

Customs Chief Named As Caulfield Contact

Post 4/13/74

Associated Press

The Senate Watergate committee has obtained the name of the former federal tax official alleged to have furnished the White House with tax data on its friends and enemies.

John Caulfield, President Nixon's former law enforcement adviser, named Vernon D. (Mike) Acree, now the U.S. commissioner of customs, as his primary IRS contact.

In two interviews, Acree vigorously denied that allegation, saying he had done nothing "venal or illegal," that he could not be considered Caulfield's prime contact and that the information supplied was similar to that given other administrations over the last 20 years.

He described some of Caulfield's testimony as grossly distorted.

In executive-session testimony taken March 23, Caulfield said he was referring to Acree, until recently the assistant IRS commissioner for inspections, when he spoke of "our capability at IRS.

"By that I mean the capability of conferring with Mr. Acree with a view towards seeing whether or not an IRS audit might be accomplished in a legal method without vio-

lating the law," the transcript said.

Acree said he did have what he described as a casual, business relationship with Caulfield during a seven-month period of 1971 and had been aware of White House interest in the tax problems of movie star John Wayne.

And he said it would not be possible to initiate an audit for the White House because normal IRS procedure could not be bypassed.

Excerpts from the transcript of Caulfield's testimony was provided by a source close to the Watergate committee, who said the allegations are under investigation by Watergate Special Prosecutor Leon Jaworski.

Caulfield was questioned about Nixon administration documents made public Monday by Sen. Lowell P. Weicker (R-Conn.), which indicated great White House interest in the tax problems of Wayne and evangelist Billy Graham as well as newsmen and critics of Nixon policies.

Last summer, former presidential counsel John W. Dean III testified the White House tried actively to use the IRS to harass and intimidate the administration's political enemies.