

'Ridiculous,' Says ITT Chief

He Denies Knowing About White House Phone Call

Washington

ITT President Harold S. Geneen said yesterday he knew nothing about a phone call from the White House last year inquiring about a pledge to the Republican National Convention.

Neither, he said, had he ever heard of a \$600,000 contribution from the firm to President Nixon's reelection campaign.

Geneen testified for a second day as Republicans on the Senate Judiciary Committee began moving to try to end a politically charged inquiry into any connection between the ITT convention outlay and the settlement of a mammoth antitrust case involving the firm.

Geneen was asked about testimony Sunday by Dita D. Beard, ITT's Washington lobbyist, in which she referred to a phone call from the White House to D. R. Merriman, chief of the ITT's



AP Wirephoto

ITT PRESIDENT HAROLD GENEEN
A light moment at Senate hearing

Washington office, some time late in June or early July last year, weeks before the July 31 out-of-court settlement of three government antitrust actions against ITT.

BED

Mrs. Beard, who was testifying from a hospital bed in Denver and collapsed after two-and-a-half hours, made a reference to a \$600,000 ITT contribution to Mr. Nixon's campaign. But she never explained whether Merriman, the unidentified White House agent who called him, or someone else had mentioned this figure to her.

Geneen said her testimony "doesn't make sense."

"I know of absolutely no commitment to fit this description," he said. "It sounds to me like it isn't logical — a mixup. I think it's ridiculous. That's my own conclusion."

He said International Telephone and Telegraph Corp. had never made any contribution or offered to contribute to Mr. Nixon's campaign because it is against the law for a corporation to contribute to a political campaign.

He also contended that ITT had made no commitment to the San Diego convention until July 21 — long

after the alleged White House phone call to which Mrs. Beard referred.

CLAIM

Geneen claimed the out of court antitrust settlement was "a damn good deal for the government" and was connected in no way with the San Diego convention commitment.

Geneen, the head of one of the nation's 10 largest corporate empires, testified that the "real key to this whole hearing" is whether ITT's out-of-court settlement of its antitrust problems with the government last summer was on terms favorable to the people of the United States.

He contended that Richard S. McLaren, then chief of the antitrust division, got "about everything he asked for" in the sense that he stopped ITT practices which McLaren contended were stifling competition.

ITT didn't like the settlement, he said, because it forced the firm to divest nearly \$1 billion in subsidiaries to stop the govern-

ment's suit against ITT's acquisition of the \$1.2 billion Hartford Fire Insurance Co.

"But at least we could go back and run our business," he said.

FIGHT

Senator Edward M. Kennedy (Dem-Mass.) said ITT had failed to refute "evidence" linking the convention pledge and the settlement. He said he would fight GOP efforts to end the hearings.

Kennedy said everything the committee has heard so far "corroborates" a memorandum Mrs. Beard is alleged to have written last June.

The memo, which Mrs. Beard has branded a forgery, said "our noble commitment has gone a long way toward our negotiations on the mergers eventually coming out as Hal (Geneen) wants them." The memo said the commitment was \$400,000.

Asked if he believed the memo was Mrs. Beard's, Geneen said "I don't know what it is."

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