

Nixon Tapes

A Phony Call to Sen. Ervin From 'Secretary Shultz'

Washington

An apparent agreement between the White House and the Senate Watergate committee over committee access to tapes of presidential conversations evaporated yesterday with the discovery that it was all a hoax.

As the afternoon committee hearing opened, chairman Senator Sam J. Ervin Jr. (Dem.-N.C.) announced that Secretary of the Treasury George P. Shultz had telephoned to say the committee could have the tapes, and that President Nixon would meet with Ervin next week to discuss procedures.

Some minutes later, however, Ervin took the microphone back to announce that the telephone call apparently had not been from Shultz, that the White House concession was nonexistent.

"I think it's the unanimous opinion of the committee that this was a right dirty trick," Ervin said.

FBI

Senator Howard H. Baker Jr. (Rep.-Tenn.), vice chairman of the committee, said the committee had asked for an FBI investigation and was informed that Mr. Nixon and Attorney General Elliot L. Richardson had made similar requests and the matter was being pursued.

Ervin explained what happened:

"It appears that a hoax has been perpetrated upon

the committee, at least upon the chairman of the committee. I was called to the telephone just before the lunch period. I was told before I went to the telephone that Secretary of the Treasury Shultz was calling and wanted to speak to me.

"The voice at the other end of the line informed me it was Secretary of the Treasury Shultz. I am not familiar enough with the voice of the secretary to be able to identify him. I assumed it was he. He made the statement which I reported to the committee and to the news media on this microphone."

SCRAMBLE

The announcement apparently touched off a scramble in the White House. Ervin said White House staff contacted the committee staff and was told by Shultz that there had been no such conversation. When that information was transmitted to Ervin, he directed that Shultz's office be called, and that the secretary be put on the phone.

"The reason I put it this way is I hate to have my faith shattered in humanity," Ervin said. "I went to the phone, and a conversation with the man who assured me he was the real Secretary Shultz. He informed me he had had no conversation with me today and that the man who did it

was somebody else."

Baker said the call from the impostor was received on a confidential telephone in the committee room, lending credence to the call.

"It would have been helpful if we could fine a secure telephone," Baker said.

'RATIONAL'

Later in the hearing Ervin remarked, "I regret very much that I was so unsuspecting and trusting that I accepted the telephone call at face value. I might add that I was prompted to do so because I thought that the information which the spurious phone call conveyed to me was the rational thing that should be done in this connection. And it's what I've been praying that the White House would do because it is so rational."

The existence of the tapes in question was disclosed in

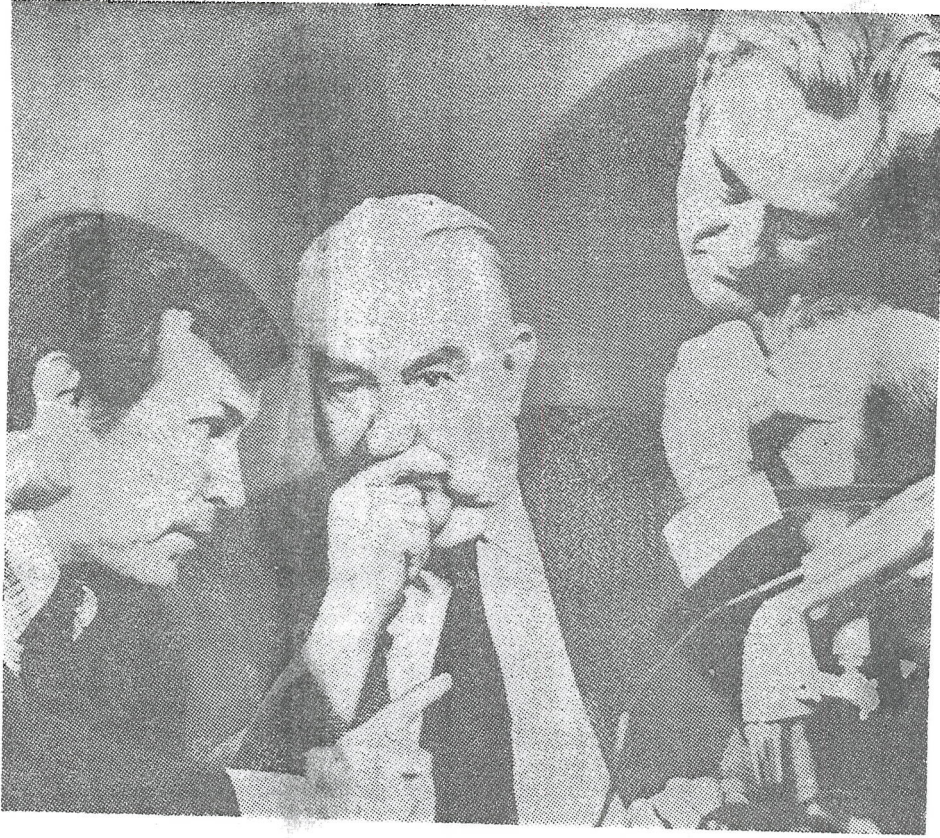
committee testimony Monday by former White House aide Alexander Butterfield, now administrator of the Federal Aviation Administration.

Butterfield said Mr. Nixon had microphones and telephone recording devices placed in his offices and in several other key White House locations. He described the equipment as highly sensitive, picking up

everything said in those rooms and on those phones.

The Watergate committee immediately sought access to the tapes, hoping by listening to them to clear up discrepancies in the testimony of several witnesses and also to define just what Mr. Nixon knew about the Watergate affair and the subsequent futile effort to cover it up.

Associated Press



AP Wirephoto
Senator Ervin (center) conferred on the phony call with Senator Baker (left) counsel Sam Dash and consultant Arthur Miller (standing).