

What the Tapes Reveal: Nixon Hid Truth

By DAVID E. ROSENBAUM

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Nov. 21 —

Last April 29, in a dramatic television address, President Nixon announced that he was making public transcripts of his Watergate conversations.

"Everything that is relevant is included," Mr. Nixon said. "As far as what the President personally knew

and did with regard to Watergate and the cover-up is concerned, these materials — together with those already made available — will tell it all."

It was a statement that he was to repeat time and again when Federal prosecutors and impeachment investigators sought additional evidence.

This week, the actual tapes of these and others of Mr. Nixon's conversations were played in court, and it became clearer than ever that Mr. Nixon did not tell the truth that night last April.

Dozens of incriminating passages were shown to have been excised from the edited transcripts that Mr. Nixon made public and gave to the House Judiciary Committee.

Conversations Omitted

Damaging conversations, including one in which Mr. Nixon expressly approved clemency for E. Howard Hunt Jr. and another in which he planned a strategy of deception that was maintained through the impeachment proceedings, were

omitted altogether from the transcripts that were published or the material that was given to the Judiciary Committee.

In short, the new tapes appear to confirm what the Judiciary Committee charged in its final report on impeachment—that the Watergate cover-up continued up to the day Mr. Nixon left office.

Many of the tapes that were played this week were withheld altogether from the Judiciary Committee and became available to the prosecutors only after the Supreme Court ruled unanimously on July 24 against Mr. Nixon's claim of executive privilege.

Now, from the former President's own words on the tapes, it can be seen that his strenuous efforts to keep the prosecutors and the Judiciary Committee from obtaining the tapes were made not to preserve the sanctity and independence of the Presidency, as Mr. Nixon contended before the Supreme Court, but to keep the damaging evidence on the tapes from coming to light.

Some Charges Minor

No once on the tapes does Mr. Nixon ever appear concerned about a breach of his confidential relationship with his aides.

Rather, as Mr. Nixon said in a March 20, 1973, discussion with H. R. Haldeman, then the White House chief of staff, he intended to "fight for executive privilege" because "we just can't, can't allow that sort of thing to come out."

Some of the alterations in Mr.

Nixon's edited transcripts were minor. Various vulgarities were replaced with less offensive words, for instance.

But some of the alterations in and deletions from the edited transcript were substantive. And most of the tapes that came to light only this week contain passages that would have been highly damaging to Mr. Nixon's defense against impeachment. Among them were the following:

¶ Mr. Nixon's discussion with Charles W. Colson, then White House special counsel, on Jan. 8, 1973, in which Mr. Nixon agreed to devise a public relations scheme to justify granting clemency to Mr. Hunt.

¶ Evidence on a number of tapes that Mr. Nixon knew the dimensions of the Watergate cover-up well before March 21, 1973, the date on which he contended he first learned all the facts.

¶ Mr. Nixon's statement to aides on April 14, 1973, that he would give "full pardons" to various Watergate participants before he left the White House. That passage was omitted from the transcript of the April 14 conversation that was given to the Judiciary Committee and made public.

¶ A statement by John D. Ehrlichman, Mr. Nixon's chief domestic counsel on April 19, 1973, that aides had hidden the facts of the Watergate burglary because "we were protecting your re-election in a sense." Mr. Nixon remarked "That's right."

¶ A long passage on April 25, 1973, in which Mr. Ehrlichman warned Mr. Nixon that he faced "a resolution of impeachment" if all the facts became known. Again, Mr. Nixon remarked, "That's right."

Perhaps the most revealing of all the new tapes was one of a later conversation on April 25 in which Mr. Haldeman reviewed in detail the notes he took after listening to the tape of Mr. Nixon's March 21 discussion with John W. Dean 3d. The March 21 conversation was the one in which Mr. Dean, then the White House counsel, told Mr. Nixon that there was a "cancer growing on the Presidency."

Mr. Nixon and Mr. Haldeman agreed, the April 25 tape shows, to contradict Mr. Dean's version of the March 21 conversation, if Mr. Dean should tell the truth.

"You, Ehrlichman and I have got to put the wagons up around the President of this particular conversation," Mr. Nixon told Mr. Haldeman.

The "scenario" they developed—that damaging statements by Mr. Nixon on March 21 were made in the role of devil's advocate in search of the truth—was repeated time and again in Mr. Nixon's defense in the impeachment proceedings.

Mr. Nixon clearly knew as the line was being devised that it was not the truth.

On the evening of April 25, on the last tape played for the coverup jury, Mr. Nixon said that if Mr. Dean told the truth it would be "his word against the President's."

And, Mr. Nixon went on to say, "despite all the polls and all the rest, I think there's still a hell of a lot of people out there, and, from what I've seen, they're—you know—they, they want to believe. That's the point, isn't it?"