

The Scrappy Witness

By Douglas E. Kneeland
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Maybe there really are "two Ehrlichmans," as a former White House associate insists, but the Senate Watergate committee certainly got to see only one of them yesterday.

The heavy-browed, frequently scowling John Daniel Ehrlichman who sat under the television lights on the committee's witness stand for more than four hours was a combative, cocky defender of the faith.

The "relaxed, easy" fellow who was known around the White House as a "closet liberal," according to his old acquaintance, was nowhere to be seen in the crowded caucus room on the third floor of the Old Senate Office Building.

Not that the tanned and muscular-looking former chief domestic affairs adviser to the President didn't smile now and then. But the smiles were those of a man who enjoys a good scrap — and he came out fighting.

"It's an effective side of Ehrlichman," his former co-worker mused as he watched the baldish head bob and the dark brow rise and fall expressively on television. "I've seen him under hostile pressure before. He doesn't flap, nor does he become a doormat."

Ehrlichman was a new

kind of witness for the committee, a tough, unapologetic Nixon stalwart who obviously felt that a good offense was the best defense.

Most of those who have paraded to the stand before have been deferential and have at least assumed an air of cooperativeness.

Even John N. Mitchell, the former attorney general and presidential campaign director, presented a muted version of his usual crusty self in most of his appearances before the committee.

But from his opening statement, which was reminiscent of a high school civics lecture as he detailed the duties of the President, the "drudgery" of "work that is really never done," Ehrlichman seemed to be challenging or chiding the committee.

TEACHER

Putting on his glasses, he read the 30-page statement to the seven senators and their aides as if he were a teacher trying to get through to a particularly slow class. He even read the subheads, such as "Why didn't everyone know all about Watergate?"

Why everyone, including Mr. Nixon, didn't know, he insisted, was that they depended on John W. Dean III to keep them informed and he failed them.

"I do not suggest that we were all just too busy to have noticed," Ehrlichman



New York Times photo

John D. Ehrlichman found a sunny spot to look at his notes during a recess of the Watergate hearing at which he was the witness

said. "We did notice and we kept informed through John Dean on the assumption that he was giving us complete and accurate information."

Quarreling at length with Dean's testimony that the Watergate coverup "was probably the major thing that was occurring" at the White House between June 17 and Sept. 15, 1972, Ehrlichman said that "it was a very busy time."

EXPENSIVE

And he departed from his prepared statement to re-

mark, "John Dean, on the other hand, never found things so quiet and he planned the most expensive honeymoon in the history of the White House staff right along this period."

With that testy allusion to the \$4850 Dean has said he borrowed from campaign funds in his possession for a planned wedding trip, Ehrlichman left little doubt as to his feelings about the man who replaced him as the President's counsel.

On April 30, Dean was dis-

missed. Ehrlichman and H.R. Haldeman, the President's chief of staff, whom Dean had linked to the Watergate affair, resigned the same day.

But the John Ehrlichman who sparred vigorously with the committee and its counsel yesterday did not act like an unemployed 48-year-old lawyer with five children to feed.

He was still Mr. Nixon's man, no doubt about it—in fact and faith, if not in pay.