

Tom Braden

Gen. Haig Deserves A Hearing

Gen. Alexander Haig has no desire to get into a personal controversy with former Atty. Gen. Elliot Richardson about events leading up to the Saturday night massacre, but if Haig is called to testify before the Senate, he will tell a surprisingly detailed story.

As Haig remembers events, the President had determined to compromise on the tapes and had also determined to fire special prosecutor Archibald Cox. Those two objectives having been set, it was Haig's job—with the help of presidential lawyers Charles Wright, Fred Buzhardt and Leonard Garment—to figure out a way to achieve them.

Thus the Stennis compromise, on which Atty. Gen. Elliot Richardson was consulted and to which he agreed. But then, as Haig remembers, during the Friday morning meeting at the White House on the day before the massacre, Richardson suggested that instead of firing Cox the President should order him not to ask for any more White House documents.

Haig is clear about this because it represented a new idea. Since it was an idea the President had not considered, he felt duty bound to clear it with him. So he went in and asked Mr. Nixon about it and Mr. Nixon said, in effect, "All right."

Haig got the impression that Richardson wanted to avoid firing Cox. If the order to cease and desist were tacked onto the Stennis compromise, Cox might resign; whereas if the President fired him, Cox might argue in court—as he had been arguing in private—that he could not be fired except for the "gross impropriety" spelled out in the regulations under which he took his job.

In any event, the plan was now changed to encompass the cease and desist order. That evening at about 6, Richardson called to say he had thought better of his idea. Haig remembers telling him that it was now too late to change, that Sens. Sam Ervin (D-N.C.) and Howard Baker (R-Tenn.) of the Watergate committee were on board. In that conversation, he thought he persuaded the Attorney General to stay aboard, too.

But two hours later he received a call from presidential aide Bryce Harlow. Harlow had shown Richardson a copy of the President's statement to be released the next day. According to Harlow, Richardson was upset.

So Haig telephoned Richardson at his home, reminding him that the order to Cox had been his idea. Richard-



Alexander Haig

son replied that he thought the President's language had been unnecessarily peremptory. But it had been a tough day; he was home now, had had a drink and felt better.

So Haig went to bed thinking that all was on the tracks. Instead, on the next morning he learned on the radio that Cox had called a press conference. Again he telephoned Richardson. It didn't seem to him, he remembers saying, that there was much chance of a resignation coming out of a Cox press conference; that it was more likely

that Cox intended to fight. Richardson agreed.

It was not until later that Haig learned that Richardson had spent most of the previous evening with Cox. He wonders whether they coordinated their plans.

That's what Haig will say if he is forced to testify, and the testimony will contradict Richardson.

Which man is to be believed?

So far Richardson has had the best of the argument. In the public mind and in the press, he was already Mr.



Drawings by Lucille Carter

Elliot Richardson

Clean, and his resignation stamped him as a man who would go to the wall for principle.

But Alexander Haig has served his country as long as Richardson and, it may be argued, just as well.

During the Cuban missile crisis, he worked with Robert Kennedy. In the White House, he worked with Henry Kissinger. He taught at West Point and commanded a battalion in Vietnam. He deserves a hearing and the Senate ought to give it to him.