

Ehrlichman's Case for Tape 'Bonfire'

Washington

Former White House aide John Ehrlichman said yesterday that "as a matter of historical perspective you can make a pretty good argument that a bonfire on the South lawn (of the White House) wouldn't have been a bad idea" after the public disclosure of the White House taping system.

Ehrlichman, convicted Wednesday of conspiring to obstruct the investigation of the break-in at the Democratic National Committee headquarters in the Watergate complex, said he believes the 20 hours of conversations made public provide a "highly warped view of what went on."

Interviewed on the NBC "Today" program, Ehrlichman said the tapes have been "helpful in elucidating what really happened," provided that listeners bear in mind that they're hearing only "about a tenth of one per cent of all the tapes. My argument is that if you're going to hear that much, you ought to hear them all. Then you'll get some balance in this thing."

Ehrlichman said he learned of the taping system about the time that it was disclosed to the Senate Watergate committee in July, 1973, after he had left the White House.

He said he has never discussed the taping system with former President Nixon, but he thinks that Mr.

Nixon had the tapes made "in part out of a distrust of some of the people who were working for him, and also, I think, out of a genuine desire to have a historical record."

Ehrlichman said a major element in the appeal that he plans will be the decision by the presiding U.S. district judge at the trial, John Sirica, that the former President would not be required to give a deposition.

He said his defense needed testimony from the President to describe conversations that "would have been important in providing links between the tapes" but were held in offices where the system did not operate.

For example, he said, it would be important for a jury to understand that much of what he is heard telling Mr. Nixon in April, 1973, is "not my personal knowledge . . . but what I'm developing in an investigation" into Watergate events that the former President had ordered him to begin near the end of March.

He also said that if he had had "any understanding that everything was a matter of record" in his conversations, he would, instead of merely listening to what Mr. Nixon said, have made statements such as: "Well, the moral imperative here, Mr. President, requires that you do this and not this."

Associated Press