

Haldeman on

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Nixon's drinking

By Marianne Means
Examiner Correspondent

WASHINGTON— H.R. Haldeman, Nixon's chief ally, has finally confirmed our worst suspicion about the Watergate days: there were times when the former president was incapable of fully functioning.

In his newly published memoirs, Haldeman indicated that Nixon sometimes was so knocked out that he could not have responded swiftly and intelligently to a national or international crises. During these periods, this country was vulnerable to a sudden enemy attack. Haldeman doesn't say it that badly. He tried to tell a version of events that might serve as the basis of his rehabilitation. But in seeking to portray the Watergate saga in the best light possible, he has revealed much about both Nixon and himself.

Watergate reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, in their book "Final Days" depict Nixon as drinking heavily in the final phase of the scandal. Haldeman set out to debunk this by insisting that Nixon had no problem handling liquor. The problem he did have, however, was worse.

Haldeman described behavior that he says he saw often, in which Nixon would be thick-tongued and slurry and look groggy. He said this condition wasn't the result of too much drinking. Instead, Haldeman says Nixon was in the habit of taking a sleeping pill before going to bed and also a bottle of beer. This combination, coupled with exhaustion, produced the appearance of intoxication.
