

The Nixon Briefings During Watergate Era

Washington

Alexander P. Butterfield described in detail yesterday the White House organization during the Watergate era, giving House Judiciary Committee members the impression that nearly all information flowed to the President through H. R. Haldeman.

Butterfield, the man who first disclosed the existence

of the White House taping system, was the first witness at the impeachment inquiry.

Testifying behind closed doors, Butterfield was asked how information got to the President and who had access to him.

Committee members said the purpose of the questioning was to determine wheth-

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er the President could have remained unaware of the involvement of administration and campaign aides in the Watergate coverup.

Representative Hamilton Fish Jr. (Rep-N.Y.) said Butterfield pictured Mr. Nixon as a man who was "communicating with a small group of persons. The access was not there."

But, Fish added, the President also was portrayed as a man who paid an enormous amount of attention to detail, sometimes of a very minor nature.

As an example, Fish said Butterfield told the committee that Mr. Nixon concerned himself with such matters as the table settings and entertainment for White House dinners.

Fish and other committee members said Butterfield testified that Haldeman, White House staff chief until he resigned on April 30, 1973, saw the President far more than any other member of his staff and largely controlled the access others had to Mr. Nixon.

"Butterfield described how paper work goes in and

out," said Representative George E. Danielson (Dem-Calif.). "This thing was so structured that the President was aware of everything that went on."

Representative Edward Mezvinsky (Dem-Iowa) said Butterfield's testimony helped him understand "the awareness of the President. How closely the President watched the activities in the Oval Office."

Representative Trent Lott (Rep-Miss.), said, "I didn't find anything helpful at all. He talked about the physical layout of the office — the chain of command... I got the impression of very limited access to the President."

"I was surprised to learn that (John D.) Ehrlichman did not have continuous running access to the office."

Butterfield, who left the White House in March, 1973, to become head of the Federal Aviation Administration, had a variety of responsibilities on the Nixon staff.

He told the Senate Watergate Committee last year that he was in charge of administration, was responsible for the collection of presidential papers, was in charge of security and served as secretary to the Cabinet.

"Finally, I was in charge of the smooth running of the President's official day, both in Washington, D.C., and at the Western White House in San Clemente," he told the Watergate committee.

Associated Press



AP Wirephoto

EX-AIDE ALEXANDER BUTTERFIELD
First witness at the House impeachment inquiry