

By LINDA CHARLTON

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WASHINGTON, Aug. 7— Does anyone remember Robert C. Odle Jr.?

Mr. Odle, a one-time employe of the Committee for the Re-Election of the President, was the first man to rise in the white glare of the television lights in the Senate caucus room, to raise his right hand and swear to tell the truth to the seven Senators on the Watergate investigating committee and a network audience.

That was more than 7,500 pages of testimony ago, on the morning of May 17. At about 4:45 o'clock this afternoon, the hearings were over, at least for now—adjourned "until the call of the chair," probably sometime in September. For those waiting for some final moment of drama, or at least for the last rhetorical flourishes from Senator Sam J. Ervin Jr., the committee chairman, and his colleagues, the end seemed an anticlimax: not a whimper, but a dying trickle of questions for the last witness.

He was Henry E. Petersen, the Assistant Attorney General in charge of the Justice Department's criminal division, a man whose cowlick and flexible face reminded some of Will Rogers. He was

not, if anyone was, a typical Watergate witness.

In the first place he was, he said, a registered Democrat. But he was also a career civil servant, a man who joined the Justice Department as a messenger in 1947 and has risen further than any other department professional through its ranks.

Quite naturally for a man who has watched administrations come and go, Mr. Petersen, by his own testimony, seemed unawed by the White House, by its hierarchy or, indeed, by the President.

Resignation Cited

There had been an inkling of Mr. Petersen's antiroyalist leanings in the testimony of the morning's witness, former Attorney General Richard G. Kleindienst. In recounting a telephone conversation with John D. Ehrlichman, President Nixon's chief domestic adviser at the time, Mr. Kleindienst quoted him as being "very upset" because Mr. Ehrlichman "gave him [Mr. Petersen] an instruction which he refused to follow."

Mr. Kleindienst himself displayed extraordinary casualness, by his own account, in telling Mr. Ehrlichman, "John, you have got to be out of your mind." He also threatened to resign, he said, if "the President tells me that you have the authority

and Petersen Shows Contrasting Styles

and the power to give specific instructions to people in the Department of Justice."

Mr. Ehrlichman, who has often been described as a much feared man with almost unlimited authority, reportedly told Mr. Kleindienst not to get excited, not to worry about it, that it "will never happen again." And, Mr. Kleindienst added, it never did.

The former Attorney General, who resigned April 30, was almost ostentatiously relaxed during his three hours of question-and-answer session before the Senate committee. He gestured freely, played with a matchbook from Caesar's Palace in Las Vegas, Nev., and at one point flung a leg over the arm of the witness chair as he turned toward a questioning Senator.

Blunt at Times

That was not Mr. Petersen's style. Most of the time he leaned over the witness table, reaching again and again into the left-hand pocket for something apparently not there. Still, he seemed at home in the hearing room, almost as if he felt himself akin to the committee members as a man who had tried, with a frustrating lack of success, to find out just what was going on.

Mr. Petersen was some-

times blunt in his replies. Yes, he said, and with vehemence, he was "resentful" about the appointment of a special prosecutor to succeed him in leading the Watergate investigation—he saw it as a slur on himself, and like most human beings, he didn't like it.

His testimony was generally conversational; listening to Mr. Petersen's account of a discussion or a telephone call was almost as good as being the proverbial fly on the wall.

There was, he said, a telephone call from Mr. Kleindienst reporting that John W. Dean 3d, then the President's counsel, had requested raw F.B.I. files, to which Mr. Petersen said as he replied, "Tell him no," and I was so abrupt that he just started to laugh; his reaction was, "You are a big help." Then Mr. Petersen said he was "a little embarrassed" about his abruptness, and so he went on: "Well, hear me out, if the President calls you up and says, 'I want those reports,' you click your heels and say, 'Yes, sir.'"

Nixon 'Very Upset'

The image of the President that emerged from Mr. Kleindienst's testimony was more of a man and less of a divinity than others had portrayed Mr. Nixon. When the President heard of the break-

in at the office of Daniel Ellsberg's former psychiatrist, Mr. Kleindienst said, he was "very upset" and provoked.

Without giving examples, Mr. Kleindienst indicated that Mr. Nixon's reaction was couched in terms anyone might have used—"the language that he used to describe the idiocy of the event," Mr. Kleindienst said, was a measure of his irritation.

'Been There Too Long'

In the afternoon came Mr. Petersen, who admitted to his uncertainty about the philosophical value of unbridled loyalty to a single man, even a President. "I've been there [the Justice Department] too long to jeopardize my reputation for anybody," he said.

Mr. Petersen defended the President's actions several times, but he also seemed to take it for granted that he had a right to disagree with Mr. Nixon, an even to have told him, "If I reach the point where I think you are involved, I have got to resign. If I come up with evidence of you I am going to waltz it over to the House of Representatives."

He had also told the president, he said, that his wife, "who is no left-wing kook," had asked him at breakfast one day about the possibility of Presidential involvement.