

Haldeman the floor manager. Haldeman the unfeeling gatekeeper. Haldeman the obsessively loyal major-domo. Haldeman the ad man, the alumni chairman, the regent, the friend.

Somehow, the pieces fail to mesh.

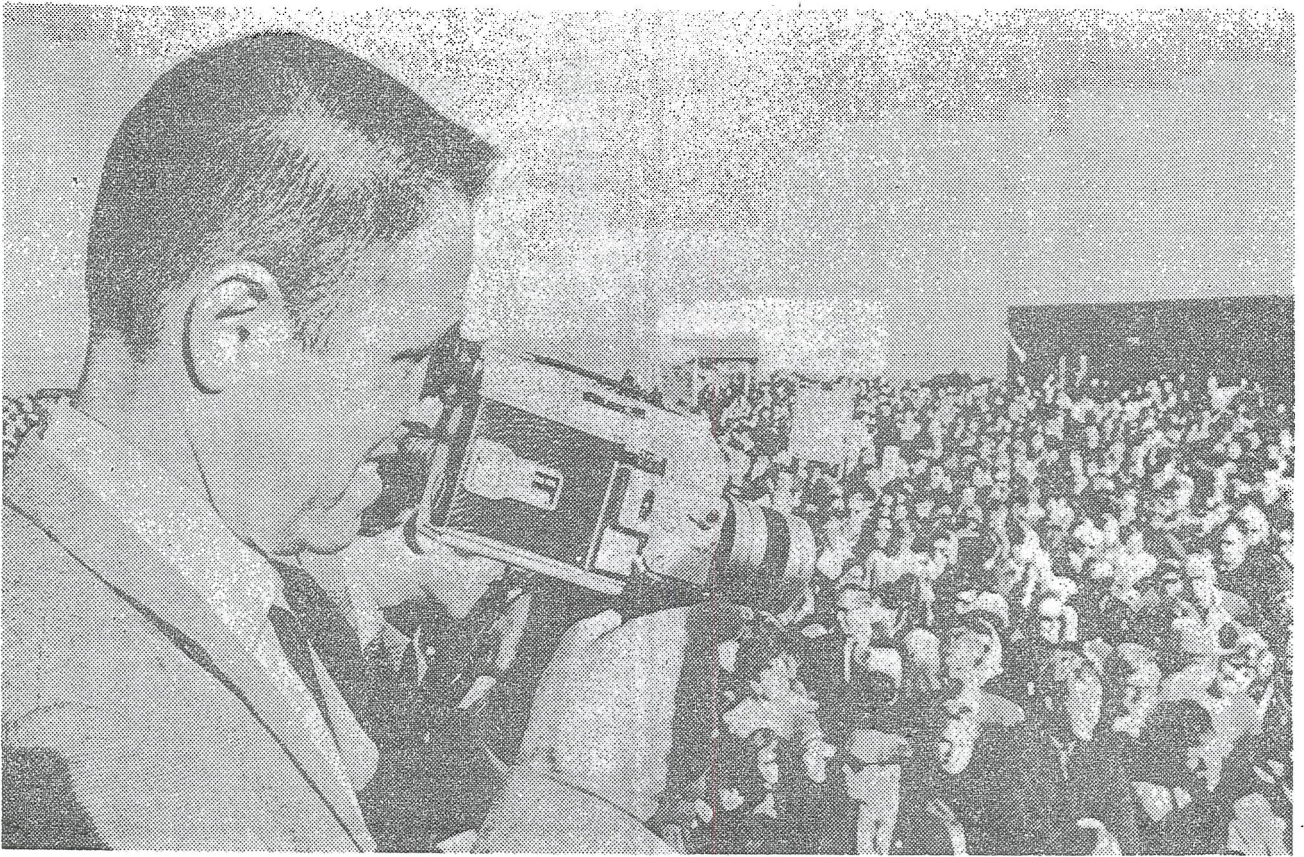
Sally Quinn in a profile of Haldeman published in The Washington Post last fall quoted a White House official as saying:

"He probably thinks its demeaning to show a sense of humor much around the office. When you're the President's alter ego or whatever he considers himself, you take yourself and your job seriously. It's a tense job and he's an extremely precise man, intolerant of bad staff work."

"I think his staff holds him in awe and regards him with great fear. I'd be surprised if anybody regards him as a person at all. The problem with Haldeman is that he is intensely devoted to the President. He can't see anything else. His staff is the same way. Everybody else is judged by how loyal they are and how long they've known the President."

She found others, however, who spoke of Haldeman's quiet humor; of his dislike of Washington social life, of the strong ties that existed among the Haldeman family, of his guitar playing, his love of country music.

So the image is confused. Haldeman the floor manager, Haldeman the unfeeling gatekeeper at the White House. Haldeman the loyal major domo to the President. Haldeman the ad man, the alumni chairman, the regent, the friend, the father and husband. He is seen through many prisms, and now the television networks will bring him into the homes of America through the special prism of Watergate.



Newsweek

Haldeman films the crowd gathered at airport to greet the President on a trip to Columbus, Ohio.