

SF Chronicle MAR 26 1975

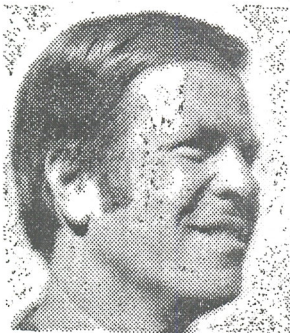
Terrence O'Flaherty

Views TV

In Sickness and in Health

ROBERT HALDEMAN is not now — nor has he ever been — in love with Richard Nixon

That's what he told Mike Wallace anyway, thereby coming clean on the only charge that WASN'T levelled at the pair which arrogance brought together and public opinion split asunder.



Robert Haldeman

In the first of two interviews with the convicted White House aide on CBS's "60 Minutes," Wallace thrashed about as if wrestling with his own puzzlement over the man's refusal to be humbled. Haldeman, on the other hand, seemed content to smile a lot and flash a splendid row of teeth few people had ever seen before.

Smiling is a new thing for Haldeman — but who wouldn't smile? He's being paid a reported \$25,000 by the CBS network for the use of his teeth and the opportunity to make his new personality-boy pitch to the nation he served so poorly. His kraut-cut has been replaced by a new Robert Wagner hair-do that makes him look more human but he still comes across as a very hard cookie.

★ ★ ★

HALDEMAN admitted that he was not close to Mrs. Nixon. "I had no reason to be. I wasn't close to Julie or Tricia either. And on a personal, non-business basis I was not close to Richard Nixon."

"But you loved Richard Nixon," allowed Wallace.

"No I didn't — and don't," said Haldeman immediately.

"I'm not sure I understand," said Wallace.

"I didn't love him. I have enormous respect for Richard Nixon. I have and had a very close and very strong working relation with him, but I did not worship him — and do not — nor did I love him in any possible definition of the word that I could apply."

Haldeman told Wallace that Nixon was "weird" and he enlarged on that on the program: "He was weird in the sense of inexplicable, strange, hard to understand . . . He's a very paradoxical man. His complexities are not surface complexities . . . If I can't get an answer to the riddle, I don't know how anybody else can because there's no one else with as much raw data to draw on," Haldeman said with a smile.

★ ★ ★

"I CAN tell you this. The tapes were put into the White House at Richard Nixon's orders . . . He wanted them for the purpose of recording and preserving for his personal use all that was said by him and by others . . ."

"Why didn't you burn the tapes?"

"The point came up only once with me. This was before anyone knew that the tapes existed except the technicians, Mr. Nixon and me . . . The President raised the question and I advised no."

"That was a mistake, wasn't it, Mr. Haldeman?" asked Wallace.

"Yes, sir!" said Haldeman.

Wallace's conclusion:

"In conversations both on camera and off, he continues to blame the press for much of the predicament in which he now finds himself. We came away from two days with Haldeman persuaded that he has genuinely convinced himself that he is the victim of a monumental miscarriage of justice. He pleads guilty to one charge only — bad management."

If CBS ever needs a replacement for "Tony Orlando And Dawn," I think they've got one in the house right now.

★ ★ ★

OF SPECIAL Interest Tonight: "The Easter Promise" — a continuation of the family story begun with "House Without A Christmas Tree" (8:30 p.m., Channel 5).