

'Haldeman's Haldeman' in Changed Status at White House

By John Saar

Washington Post Staff Writer

Before Watergate, Lawrence M. Higby belonged to one of Washington's more exclusive car pools. Six days a week, a chauffeured White House limousine swept in from the Maryland suburbs with Higby, his boss, former chief of staff H. R. Haldeman, and Dwight L. Chapin, President Nixon's appointments secretary.

Today, Higby, a 28-year-old Californian and a protege Haldeman recruited from the UCLA campus in 1967, is the only one of the three still on the government payroll. He drives in alone, spends his days walled away in a temporary office and a "holding pattern" job with the Office of Management and Budget. The drafts and torrents of the Watergate scandal inundated people all round him, but the personal aide of such discretion and self-effacing loyalty that he was known at the White House as "Haldeman's Haldeman" has so far weathered the storm.

Although still on the White House staff lists, Higby moved out of his west wing office more than three months ago and has been working as an assistant to OMB's deputy director Fred Malek. "He was so much one-man's guy," says a friend explaining his departure from the White House, "there was no way he could fulfill the same role for Al Haig."

The friend recalled that when he saw Higby recently, "He talked about how much it (the White House) had changed since Haldeman left and how no one knew what to do with him."

Though his name frequently cropped up in testimony to the Senate Watergate committee and he was accompanied by an attorney when he met privately with staff investigators on three occasions, Higby has not been called or scheduled as a witness.

The focus of interest in Higby—a man of tall, slender build and a serious, scholarly mien accentuated by tortoise-shell spectacles and receding hair—is his proximity to Haldeman. He is a personal friend and the massive flow of paper Haldeman demanded of his staff was channeled through Higby. He is said, for instance, to have seen before

the Watergate break-in the political reports prepared for Haldeman by Gordon Strachan, including Memo 18 noting the approval by re-election campaign director John Mitchell of a \$300,000 sophisticated intelligence plan.

It was Higby who relayed Haldeman's order to Alexander Butterfield, a deputy assistant to the President, for the installation of a secret recording system in the President's offices. Butterfield testified to the committee that existence of the hidden tape recorders was known to very few people, that he believed John Ehrlichman was unaware of the system.

Higby also arranged for the transfer of \$350,000 from the Committee for the Re-election of the President to Haldeman's White House office. The money was later returned to the committee for covert payments to the seven Watergate defendants.

The impact of the Watergate scandal on Higby's boss and mentor and some of his colleagues had been devastating.

Chapin resigned on Jan. 29 this year and joined United Air Lines after the Washington Post revealed he recruited alleged political saboteur Donald H. Segretti and funneled \$30,000 in campaign contributions to him through President Nixon's personal attorney, Herbert Kalmbach.

Haldeman resigned April 30 amid growing accusations he was a key figure in the Watergate cover-up. He has been directly accused of knowledge and participation in the cover-up in testimony given to the Senate Watergate committee by former White House counsel John Dean, and former deputy director of the re-election committee, Jeb Stuart Magruder.

Gordon Strachan, a close friend of Higby and fellow aide and protege of Haldeman, resigned from his position as counsel to the U.S. Information Agency April 30 when the cover-up was unraveling. Giving evidence under limited-use immunity, which prevents his testimony being used against him, Strachan said that shortly after the Watergate break-in he shredded politi-



Associated Press

Lawrence M. Higby, at desk in 1969, had no inkling of his uncertain future and White House status.

cal intelligence papers on Haldeman's orders.

A former White House contemporary who requested not to be named attributed Higby's emergence relatively unscathed to the

chance that made him a staff-worker with no decision responsibility: "I suspect he was shuffling papers and while some of the signposts were there, he probably wasn't confronted with a

p. 2, last three marked paragraphs - see entries in Chronology:

13 Jul 73, Butterfield

31 Jul 73, Haldeman

situation where a choice had to be made."

A Senate committee source said: "He was into administration but no substance. The impression I have is that he was Haldeman's paper shuffler and errand boy. His opinion was never sought and he never volunteered it."

Since his resignation Haldeman has seen his former aide frequently—dropping in Higby's EOB office while he was working on files for his Watergate testimony, and dining with Higby and his wife at their home.

A group of Haldeman's old staffers, Higby among them, were gathered round a television watching his testimony to the Watergate committee. Someone else who was there said, "We hadn't seen him in a while and we were saying to ourselves we'd forgotten how good he really was. We were like a bunch of disciples seeing Christ."

Higby is another of the intelligent young men of charm and smooth good looks who followed one another to the stand in the early days of the Watergate hearings. What made such men, a visitor asked, rally to the now questionable leadership of H.R. Haldeman?

Higby ticked them off on his fingers, "One, because he is totally honest. Two, he's totally selfless. Three, he always let you know where you stood. If you needed an answer you got one: if there was a problem he told you what it was."

Higby's reputation for "rather mechanical" execution of Haldeman's orders was well known in the White House according to the Senate source. "Some people used to say, 'I'd like to have a Higby of my own.'"

In an interview recently, Higby said he was uninvolved in the Watergate cover-up "but had pieces of knowledge all along the periphery which made it awkward." Worrying, he said, was unproductive and he tried to avoid it, but he admitted to some apprehension.

