

Nixon Reportedly Called Day He

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WASHINGTON, May 22 — President Nixon reportedly described March 21, 1973—the day he says that he first learned of the Watergate cover-up—as an “uneventful day.”

The President's characterization, according to members of the House Judiciary Committee, came at the beginning of a 15-minute Dictabelt recording that Mr. Nixon made the night of March 21 in which he recalled the events of that day.

The committee heard the Dictabelt, along with the tapes of two of the President's meetings with top advisers, in a closed session today.

The committee members said that, after noting at the outset of his personal recollection that it had been an “uneventful day” Mr. Nixon added that he had met with John W. Dean 3d, then a White House counsel, and that Mr. Dean had told him that there was a “cancer” growing on the Presidency that had to be removed.

The President then proceeded to dictate, in what one Representative described as a “sleepy voice,” an account of what Mr. Dean had told him.

Committee members reacted with surprise — and in some cases, glee—at the revelation that Mr. Nixon did not feel anything out of the ordinary had happened on what he now says was the critical day on which he first heard of a cover-up by his aides.

John F. Siberling, an Ohio Democrat, said with a deadpan expression, “It was an uneventful day except for the fact my house collapsed and all of my family was hit.”

And Henry P. Smith 3d, a Republican from upstate New York, said that there was irony in the President's characterization, “because it may turn out to be one of the most eventful days in his life.”

The White House did not include a transcript of the Dictabelt recording in those that it made public last month. The committee presumably obtained the recording from the Watergate grand jury.

Yesterday, the committee heard the President's morning meeting on March 21 with Mr. Dean and H. R. Haldeman, then the President's chief of staff,

transcript of which has been made public. Mr. Dean laid out the Watergate case in detail for the President, and the three

men spent some time discussing such matters as hush money and executive clemency for the convicted burglars.

Committee members cautioned today against drawing conclusions from the lack of on the Dictabelt. “How else do you talk to yourself?” asked Representative Charles B. Rangel, Democrat of Manhattan.

But some members said that there could be a connection between the President's dispassionate tone and the possibility, raised yesterday, that Mr. Nixon may have known of White House involvement in the alleged cover-up before March 21.

Representative Peter W. Rodino Jr., Democrat of New Jersey, suggested yesterday that the key conversation may

have occurred on March 17, 1973, and that the pertinent part of the discussion may have been omitted from the edited transcript put out by the White House.

The two other tapes heard by the committee today were the following:

¶The President's 40-minute meeting in the late afternoon of March 21 with Mr. Dean, Mr. Haldeman and John D. Ehrlichman, then the President's domestic counselor.

The President's meeting of nearly two hours on March 22 with the same three men and John N. Mitchell, the former Attorney General and campaign director.

The edited transcripts of both of these meetings have been published.

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Learned of Cover-up 'Uneventful'

At the afternoon meeting March 21, the transcript shows, the President and his aides continued to discuss the question of hush-money payments, and the President suggested that some trusted aides might have to step forward and take the blame for the Watergate burglary to protect others.

What Was Not Said

The March 22 meeting seemed more significant because of what was not said than because of what was said.

It was apparently the first time that the President had talked with Mr. Mitchell since he had been told that Mr. Mitchell had authorized the Watergate burglary, yet Mr. Nixon never confronted him with the allegation.

It was at the March 22 meet-

ing that Mr. Nixon suggested that Mr. Dean go to Camp David to write a report on Watergate.

The President said at a news conference the previous August that Mr. Dean had conducted a complete investigation that exonerated everyone in the White House from complicity in the burglary, and the White House referred for months afterward to Mr. Dean's report, although none had ever been written.

During the discussion March 22, the alternative of telling the full truth about the case was suggested, and there was the following exchange:

Mr. Nixon: Do you think we want to go this route now? Let it hang out, so to speak?

Mr. Dean: Well, it isn't really that—

Mr. Haldeman: It's a limited hang out.

Mr. Dean: It's a limited hang out. It's not an absolute hang out.

Mr. Nixon: But some of the questions look big, hanging out publicly or privately.

Mr. Dean: What it is doing, Mr. President, is getting you up above and away from it. That is the most important thing.

Committee members said that the tape of the March 21 afternoon meeting was the first they had heard that was of poor quality. Mr. Rodino said that he could not explain the poor quality and amount of static on the tape.