

A New Kind of Watergate Witness

John Daniel Ehrlichman

By DOUGLAS E. KNEELAND

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, July 24— Maybe there really are "two Ehrlichmans," as a former White House associate insists, but the Senate Watergate committee certainly saw only one of them today.

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 today 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-workers mused as he watched the baldish head bob and the dark brows rise and fall expressively on television. "I've seen him under hostile pressure before. He doesn't flap, nor does he become a doormat."

Nixon Stalwart

Mr. 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 testified 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 Mr. Ehrlichman's opening statement, which was reminiscent of a high school civics lecture as he detailed the duties of the President and the "drudgery" of "work that is really never done," the former domestic affairs adviser seemed to be challenging or chiding the committee.

Putting on his glasses, Mr. Ehrlichman 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?"

Depended on Dean

Why everyone, including Mr. Nixon, didn't know, Mr. Ehrlichman insisted, was that they depended on John W. Dean 3d to keep them informed and he failed them.

"I do not suggest that we were all just too busy to have noticed," Mr. Ehrlichman 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 Mr. Dean's testimony that the Watergate cover-up "was probably the major thing that was occurring" at the White House between June 17 and Sept. 15, 1972, Mr. Ehrlichman said that "it was a very busy time."

And he departed from his prepared statement to remark, "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 his period."

With that allusion to the \$4,850 that Mr. Dean has said he borrowed from campaign funds in his possession for a planned wedding trip, Mr. Ehrlichman left little doubt as to his feelings about the man who replaced him as the President's counsel.

Mr. Daen was dismissed last April 30. Mr. Ehrlichman and H. R. Haldeman, the President's chief of staff, who has been linked by Mr. Dean to the Watergate affair, resigned the same day.

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

Still Nixon's Man

He was still President Nixon's man, no doubt about it—in fact and faith, if not in pay. And from the moment this morning when he sat at the witness stand in his neat gray suit, blue shirt and blue-and-red-patterned tie and listened to the sustained applause of the spectators as the committee chairman,

Senator Sam J. Ervin Jr., strode into the room, he must have sensed he was on less than friendly ground.

The committee has clashed with the President over his refusal to provide tapes and documents that it considers relevant to its inquiry. Yesterday it issued subpoenas for them, and the crowd obviously was siding with the white-haired North Carolina Democrat in his struggle with the White House.

By late afternoon, Mr. Ehrlichman was tangling with Senator Ervin.

Mr. Ehrlichman had contended earlier that the President had the constitutional authority to permit the burglary of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist's office by White House investigators to protect the national security.

Concept Challenged

Senator Ervin, who is regarded as the foremost Senate authority on the Constitution, had been waiting for hours to challenge that concept.

"Is it your opinion now that the President can authorize burglaries?" Senator Ervin asked.

Mr. Ehrlichman cited a statute that he said permitted the President to act to protect national security against foreign intelligence activities.

"The foreign intelligence activities has nothing to do with the opinion of Ellsberg's psychiatrist about his intellectual or emotional or psychological state," Senator Ervin declared.

"How do you know that?" Mr. Ehrlichman asked.

"Because I can understand the English language," Mr. Ervin replied sharply. "It's my mother tongue."

The crowd liked that. In their eyes, Mr. Ehrlichman had lost another round.

In another part of town, the former White House associate discussed the other John Ehrlichman, the one the crowd did not see.

"He had a nice sense of family about his Domestic Council," the friend said. "He taken them up to Camp David on weekends when the President wasn't there."

Then he added: "He's the kind of guy who takes his family backpacking in the Washington woods. Can you imagine that?"

Maybe tomorrow, that John Ehrlichman will be on the witness stand.



The New York Times/George Tames

John D. Ehrlichman, former Presidential adviser, studying his notes outside the Caucus Room of the Old Senate Office Building before the afternoon session of yesterday's Watergate hearings got under way. The dome of the Capitol is in the background.