

Closeup of the President

Nixon -- 'Blemishes and

Washington

"Blemishes and all," President Nixon said, and he warned of ambiguities, embarrassments and brutal candor in the 1308 pages that provided yesterday perhaps the closest look outsiders have ever had of a President in private — and certainly of the private Richard Milhous Nixon.

If the "blemishes" that Mr. Nixon warned of meant the sort of language that many use in unguarded conversation but few feel at ease with in public, most of them have been excised. . . Whatever the words and phrases were, they are now "(characterization deleted)" or "(Epletive omitted)."

But the promised candor seems to be there in Mr. Nixon's blunt and unflattering appraisals even of members of his own administration, his own White House staff.



H. R. HALDEMAN
'We hide at Camp David'



JOHN D. EHRLICHMAN
'I don't think it sells'



HENRY E. PETERSEN
An 'outsider'

L. Patrick Gray III, the one time acting director of the FBI, was edscribed in these terms by Mr. Nixon in an Oval Office conversation with John W. Dean III and John D. Ehrlichman:

"He is just quite stubborn and also he isn't very smart."

At another time, Senator Howard H. Baker, Jr. of Tennessee a Republican member of the Senate Wat-

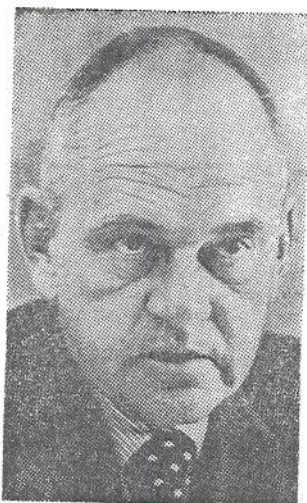
ergate Committee, was dismissed as "a soothy — impressive." Of the late Senator Robert F. Kennedy, Mr. Nixon said in a discussion of the use of bugging, "Bobby was a ruthless (characteri-

All'

zation omitted.)"

But the true candor lies not in these harsh assessments.

It is, rather, in the indefinable tone and flavor of these conversations in which Mr. Nixon becomes "P" for "President" and others are,



L. PATRICK GRAY III
'He isn't very smart'



HOWARD BAKER JR.
'A smoothy'



HERBERT L. PORTER
'A little fish'

similarly, identified by an initial in the margin: "D" is Dean, "M" is former Attorney General John N. Mitchell, "K" is former Attorney General Richard G. Kleindienst; "H" is H. R. Haldeman and so on.

Except for relatively rare conversations with an outsider such as Assistant Attorney General Henry E. Petersen, these are tactical discussions among people whose common outlook and goals are understood among themselves.

Only rarely does the President look beyond the confines of the political moment as when he spent more than 30 minutes in a late-night telephone conversation with Ehrlichman last April:

"My feeling frankly is this, Mr. Nixon said. "That you know I was just thinking tonight as I was making up my notes for this little talk, you know, what the hell, it is a little melodramatic, but it is totally true that what happens in this office in these next four years will probably determine whether there is a chance, and it's never been done, that you could have some sort of an uneasy peace for the next 25 years."

Ehrlichman, the transcript records, replied "Uh, Huh."

The President went on, "And that's my — whatever legacy we have, hell, it isn't going to be in getting a cesspool for Winnetka, it is going to be there."

But such philosophical

comments are the exception.

Mostly, the principals are talking about who and how and what and, sometimes, why, and what can be done, and what will happen if. No one, as far as the flat, badly punctuated sentences show, was other than businesslike; anger was kept within bounds. Humor was scarce, and it is sometimes difficult to tell whether a remark was meant lightly or not.

Once in a conversation with Haldeman, Dean spoke of the possibility of subpoenas being served "at home somewhere."

They can always find you," he said.

"We move to Camp David and Hide!" replied Haldeman. "They can't get in there."

There is no recorded

"(laughter)", only the exclamation remark to indicate that, perhaps, Haldeman was having his little joke.

But "(laughter)" is recorded an exchange of remarks about Gray that ends with Dean remarking, "Maybe someone will shoot him."

Not that Mr. Nixon was not jocular sometimes and often friendly, opening conversations with "Hi!" and once telling Mitchell on the phone, "O.K. John, good night. Get a good night's sleep. And don't bug anybody without asking me. O.K.?"

Mr. Nixon, as he emerges from these transcripts, has little tolerance for those he regards as fools. Of Donald H. Segretti, he said, "(expletive deleted). He was such a

dumb figure. I don't see how our boys could have gone for him. But nevertheless, they did. It was really juvenile. What in the (characterization . deleted) did he do?"

And later, he scoffs at what he calls "the Segretti crap."

Sometimes, however, he expressed compassion, as when Ehrlichman described Herbert L. Porter, an aide at the Committee for the Re-election of the President who pleaded guilty to lying to the FBI, as "a little fish who got caught in the net."

The President added, "Poor son of a bitch. It's wrong. It's wrong."

But more often he is the isolated man. "Nobody's a friend of ours," he said. "Let's face it. Don't worry about that sort of thing."

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