

Ex-Aide Believes Nixon OK'd It

Washington

Alexander Butterfield, who disclosed the existence of the White House tapes said yesterday he believes former President Nixon had prior knowledge of the first Watergate break-in.

"To have done something that big, he had to have given the OK," said Butterfield in a telephone interview.

"Once they had permission to do what they first did, then that was considered tacit approval to go back again," said Butterfield.

Butterfield said he was "strictly expressing a personal opinion" that Mr. Nixon knew about the first break-in at the Democratic National Headquarters in May 1972. In that break-in, the Watergate burglars placed electronic eavesdropping devices in the office.

That break-in was followed by another on June 17, 1972, in which five men were arrested and later linked to the Nixon re-election campaign.

Butterfield, who resigned in March as head of the Federal Aviation Administration, said he had no inside knowledge that Mr. Nixon

was aware of the break-in plans. "That is strictly a personal opinion based on a damn clear knowledge of the system — the way Nixon operated," said Butterfield.

"But who knew it better than I — except maybe Haldeman," said Butterfield in a reference to H.R. Haldeman, a top Nixon White House aide who resigned because of Watergate.

"Knowing the system as I know it to be — the way intransigency, the whole they stonewalled it and their time — there's little question in my mind . . . that Nixon knew about it," said Butterfield. "I don't think it is a unique point of view. After everything that has come out, people who think he didn't know about everything, they must not get him."

Butterfield was the former Nixon deputy who told the Watergate hearings in 1973 how listening devices were installed in Mr. Nixon's offices and on his telephones. The tapes, which were heard by a House panel considering impeachment, figured prominently in Mr. Nixon's resignation last year.

The tapes picked up Mr. Nixon's conversations with then White House counsel

John Dean, who said that Mr. Nixon knew of efforts to cover up the Watergate break-in.

Mr. Nixon denied ever knowing about plans to burglarize the Democratic headquarters.

Neither the former president nor any spokesman for him could be reached for comment yesterday on Butterfield's allegations.

Butterfield said in the interview that he has had no communication with Mr. Nixon since the former president's resignation.

"I'm sure he hates me as much as anyone can," Butterfield said. He said he feels sorry for Mr. Nixon's family, "but I don't feel awful about the president's resignation. Not at all."

Butterfield said there was no question that his resignation from the FAA was forced.

"The White House acts as though it was voluntary, but I was asked to leave — and quickly," he said.

"I wouldn't have minded leaving if they had admitted it was for these understandable political reasons — if President Ford had just stood up and said Butterfield has done a satisfactory job at FAA but this is politics, goodbye and good luck. I would respect that. But he didn't."

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