

The Tape Peril Nixon

Washington

Even with Watergate falling all around him in the spring of 1973, former President Nixon little realized that his White House taping system was a Frankenstein monster about to destroy him.

In fact, he seemed to think that when all was said and done, it would work to his advantage.

The prosecution introduced at the Watergate cover-up trial yesterday the transcript of a recording of a telephone conversation between Mr. Nixon and his top aide, H. R. Haldeman, from 6:57 to 7:14 p.m. on April 25, 1973.

It was at this time that then-White House counsel John W. Dean III had begun to tell his story to government prosecutors. And, as

he told Haldeman, Mr. Nixon knew that "whatever John Dean knows it is going to come out, Bob."

Still it never occurred to the former president that transcripts of the taped conversations would shortly be made public and, above all else, would serve to force him from office.

Here's the way one section of the 1973 transcript goes:

President: "Incidentally, I

always wondered about that taping equipment, but I'm damn glad we have it, aren't you?"

Haldeman: "Yes, sir . . . Just one thing I went through today, it was very helpful."

President: "Yes. It's helpful because while it has some things in there that . . . we prefer we wouldn't have said . . . on the other hand, we also have some

Never Realized

things in there . . . that I've said . . . that were pretty good."

Haldeman: "That's right."

Referring to a taped discussion about payment of \$1 million to E. Howard Hunt Jr. and other Watergate conspirators, Mr. Nixon ticked off several of his remarks at that time that he now deemed "pretty good."

He recalled that he had

said "this is wrong" and "blackmail" and "how much is this thing gonna cost . . . and so forth and so on."

On the other hand, he also recalled that he had said:

"Let's, ah, we could get that, but how would you handle it."

And Mr. Nixon then said to Haldeman: "I don't know how you analyze it . . . I

don't know."

The last remark also appeared to give Haldeman pause. The transcript reads:

Haldeman: "I, I, I really don't think it, it would be, if if all gets, if that comes out, it's it's another hard thing to explain but I think it's explainable."

President: "Right."

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