

Key Watergate Investigator

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Henry Edward Petersen

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WASHINGTON, April 20—Twenty-five years ago Henry E. Petersen was hired as a clerk at the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Gradually he climbed his way through the bureaucracy of the Justice Department, immersing himself in the battle against organized crime and winning a reputation as a “completely honest man, as tough as nails,” who “doesn’t get snowed easily.”

Man in the News

After 20 years he earned a top civil service job—chief of the Organized Crime and Racketeering section. Then John N. Mitchell became attorney general in 1969, and promoted Mr. Petersen to jobs normally reserved as political rewards.

First Mr. Petersen was named a Deputy Assistant Attorney General, then acting Assistant Attorney General and then Assistant Attorney General in charge of the Criminal Division.

“His tremendous advances in the department were because of Mitchell,” said a former colleague.

Mr. Petersen returned his benefactor’s regard, calling him “a man of high integrity and a tough prosecutor—he’s such a refreshing breath of air after Ramsey Clark,” the former Attorney General.

Key Legal Decision

Now, as the man responsible for the Justice Department’s Watergate investigation, Mr. Petersen faces the possibility of deciding whether to prosecute his mentor.

It is not the first time Mr.



The New York Times
Has handled charges of scandal before.

Petersen has faced decisions on how to handle charges of scandal in the Justice Department.

His critics say he compromised himself two years ago when the Justice Department was investigating allegations of improper conduct by the United States Attorney in San Diego, Harry D. Steward, who came under attack for quashing a subpoena for a Nixon contributor during a grand jury investigation last year.

When Mr. Petersen was drawn into the dispute at confirmation hearings for Richard G. Kleindienst as Attorney General last March, he told the committee that Mr. Steward had been wrong. But he defended the Justice

Department’s decision to clear Mr. Steward because he said it was in the best interest of the department since Mr. Steward was needed in the prosecution of a major tax case in Southern California.

Mr. Petersen’s family has dual opinions of his personality.

“The children all love him,” said his wife Jean, “but they fear him too. They know he means what he says and he lets them know, in no uncertain terms, when he’s displeased.”

The father is proud of his seven children, ranging in age from 25 to 2 years old, and spends most of his summer weekends with them on his 26-foot cruiser on the Chesapeake Bay.

Henry Edward Petersen, a native of Philadelphia, was born on March 26, 1921.

He was a staff sergeant in the Marine Corps during World War II and served in the South Pacific.

After the war he went to Georgetown University and then put himself through law school at Catholic University by taking a job as a clerk for the F.B.I.—an agency he might head if he comes out of the Watergate case looking good.

Now, while pressures focus on the chief of the Watergate investigation, he tries to find a respite on the putting greens.

Even last Saturday the man with the cowlick and heavy lined face kept his date with his old friend, William G. Hundley, John Mitchell’s new lawyer, on the Cedar Crest Golf Course.