



Shabby Record Of a Nixon Lawyer

Joseph Kraft

SO MUCH White House dirty work has been revealed by Watergate that it seems churlish to single out individuals. But a special exception is due in the case of the President's counsel, J. Fred Buzhardt.

Buzhardt has repeatedly been a central figure in Watergate matters. He still plays a leading role, and his performance expresses the thuggish quality that continues to dominate the Nixon White House even in its approach to the impeachment proceedings.

A good starting point is a press conference given by Buzhardt on May 17. The second question concerned White House tapes and other materials subpoenaed by the House Judiciary Committee. Buzhardt said: "On the last subpoena, it was met in its entirety."

A reporter asked: "Did you really say, as my notes say, the last subpoena was met in its entirety, a subpoena for all tapes, all transcripts, all written memoranda concerning 42 specific conversations? Do you say that edited transcripts of 31 of them means 'in its entirety'?"

Buzhardt replied: "They reveal the substantive material that was subpoenaed. That is what I said."

★ ★ ★

FIVE WEEKS earlier, on April 10, Buzhardt was testifying before the Senate Watergate committee. The subject was a \$100,000 campaign contribution paid in cash to Bebe Rebozo, the President's friend, by associates of Howard Hughes. Rebozo and the President had claimed the money had been held in a Florida bank for three years and then returned to Hughes. Newspaper stories, which ap-

peared just before Buzhardt took the stand, indicated the money might have been doled out to members of the President's family.

Buzhardt acknowledged he had seen the newspaper stories and discussed them. The assistant committee counsel, Terry Lenzner, asked with whom Buzhardt had discussed the stories. Buzhardt said: "I do not recall." Then there took place this exchange:

Lenzner: "We are talking about the beginning of this week."

Buzhardt: "Yes."

Lenzner: "And you do not have any recollection today, Wednesday, who you may have discussed that with Sunday or Monday?"

Buzhardt: "No, probably someone in the office."

It later developed that Buzhardt had in fact discussed the matter with Alexander Haig, the White House chief of staff, and with Edward Nixon and with the lawyer of Donald Nixon.

★ ★ ★

BEFORE THAT, one of the Watergate prosecutors claimed that Buzhardt would transfer papers from one White House file to another to block access by the prosecutor.

Another told of an occasion on which an investigator found a paper whose existence Buzhardt had denied.

To be sure, there is nothing positively criminal in this record. But there is a lot — misrepresentation, corner-cutting, deceit, obstruction. The eyes have to be rubbed and the ear pounded to realize that Buzhardt represents the counsel for the President of the U.S.