

'Hoover Should Have Been Fired'

Washington

President Nixon should have dismissed J. Edgar Hoover as director of the FBI early in his presidency, John D. Ehrlichman asserted yesterday.

Ehrlichman, the President's former chief domestic affairs adviser, told the Senate Watergate Committee that it was Hoover's refusal to investigate Daniel Ellsberg thoroughly that led White House agents to break into the office of Ellsberg's psychiatrist.

"I think in retrospect the administration would have been far better off if Mr. Hoover had been retired well before the episode," Ehrlichman said.

"Many of the problems we encountered were because of Mr. Hoover's fixed views. He was alert, he was sincere, he was patriotic but he was certainly fixed in his views and it made "operations very, very difficult."

Ehrlichman insisted that Hoover, who died in May, 1972, had declined to pursue the Ellsberg investigation actively because of the director's friendship with Louis Marx, the toy manufacturer, who is Ellsberg's father-in-law.

PAPERS

Ellsberg was alleged to have stolen the Pentagon Papers and to have delivered the secret history of the

Indochina war to the New York Times.

The publication of portions of the material by the Times in June, 1971, was said by Ehrlichman to have concerned the White House gravely.

Around Labor Day that year, the Beverly Hills, Calif., office of Dr. Lewis Fielding, once Ellsberg's psychiatrist, was broken into, allegedly by a team led by E. Howard Hunt Jr. and G. Gordon Liddy, two men who were later convicted in the Watergate conspiracy.

Ehrlichman has acknowledged that at the time Hunt and Liddy were working for a special White House intelligence unit, known as the "plumbers," because their assignment was to prevent leaks of information to the news media.

BACKGROUND

The plumbers unit was assigned to the Ellsberg investigation, according to Ehrlichman, after Hoover not only refused to have Marx interviewed by FBI agents but also tried to demote a top bureau official who tried to arrange such an interview.

That official, Charles D. Brennan, was an assistant director of the bureau in charge of the domestic intelligence division.

Brenann, who had served 23 years with the FBI, was reassigned in September,

1971, to be the inspector in charge of the bureau's special investigations office. A year later, he was made the agent in charge of the Alexandria, Va., field office, where he now serves.

Brennan refused to comment on Ehrlichman's assertions yesterday, saying that he would tell his version only to the Senate committee.

LETTER

Senator Lowell P. Weicker Jr. tried to discredit Ehrlichman's contention that the FBI was lax on the Ellsberg investigation by producing a letter from Hoover to Egil Krogh Jr., Ehrlichman's assistant, who was in charge of the plumbers unit.

In the letter, dated Aug. 3, 1971, Hoover noted that, at the President's instructions, he was forwarding to Krogh bureau files on 17 persons connected with the Ellsberg case, including the records of five FBI interviews.

Ehrlichman said Hoover's letter, implying a thorough FBI investigation was merely the "well-known bureaucratic device of papering the file."

QUESTIONS

Senator Herman E. Talmadge (Dem.-Ga.), interested in Ehrlichman's suggestion that Hoover could countermand an order from the White House, asked Ehrlichman:

"You are not saying that the President of the United States was helpless in trying to get the cooperation of the FBI, are you?"

Ehrlichman ducked the direct question and replied that John N. Mitchell, then attorney general, "did not think at the time he could force the director to an acceleration of the bureau effort on this subject without a total rupture with the director."

Ehrlichman said that "everyone who knew of the director knew of his loyalty to his close friends."

New York Times