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Dean Called Petersen A 'Soldier'

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Assistant Attorney General Henry E. Petersen was a "soldier" whose view of the Watergate investigation was a "break for us," President Nixon was told by his counsel, John W. Dean III.

This assessment came early in the day of March 21, 1973, when Dean was detailing the onrush of Watergate events to the President, according to transcripts released yesterday by the White House.

Dean told Mr. Nixon that he, Dean, was fully aware of the FBI's investigation, what the grand jury was doing, what witnesses had been called and what questions they had been asked.

"Why did Petersen play the game so straight with us?" asked Mr. Nixon.

"Because Petersen is a soldier," replied Dean. "He kept me informed. He told me when we had problems, where we had problems and the like.

"He believes in you and he believes in this administration. This administration has made him. I don't think he has done anything improper, but he did make sure that the investigation was narrowed down to the very, very fine criminal thing which was a break for us. There is no doubt about it."

In his testimony in August, 1973, before the Senate's select Watergate committee, Petersen testified he had not received orders from President Nixon on March 21 to get all the facts and report directly to the President as the President told the nation in a televi-

Petersen's straightforward appearance before the committee was praised by senators.

He told them his relations with Dean were "good" and that he had no trouble agreeing that the Watergate investigation should not turn into a general probe of the White House during an election year.

In the transcript of the March 21, 1973, meeting between Dean and Mr. Nixon, the President asked Dean if he felt Petersen had done an adequate job.

"They ran that investigation out to the fullest extent they could follow a lead and that was it," Dean replied.

"But the point is," said Mr. Nixon, "where I suppose he could be criticized for not doing an adequate job. Why didn't he call Haldeman? Why didn't he get a statement from Colson? Oh, they did get Colson."

Later in the transcript, the President and Dean discussed the sentencing of the original Watergate defendants, which was scheduled two days later. Dean told Mr. Nixon he wanted the court to withhold sentencing for two weeks.

"I will tell you the person that I feel we could use his counsel on this," said Dean, "because he understands the criminal process better than anybody over here does."

"Petersen?" asked Mr. Nixon.

"Yes, Petersen," replied Dean.

Dean said it would be awkward for Petersen as head of Justice's criminal division but he could be given a special White House assignment to conduct an investigation.

Petersen was unavailable yesterday for comment on the transcripts.