

NOW, OPERATION RICHARDSON?

Perhaps the most peculiar element in Richard Nixon's Operation Candor is what seems a coordinated effort to undermine the reputation of former Attorney General Elliot L. Richardson—a man whose administrative ability and towering rectitude Mr. Nixon had turned to his own advantage for years. The normally circumspect Richardson himself said last week that he seems to be the victim of a White House rumor campaign. "I think there is an impulse to do it," Richardson told NEWSWEEK's Tom Joyce. "There are people close to the President who feel I let him down by resigning."

The campaign against Richardson—if that is what it is—began with the President's suggestion to two Congressional groups that the A.G. had lied about his role in the abortive White House compromise over the Watergate tapes. The word "lie" later became inoperative, but the suggestion remained that Richardson

had somehow gone along in private with an arrangement he later repudiated in public. And last week a White House aide's comments about Richardson's role were taken as a hint that part of his problem was alcohol—a reminder of two incidents, in 1939 and 1951, when Richardson mixed drinking with driving.

As Richardson recalls it, he agreed to that part of the tapes compromise that would have had Sen. John C. Stennis authenticate White House summaries of the Watergate tapes. But, he says, he never went along with the President's further proposal that special Watergate prosecutor Archibald Cox should agree not to ask for any other Presidential documents or material. Indeed, Richardson insists that he resigned over that issue and over a letter from Mr. Nixon ordering him to make Cox toe the line.

White House chief of staff Alexander M. Haig Jr. called Richardson on Oct. 19 to apologize for what the A.G. had complained was shabby treatment. Richardson recalls that he told Haig not to worry, that he'd had a drink and felt better. "Somehow," says Richardson, "this got twisted around to suggest I had a drinking problem . . . I don't know who did it." Richardson also says Haig told him of trying to talk Mr. Nixon out of tying Cox's hands, but Haig maintains that Richardson's recollection of the whole affair is somewhat inaccurate. Just who is telling the truth may emerge soon when both men are asked to tell their stories in detail before the Senate Judiciary Committee—with possible perjury charges in store for the loser.



AP

Richardson: Target for today?

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