

The Hottest Briefcase in

Washington

Surrounded by police and press fanfare, the famous brown satchel finally traveled up to Capitol Hill yesterday, where House impeachment investigators will finally learn what the Watergate grand jury said about President Nixon.

The briefcase left the federal courthouse in the firm grip of John Doar, chief counsel for the House Judiciary Committee's impeachment inquiry.

What would have been a

routine transaction took on the trappings of a celebrated event — police guards, a swarm of cameramen and reporters, the gawking spectators — because the satchel's contents could have historic consequences. They are the grand jury's compilation of evidence on President Nixon and the so-called Watergate coverup — the central event under scrutiny by the House committee.

Judge John Sirica, one of the few people outside the grand jury who has actually

seen what's inside the briefcase, kept it in his office safe for the past month while Watergate defense lawyers unsuccessfully argued against its delivery to the House investigators.

When the satchel was safely transferred from the judiciary branch to the legislative branch, Sirica announced to reporters: "As far as the court is concerned, the transaction is completed."

The move was made 25 days after the grand jury

concluded a 21-month investigation of the Watergate scandal by indicting seven former White House aides or top officials in the 1972 Nixon re-election campaign. The grand jury also handed up the briefcase of evidence and a two-page report which it had concluded should be considered by the impeachment inquiry.

Delivery of the documents had been delayed since March 1 while attorneys for two of those indicted sought to block release of the material on grounds that it might

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prejudice the eventual trial of their clients. The U.S. Court of Appeals last week rejected these arguments by attorneys for former White House chief of staff H. R. Haldeman and his aide, Gordon Strachan.

Doar and the Judiciary committee's minority counsel, Albert Jenner, arrived at the judge's chambers soon after 9:30 a.m. yesterday, but it was more than two hours later when they left with the briefcase.

In the privacy of an adjoining jury room, Sirica lis-

tened first to Doar as he read a letter from Judiciary chairman Peter Rodino (Dem-N.J.), authorizing the two men to accept the package.

Then the three men unlocked the dark brown satchel and spent two hours going over all of its contents, just to make sure everything was still there.

"All of the time," the judge said afterwards, "was spent checking very carefully all the items that were in the briefcase when it was turned over to me by the

foreman of the grand jury on March 1. We have a receipt for all of the items."

The limited public discussion of the satchel's contents indicated it includes an index of Watergate-related events plus back-up testimony and documents, all pertinent to the question of whether President Nixon should be impeached, in the grand jury's judgment. Sitting in on the inventory were Peter Kreindler, an attorney from the special Watergate prosecutor's office and the judge's two law clerks.

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