

Nixon, Adviser Picked March 21

On April 17, 1973, President Nixon walked into the White House press briefing room and said:

"On March 21, as a result of serious charges which came to my attention, some of which were publicly reported, I began intensive new inquiries into this whole matter . . . I can report today that there have been major developments in the [Watergate] case concerning which it would be improper to be more specific now, except to say that real progress has been made in finding the truth."

Just a few minutes earlier, according to the White House edited tape transcripts of the same date, the President and aide John D. Ehrlichman discussed the statement Mr. Nixon would make.

"Four weeks ago, we—" the President began, and then said: "Why don't we say, shall we set a date? That sounds a hell of a lot stronger if we set a date."

"All right," Ehrlichman said.

"On March 21, I began new inquiries—strike that," the President said. "I ordered an investigation, new inquiries throughout the government—"

"How about saying," Ehrlichman suggested, "On March 21 as a result of serious charges which were reported publicly and—"

In subsequent statements, Mr. Nixon has said his own investigation was undertaken on March 21 as the date on which he first learned from John W. Dean III of White House involvement in the Watergate cover-up.