

21 July 1973

Dear Harold:

Ever since Alexander Butterfield appeared as a surprise witness last Monday, July 16, we have been trying to detect the real probable genesis of this remarkable development in which he disclosed the system of taping all conversation in certain areas of the WH and EOB. Without much luck, I must say, but we both think this is a question which should be kept in mind and watched for any possible clues to the answer.

The official explanation was provided by Butterfield himself in his testimony, namely that when he was asked a question that required an answer involving the tapes he provided it, but only after very serious thought. This was supplemented afterward by corridor interviews with Sen. Baker and Dash which were practically identical. Baker's was a bit fuller. He said Butterfield had ~~been slated to be a witness until very late in the present phase, if even then, and that it was only during the third of three staff interviews the previous week that the subject of the tapes had come up.~~ This was on Friday, July 13. Baker said Butterfield was asked how the WH could provide such detailed and precisely timed logs of conferences, interviews, meetings, conversations and telephone conversations. He replied that was easy, they just consulted the tapes. The whole story of the system then emerged.

News stories about Butterfield at the time, providing quite a lot of background, depicted him as the type of person in whom such a behavior pattern would not be inconsistent.

Problems remain with this explanation, however, especially in relation to the effect of the story on foreign relations, and in respect to the risks Butterfield himself took, which make it appear too costly in relation to any imaginable benefit, particularly in view of the casual way the story appears to have emerged. I think most cultured foreigners, for instance, will be inclined at least privately to equate the disclosure with one regarding the practice of cannibalism or some other equally odious practice. I suspect their attitude would be roughly that if you want to practice cannibalism or hold sex orgies in private, that's your business, old boy, but you DON'T talk about it or get your guests mixed up in it. After all, there are such things as appearances.

From Butterfield's standpoint it seems improbable that a man in his position would have made such a disclosure without at first checking with the WH. He's young, obviously of considerable ability, and actually seems to be reasonably if not unusually well qualified for his new job, FAAdministrator, for which he left the WH last March 14. (You may recall this as a very busy and critical time around 1600 Penna.) We find it difficult to believe he would have made this disclosure purely on his own without consulting with someone.

If Baker and Dash are levelling with us, Butterfield disclosed the tape situation late Friday, July 13. In a NYTimes svc story printed by the Chronicle on July 17, the day after Butterfield testified on the 16th and probably written on the 16th, Gerald Warren is quoted as saying that ~~Butterfield had planned~~ the WH had been informed that Butterfield "planned to disclose" the tape situation to the Ervin Committee. Warren does not say when he informed the WH, but it was on July 12 that our GL succumbed to a nasty virus and repaired to his bed of pain at Bethesda. It is difficult not to relate the two circumstances, although plenty of other things were going on "at that point in time."

It is probably important, therefore to determine why the WH gave him the go-ahead, if this is what happened. Our own thought is that, costly as it obviously was, it was considered worth while by some decision-maker as a smokescreen to lessen the impact of something else that might be coming up. That would have to be pretty horrible from the standpoint of the ~~the~~ decision-maker.

In any case, there is no acceptable answer that we can imagine on the basis of what we know about the situation here.

Meanwhile, one has to ask, along with Mr. Skolnick, whether Bitterfield's taking over of the FAA had anything to do with the verdict on the crash of Mrs. Hunt's plane, the same question Skolnick asks in regard to Dwight Chapin going to UAL. He's reaching and jumping to conclusions, and one doesn't have to jump with him in order to pose the unanswered question.

The question becomes just a bit more relevant in view of the testimony of both Kalmbach and Ulasewicz, both of whom perhaps unconsciously depicted Mrs. Hunt as a pretty tireless operator when it came to wheedling cash for the cause. It cannot be said that her removal from the picture was not without benefit to anyone who found her activities a nuisance. Incidentally, we have not seen Ulasewicz, merely heard him. We understand that as a TV comic he outshines Sen. Sam at times. From his voice, however, he emerges as a character whose deadly purpose is fully as developed and in place as that of Bernard L. Barker, and with none of the confusion.

Getting back to our GL, at the moment he has made a brave recovery, delivered a pep talk to the WH staff, and hied himself to Camp David to sit out Congress. He successfully is projecting an air of triumph of some kind, as if he had pulled a fast one and got away with it. How real is this? Is it real at all? When he says we're going to finish the job we were elected to do, just what does he mean? Is this empty talk? Perhaps by the end of next week, after Haldeman and Ehrlichman have testified, we may have a clearer idea.

Best,


jdw

P.S. -- We had one thought about Thursday's hoax phone call to Ervin which might fit in with some of the above. That would be that it could have been a trial balloon to see how the committee would react to an offer to hand over tapes -- to see if there would be any adverse reaction, such as suspicion that they could have been doctored in the meantime. There was none expressed. Could this account for GL's triumphant air? The idea that he can appear generous by providing tapes which in the meantime have been altered to suit his purposes? Does he, for instance, know that Ehrlichman or Haldeman may allude to such tapes?

The idea of phony phone calls is sort of in: remember that the other day Martha Mitchell claimed someone had impersonated her in a phone call to UPI which certainly hardly served the Mitchells well.