

# Nixon's One-Time Strong Man Stays Mostly Serene

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WASHINGTON, July 10—What folks had wondered most about John N. Mitchell, a former strong man of the Nixon Administration, was how he would bear up before the Senate Watergate committee.

Today he showed them. The one-time Attorney General and former Nixon campaign director has been portrayed in recent months as a lonely relic of his old self, ostracized by friends and the chosen scapegoat of some within the White House.

But today Mr. Mitchell seemed almost serene as he sparred with the committee and its counsels, interspersing his testimony with occasional humor, spicing it with frequent "hells" and "damns," and only rarely flashing a remembered testiness.

On camera before a national television audience, he forsook for most of the day the comfort of the ever-present pipe that has been the delight of caricaturists, although he toyed with it on the table in front of him from time to time and finally succumbed and lighted it this afternoon.

## His Hands Shake

His hands shook some, especially during the latter stages of his five-hour opening appearance, but he never President Nixon, insisting that he had never told his former law partner anything about the Watergate cover-up.

Most of the time he was even kind to Jeb Magruder, his former deputy at the Committee for the Re-election of the President, and to John W. Dean 3d, a Justice Department protégé who was counsel to the President be-

fore being dismissed April 30.

Both Mr. Magruder and Mr. Dean had testified that Mr. Mitchell knew in advance of the Watergate bugging and took part in the extended cover-up after June 17, 1972.

But Mr. Mitchell, his long face as resigned as a tired bloodhound's, allowed repeatedly that anyone could have memory lapses about the dozens of meetings that took place over a year and a half.

During intensive questioning about whether Mr. Magruder had shown Mr. Mitchell a file that contained the results of the bugging of the Democratic National Committee's headquarters, Samuel Dash, the Senate committee's chief counsel, asked:

"Do you recall that he had testified that he had taken these documents and showed them to you?"

Mr. Mitchell's ruddy face turned a deeper shade of red. "I recall it very vividly," he said, angrily, "because it happens to be a palpable, damnable lie."

## Many Logs Kept

A few moments after that brief outburst, however, he was bringing laughter from the audience crowding the hearing room with a reference to his volatile wife, Martha, who did not attend the session.

Explaining to Mr. Dash how he could be so certain about dates and times of meetings with, and telephone calls from, various figures linked to the Watergate affair, Mr. Mitchell noted the thoroughness of his office logs, large duplicates of which were displayed on an easel beside the long committee table.

"If you go back and look at that log," he said, "you

will find that the aide that I had sitting in the next office to me—when he came in to see me, that was logged.

"When my daughter called on the telephone or when my wife called on the telephone—by the way, my wife called a lot more often than my daughter...."

That brought down the house. There didn't seem to be anyone there who didn't know of Martha Mitchell's penchant for telephone calls. Actually, a lot of those who stood in Ion glines to attend the hearing were probably as interested in Mrs. Mitchell's nonappearance as they were in Mr. Mitchell's appearance.

No sooner had Mr. Mitchell, wearing a conservative dark blue suit, a white shirt and a red, white and blue tie, slumped into his seat at the witness table and called his lawyer, William G. Hundley, up beside him, than he was surrounded by cameramen and inquisitive reporters.

What they mostly wanted to know was "Where is Martha?"

Mrs. Mitchell's whereabouts have been kept pretty much a secret for the last week or so. About all anyone would say was that she was vacationing "in the South."

Whether she would attend the hearings and sit behind her husband as the nearly silent Maureen Dean did throughout John Dean's five days on the stand has been a matter of wry speculation for days.

And Mr. Mitchell was almost coy about it—right up until yesterday when he said, "Wait and see and you'll be surprised."

Today, arriving alone, he replied to early questions about her by saying: "She decided to stay away."

I don't know why. You'll have to ask her."

Pressed further, he told one newsmen that "she's in heaven like all the angels."

As he returned from the luncheon recess, a television reporter tried again.

"She's where she ought to be," he said in his flat, dead-pan way, striding past the newsmen.

In the absence of Mrs. Mitchell, Mr. Mitchell and Mr. Hundley posed good-humoredly for the cameras with two girls who were seated two rows behind them in the witness section.

"They're two girls from my office who want to get into show business," Mr. Hundley explained with a grin.

From the outset, the pallid, 59-year-old Mr. Mitchell, in contrast to his serious 34-year-old former protégé, Mr. Dean, faced his testimony with attempts at humor, some of it self-deprecating.

During the sort of routine process of identification that all witnesses go through, Mr. Dash inquired of him:

"Did you take any active role with the President during his 1968 political campaign?"

To which Mr. Mitchell replied drolly:

## Most of the Laughs

"Well, I am sure that is a matter of some debate, but I was known as the campaign director in the 1968 campaign."

Later, after describing an intelligence and espionage plan put before him by G. Gordon Liddy, a former counsel to the Finance Committee to Re-elect the President, as "a complete horror story that involved a mish-mash of code names and lines of authority, electronic surveillance, the ability to intercept aircraft communications, the

call-girl bit and all the rest of it," he was asked by Mr. Dash:

"Why didn't you throw Liddy out of your office?"

Again, Mr. Mitchell leaned toward the microphone, his blue suit rumpling at the shoulders.

"Well, I think, Mr. Dash, in hindsight," he said, "I not only should have thrown him out of the office, I should have thrown him out of the window."

While Mr. Mitchell, whose testimony was by no means an unceasing blizzard of laughs, was getting most of them today, the usual founts of humor at the hearings, Senators Sam J. Ervin Jr. of North Carolina and Senator Howard H. Baker Jr. of Tennessee were silent.

Still, although Mr. Ervin, the chairman, and Mr. Baker, the vice chairman, will not get their turns as interrogators until tomorrow, the North Carolina Democrat became the focus of some attention today.

He discovered that he had a fan club named for him. Two young men from Palo Alto, Calif., Rob Caughlan, who described himself as a writer, and David Oke, who said he is a member of the Stanford University administrative staff, braved the 90-degree heat and the third day of a Washington smog alert to attend the hearings and pass out membership cards in the National Sam Ervin Fan Club.

They said they started with eight members and now have 2,000. Membership is free. All it takes is a card, which has a likeness of Mr. Ervin, whom they call "Uncle Sam."

"I believe in integrity, fairness, and in the Constitution of the United States," the card says. "I think that Chairman Ervin is the real thing."

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People in the audience yesterday as John N. Mitchell, the former Attorney General, testified before the Senate committee on Watergate

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