

The 'Decent Man' Picked To Verify Tape Summary

Washington

John Cornelius Stennis, named by the President last night to verify his summary of the Watergate tapes, is a silver-haired grandee of the U.S. Senate who has experience investigating national scandals.

Stennis, 72, who is recovering from a near-fatal bullet wound suffered in a hold-up in front of his home, was tapped three years ago for a job nobody wanted — to chair the inquiry into whether the Senate should censure a fellow senator, the late Thomas Dodd (Dem-Conn., accused of converting campaign funds into personal use.

Described by his colleagues as "fair," "honest," and "a very decent guy," the Mississippi veteran of 25 years in the Senate went out of his way to give Dodd every chance to defend himself. More important than Dodd's censure, Stennis' inquiry gave birth to a new code of ethics for senators'

financial holdings and outside interests.

In his statement announcing his compromise plan for the tape recordings, which contain his Watergate conversations with key aides, President Nixon called Stennis "a distinguished man, highly respected by all elements in American life for his integrity, his fairness and his patriotism..."

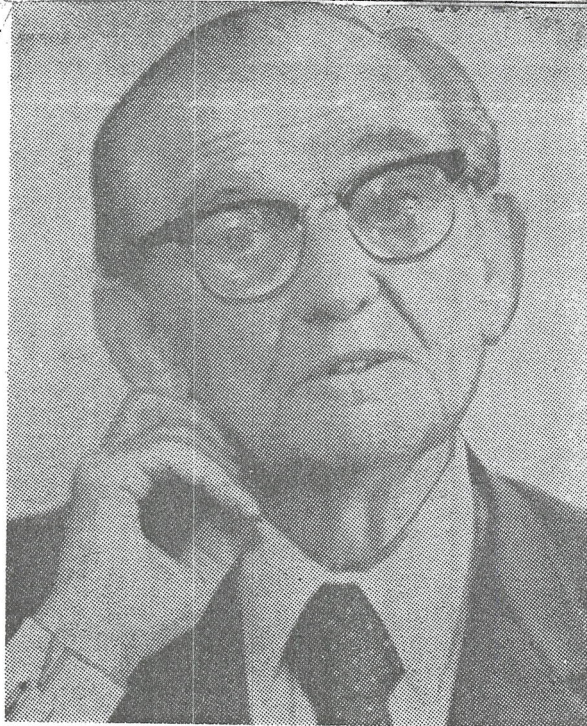
It will be Stennis' task, Mr. Nixon declared, "to satisfy himself that the statement prepared by me ... does indeed include fairly and accurately anything on the tapes that might be regarded as related to Watergate..."

In a statement issued after learning about Mr. Nixon's plan, Stennis declared: "If I am called on to listen to the tapes and certify as to their content, I will consider it a call to duty and render the best service I can." He said he hadn't perfected a "plan of operation" to carry out his task "and therefore cannot elaborate further on it now."

The courtly senator was wounded January 30 and underwent six hours of surgery. He recovered despite a worsening in his condition during early February and resumed his Senate duties September 5. Three youths were charged with attempting to kill him.

One has been sentenced to 15 years in prison, another has pleaded guilty and the third is awaiting trial.

Associated Press



AP Wirephotos

SENATOR JOHN C. STENNIS (DEM-MISS.)
Respected by colleagues, experienced investigator