

Nixon Relives The Hiss Case

Washington

Like a dinosaur trapped in some weird time machine, the name of Alger Hiss pops up again and again in the transcripts of President Nixon's private Watergate conversations.

The former State Department official, convicted in 1950 of lying to a federal grand jury about leaking secret government documents, may have been relegated to the history books as far as most people are concerned. But to Richard Nixon, who won national recognition during the congressional investigation of Hiss, his quarry is still very real.

According to the Watergate transcripts, Mr. Nixon occasionally relives the Hiss battle 25 years later, regaling his young aides with all the details and drawing analogies to Watergate.

On Feb. 28, 1973, as he consulted with John W. Dean III about the Senate Watergate committee's forthcoming hearings, Mr. Nixon suddenly reminisced about the Hiss investigation. The President suggested that Dean "Go back and read Chapter I of 'Six Crises,'" his book on his up-and-down political career, for further Hiss details.

Reflecting further on the Hiss case in the same conversation, Mr. Nixon compared his detective work



ALGER HISS
Early Nixon probe . . .

with that of the Watergate committee.

"I conducted that investigation with two (characterization omitted) committee investigators — that stupid," he said. "They were tenacious. We got it done."

"Then we worked that thing. We then got the evidence, we got the typewriter, we got the pumpkin papers. We got all of that ourselves. The FBI did not cooperate. The Justice Department did not cooperate. The (Truman) administration would not answer questions . . ."

Mr. Nixon held up the Hiss hearings as an example later in the same meeting as

he talked of the need to convince Senator Howard H. Baker Jr. (Rep-Tenn.), the Watergate committee's vice chairman, that the Watergate hearings should be run like a court of law.

"Tell them that is the way Nixon ran the Hiss case," the President said. "Some innuendo came out, but there was (adjective deleted) little hearsay. We really just got the facts, and tore them to pieces. Say 'no hearsay' and 'no innuendo' to Baker."

The same point was made three weeks later as Mr. Nixon urged his top lieutenants to appeal to Senator Sam J. Ervin Jr. (Dem-N.C.) the Watergate committee chairman, to follow formal rules of evidence. "Talk about the Hiss case," the President instructed.

Hiss surfaced again on March 27, 1973, during a session about Jeb S. Magruder's obtaining immunity and turning government witness. Mr. Nixon reflected on the hazards that informers encounter.

"Hiss was destroyed because he lied," the President said. "(Whittaker) Chambers was destroyed because he was an informer," he added, referring to the witness who testified that Hiss had passed secret government documents to the Communist underground.



WHITTAKER CHAMBERS
... compared to Watergate

Hiss was cited again on April 16, 1973, during a final discussion about Dean's resignation as White House counsel and his future Watergate testimony.

Dean said he was "incapable" of lying about what he knew, and the President responded:

"Thank God! Don't ever do it, John. Tell the truth. That is the thing I have told everybody around here. (expletive omitted), tell the truth! . . ."

"That (characterization omitted) Hiss would be free today if he hadn't lied. If he had said, 'Yes, I knew Chambers and as a young man, I was involved with some Communist activities, but I broke it off a number of years ago,' and Chambers would have dropped it."

"If you are going to lie, you go to jail for the lie, rather than the crime. So, believe me, don't ever lie."

Dean's response: "The truth always emerges. It always does."

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