"Things keep turning up, obviously; one never knows what is going to happen round here in terms of what tomorrow's headline is going to be." Friends of Higby say his concern relates to the possibility that some of the thousands of papers he processed for Haldeman, which could be embarrassing in present-day circumstances, may surface.

Reaching for a phrase that conveyed simultaneously the affection and subjugation of Higby's relationship to Haldeman, several people said it was "Like father and son." Higby's father was killed in World War II and he was brought up in Pomona, Calif., by his mother and a step-father.

He was at UCLA and active in politics—student body vice president in his senior year—when he first came to Haldeman's attention. Haldeman, then a member of the university's board of regents and peaking his meteoric advertising career at J. Walter Thompson's, was always on the look-out for bright and malleable talent from the same milieu as some of his earlier recruits—Ron Zie-

gler, Dwight Chapin and Bruce Kehrl.

Higby at first resisted Haldeman's offer to join his staff, then tried to combine the job as executive assistant with study for a masters degree. Predictably he dropped business school in mid-course for the excitement of the 1968 campaign trail at Haldeman's side.

Higby says he always wanted to be in public service, but he had the ambition to command also—his idea of a career in education, for example, was to be a high school principal. In politics he found a vocation that served both needs.

"(Haldeman) used to talk to me about politics and I became fascinated with the whole subject," he remembers. He "fell in love with the whole idea."

In January, 1969, Higby was appointed a staff assistant to the President and Haldeman gave him the major-domo role of setting up the White House organization. Higby, handpicked and molded by Haldeman's rough-spoken command style, nailed down salaries, budgets, office space, the hiring of secretaries and myriad other details with precision and efficiency.

For the first term of the Nixon administration, Higby was executive assistant staff. It was a position of immense power since Higby, while wielding no independent authority, controlled access to Haldeman.

Higby called Haldeman a dedicated public servant. "He was really interested in only one thing, the President's welfare . . . he was available to the President 24 hours a day and would often spend five to six hours a day—incredible periods of time—with the man and then he'd go home at night and get calls. One of the things he tried to do was keep a low profile. He felt he should be the inside man."

What Haldeman was to the President, Higby was to Haldeman—a loyal, obedient downfield blocker totally responsible to one man. It was a difficult role because Higby was dealing with men from other agencies who were 20 to 30 years his senior. While his friends in the White House speak of him as personable and wryly funny, outsiders who encountered him in his role as an outer bastion or what some called the Berlin Wall were apt to find him brusquely curt.

Said a friend of White House days, "He was quite young and he had a bit of trouble at first. He'd pass along everything Haldeman said 100 per cent and say 'Do it! Do it!' Later he got less authoritarian and he used his judgment more. He'd say, 'He's really on the warpath, you better do something about this.'"

Haldeman was "very tough, very intimidating" to his aides and Higby was not excluded, said the source. "Bob had treated him roughly. He would say to him 'How could anyone be so goddamned stupid' in front of other people."

The first thing anyone says when asked about Higby is how hard he worked. His former secretary, Kathy Emory remembers, "He was going full

speed all the time—trying to get the most out of himself."

He was constantly on call. The extreme example quoted by friends was of Higby attending a picnic two years ago and being summoned from a touch football game three times by his electronic pageboy.

Higby says that in four years at the White House he took only five days of vacation—"and that was five days more than Bob Haldeman took." They even shared their scant leisure hours playing tennis at an indoor center in McLean.

In conversation with a visitor, Higby quoted Haldeman continually and spoke of him with unabated admiration. "It was very disheartening to have Bob leave here and then sit down and figure out what to do with your career," he added.

Some who once shared that loyalty and dedication question it now in light of Watergate. One man now remarking his own life commented, "Young as he was, Higby paid a horrible price. He was on call all the time and that kind of loyalty demands an apartness from the staff. You confide in no one and have nothing else but your work."

Whatever the price, Higby says he paid it gratefully and has no regrets, "It was a job that consumed you. You thrived on the work. It was an opportunity that most young men never have."

At no time, said Higby firmly, did he have any feeling of anything going off the tracks in the White House. The gradual unfolding of the Watergate scandal this year was "a shock."

Higby came nearest to dangerous ground over Senate committee investigations into the closely held secret of the presidential tapes. Butterfield testified that before his appearance Higby telephoned to urge him to tell "the whole truth."

Higby himself had already appeared once before Senate investigators without disclosing the existence of the tapes. Questioned on this by a visitor, Higby replied quickly, "I did not volunteer it because I didn't think it should be made public. But if they had asked I would have told them. I'd discussed it with the White House counsel."

After Butterfield's appearance, Higby was summoned to two more meetings with staff investigators according to a source in the select committee. "There was a consensus between lawyers of both sides that the precise question was not asked."

After four years of intensely hard work and a traumatically close view of his idol's fall from grace, Lawrence Higby is ready for a quieter mode of life. He hopes his position at the OMB will be made permanent, but he has had several job offers from the private sector. One firm intention he says is to spend more time with his wife, Delores, and daughter, Jennifer, 2½, at their \$70,000 home in Brookeland Drive, Sumner, Md.

For the foreseeable future presumably, he will have to tolerate one legacy of his White House days, a nagging doubt over tomorrow's headlines.