

JUL 31 1973

THE NEW YORK TIMES

NYTimes

Loyal Ex-Chief of Staff

Harry Robbins Haldeman

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, July 30—

One day several years ago, a subordinate received from H. R. Haldeman, then the White House chief of staff, a memorandum that the subordinate had drafted. In one corner Mr. Haldeman had written, in his precise hand, "TL2." When he was asked

what that notation meant, the often curt and unbending Mr. Haldeman replied, "Too little, too late."

Mr. Haldeman's friends hope that the same comment will not apply to his attempt to clear himself—and, not incidentally, the President whom he served with such fervor for more than four years—of any implication in the Watergate case and the ensuing cover-up. That attempt began today, when he took the stand before the Senate investigating committee on Capitol Hill.

At a time when his former colleagues were defending themselves publicly, or leaking material favorable to themselves and damaging to their onetime friends, Mr. Haldeman clung punctiliously to his insistence on saying nothing until the "proper moment" in the proper forum. The result was that he came before a public conditioned to view him as a villain.

The Wise Course

Harry Robbins Haldeman resigned from the White House staff on April 30, after weeks of public and private accusations. Mr. Nixon described him as one of his "closest friends and most trusted assistants." The former staff chief spent a few weeks cleaning out his desk and poring over his papers, then moved his family out of their red brick house in suburban Kenwood, Md., and back to his native California.

Unlike his boss, Mr. Haldeman has watched much of the Watergate testimony on television. But he told a reporter who brazened his way past the "no admittance" sign on the narrow bridge leading to his rented house last month: "After all the things I've seen lobbed out of Washington which have died of their own weight or proven false, not answering the charges has usually proven wise."

Scalp Glistened

So there he has sat, in the elegant calm of Harbor Island, a bayfront community in Newport Beach, waiting for his moment. A little sailing, a little reading, long walks, an occasional trip to the barbershop to keep the famous crew cut in shape. (Today, as he began his testimony, it was so short that his scalp glistened in the glare of the television lights.)

A friend's boat was parked athwart the channel leading to the house, which Mr. Haldeman rented from Warren H. Crowell of Bel-Air, a partner in a stock brokerage firm. Her name was "Hanky-Panky."

What influence he has retained at the White House is not clear. As is known, he has neither seen nor talked by telephone with President Nixon since he left Washington.

But several of Mr. Haldeman's protégés, to the surprise of many politicans, have remained on the White House staff: Ronald L. Ziegler, the press secretary and Lawrence Higby, who was Mr. Haldeman's principal deputy, appear to have enhanced their positions. It is possible that Mr. Haldeman may still be making his weight felt through them.

In addition, Mr. Haldeman's lawyer, John J. Wilson, has consulted with the President on Watergate matters.

In his days of power at the White House, Mr. Haldeman never had to resort to indirection. His legendary clout arose precisely from the fact that almost every piece of paper and almost every visitor that reached the President did so by way of Bob Haldeman. He was the keeper of the Nixon portals.

Among bureaucrats, Congressmen, reporters and even Cabinet members who wanted to see the President and failed, Mr. Haldeman soon won a reputation for hauteur. Not only did he say "no"; he said it without the charm or humor that most politicians use as a kind of lubricant to ease the unpleasant.

Called 'Completely Obnoxious'

Those who worked inside the White House with Mr. Haldeman were dazzled by his efficiency, inspired by his loyalty to Mr. Nixon and relatively unconcerned about his toughness. One of them remarked recently that "Bob was a little arrogant, sure, but in the job he held down, he needed it to get through the day."

The assessment from those who knew him before he came to Washington, or in other than political contexts, is mixed.

A former colleague in advertising, now working for an agency in New York, called him "a completely obnoxious man who was totally uninterested in what anyone else thought, only his own ideas."

But Fred Dutton, the Californian who has worked at the top level of three Democratic Presidential campaigns, recalls Mr. Haldeman from their work together on the California Board of Regents as a "mollifier" in difficult situations who attempted to act as a bridge between adversaries.

Country Music

Mr. Haldeman's reputation for brusqueness may stem from his appearance. He has the look of a Marine Corps drill instructor or perhaps a zealous scoutmaster, with shadowed eyes, the crew cut, thin lips and a muscular jaw. He seldom smiles, which emphasizes the impression of wintriness.

But he is apparently quite capable of relaxation, particularly with his family. They like to listen to country music together, talk, staying at home rather than attending Washington or California parties. One of his sons, Hank, has shoulder-length hair, a fact that Mr. Haldeman has learned to accept with an equanimity that doesn't fit his public image.

Advertising and Richard Nixon have taken up most of Mr. Haldeman's adult life. Born in Los Angeles on Oct. 27, 1926, he grew up in the privileged environment of Beverly Hills, went to the University of California at Los Angeles (where he met his wife, Joanne, and his future colleague John D. Ehrlichman) and went to work for the J. Walter Thompson Advertising agency. He stayed there for two decades.

All the while, he was helping Mr. Nixon—in the vice-presidential campaign, then in the 1960 Presidential, 1962 California gubernatorial and 1968 and 1972 Presidential efforts. For the four years of Mr. Nixon's first term, he was at the President's side almost constantly, even on trips, during which he became famous for taking home movies of the more ceremonial moments.