

Cox nearly got it early

Examiner News Service

WASHINGTON. —President Nixon threatened to fire Archibald Cox, the first Watergate special prosecutor, as early as last July, when it was reported that Cox was investigating the financing of the President's San Clemente estate, according to evidence released by the House Judiciary Committee.

The committee released an affidavit by Elliot Richardson, the former attorney general who resigned when Nixon ultimately dismissed Cox last Oct. 20.

Richardson said he received a call from Alexander Haig, the White House chief of staff, July 3, 1973, asking about newspaper reports that Cox was investigating San Clemente.

"Gen. Haig said he was not sure the President was not going to move on this to discharge Mr. Cox, and that it could not be a matter of Cox' charter to investigate the President of the United States," Richardson said.

Later in the day, Richardson continued, Haig called again, and during the conversation Nixon cut in and "said he wanted a statement by Mr. Cox making it clear that Mr. Cox was not investigating San Clemente."

Richardson said Cox had assured him that the report of a San Clemente investigation was erroneous, but on July 23 he received another call from Haig.

"He told me that the 'boss' was very 'uptight' about Cox and complained about various of his activities, including letters to the IRS and the Secret Service from the special prosecutor's office seeking information on guidelines for electronic surveillance.

"Gen. Haig told me that 'if we have to have a confrontation we will have it.' Gen. Haig said that the President wanted 'a tight line drawn with no further mistakes,' and that 'if Cox does not agree, we will get rid of Cox.'"

Richardson said that about the time vice president Agnew resigned in October, there was another threat to Cox.

"In late September or early October, 1973, I met the President in regard to the Agnew matter," Richardson said. "After we had finished our discussion about Mr. Agnew, and as we were walking toward the door, the President said in substance, 'now that we have disposed of that matter, we can go ahead and get rid of Cox.' There was nothing more said."

When Cox refused a compromise proposed by Nixon over the White House tapes, Nixon ordered Richardson fire him. Richardson resigned rather than do so.