

Alexander Butterfield, interviewed by Mike Wallace

Wallace [introduction]: Last Tuesday [5 Oct] Democratic vice presidential candidate Walter Mondale charged President Ford with - quote - "A fundamental failure to heed the lessons of Watergate." Well, one of the most prominent Watergate figures was Alexander Butterfield, except he was the man who told the truth about the Nixon White House tapes, and the story he told triggered Mr. Nixon's fall. Alex Butterfield believes it has also triggered the lingering unemployment of Alex Butterfield. It is doubtful that Gerald Ford would be where he is today if Alexander Butterfield had not said what he did to the Senate Watergate committee that July day in 1973 [16 Jul].

[At this point a film clip was inserted, showing Butterfield testifying before Ervin committee.]

Wallace: Alex Butterfield had come to the White House after a distinguished 20-year career in the Air Force. He served Richard Nixon as a top assistant under Bob Haldeman. His office was just outside the President's door during his first term. As a reward for loyalty and effective work Mr. Nixon appointed Butterfield to head the FAA, the Federal Aviation Administration, at the beginning of his second term; salary, forty-two thousand five hundred dollars. He served there for eighteen months, first under Nixon, then under Gerald Ford. But suddenly President Ford asked for his resignation. That was a year and a half ago. Though he's out of a job, he's hardly destitute. He gets a government pension of fourteen hundred dollars a month, based on twenty-seven years of Federal service. But he wants to go back to work.

Wallace [to Butterfield]: You left the top job at the FAA in March of 1975, a year and a half ago. What have you been doing since?

Butterfield: Since that time - almost every day - I've been job-hunting.

Wallace: How many letters have you sent out, looking^{for}/work? Do you have any idea?

Butterfield: Oh yes, I know exactly how many. I've sent 241 letters out.

Wallace: To what kinds of people, what kinds of firms?

Butterfield: Well, to companies, corporations, I guess most of those that are listed in the Fortune 500.

Wallace: What do people say, these firms to whom you write: do they say they don't have a job, or they're not interested, or - what do you hear from them?

Butterfield: They say, mostly, that they're sorry, they're impressed by my resumé but that there is nothing at the moment at the appropriate level. That's a good phrase.

I --

Wallace: It's a good phrase, but it's a turn-off.

Butterfield: Oh sure, it's a turn-off.

[Wallace and Butterfield discuss various former high government officials, several of them personal friends of Butterfield's, and their initial encouraging reaction when he applied for a job. Those named are then-Secretary of the Treasury George Shultz, now head of a large engineering firm on the west coast; David Packard, Deputy Secretary of Defense under Nixon, now back with his own big electronics firm, Hewlett-Packard; Pete Petersen, chairman of Lehmann Brothers, Secretary of Commerce in the Nixon cabinet; Robert McNamara, Pentagon; Cyrus Vance, Deputy Secretary of Defense under Lyndon Johnson, now a Wall Street lawyer. Excerpts from Wallace interviews with Petersen and Vance are shown.]

Butterfield: I'm still suspected of being "Deep Throat" by some people, which - I can't tell you how ridiculous that is; I've never even seen Woodward or Bernstein, never talked to them on the telephone, even, [they] haven't even called here to question me about some of the books they've written. The suggestions that I worked for the CIA without Mr. Nixon's knowledge, that I served two masters - I've been through all that with the news - which I did not, I had no association with the CIA. But that came along to, I think, you know, hurt a little bit. In fact we joke about it a little bit. I said to my wife that I ought to go by and see George Bush - George is a good friend of mine and he's running the CIA now, as you know - and say, Listen, George, I can't get - I'm ready to come in from the cold, you know, how about getting me five years' back pay?

Wallace [to television audience]: Why did Gerald Ford get rid of Butterfield?

Butterfield: I know enough from having talked to Haig - the intimations that Haig, General Haig gave me before he left - from the things that other people I know at the White House have told me, that this is a Nixon mandate; that this is not strange at all, that there were certain understandings when - at the transition, relayed from Nixon through Haig to Ford that certain things be done. And I don't think my dismissal was a big major case at all, but I think there was the understanding that Butterfield's got to go - in time, you know, when the time is right, Gerry, see to it that this fellow goes.

Wallace [to television audience]: General Haig refused comment and the Ford White House calls Butterfield's story total rubbish.

But just as much trouble for him as his revelations about the tapes, says Butterfield, was his testimony before the House Judiciary Committee [2 Jul 74 - see note] that nothing happened in the White House that Mr. Nixon didn't personally direct. After that, said Butterfield, some Nixon people set out to get him.

Butterfield: There was a meeting at the White House, shortly before Mr. Nixon left, at which it was decided that Butter .. field .. must .. go.

Wallace: You know that?

Butterfield: Oh yes indeed, I know that.

Wallace: Where did you get the word that there was a meeting in the White House?

Butterfield: I can't tell you who told me, but someone told me who had participated in the meeting. The people who really sort of have it in for me were those Nixon loyalists, many of whom are Ford loyalists, and I mean a tight circle, and then some people who are very much party-oriented. I think the party people thought what I did had, you know, bad results for the party.

Wallace [to television audience]: As we said, Alex Butterfield wants a job, and the business of sitting around his house all day, rusting, while many of his former White House colleagues are gainfully employed, annoys and puzzles him.

Wallace: Well, that's the question I ask myself. I find I'm somewhat surprised by it because of my qualifications. I'm fifty, pushing fifty-one, and I've done a hell of a lot of things in my lifetime, frankly.

Wallace: You really are a casualty of Watergate.

Butterfield: I suppose you could say that. But as I say - now I sound like I've got the crying towel out, and I don't want to give that impression, I don't --

Wallace: Richard Nixon apparently has had his revenge on you.

Butterfield: Oh, he's - he's batting a thousand.

Note:

Butterfield testified before House Judiciary Committee in closed session 2 Jul 74. Butterfield's testimony is released by House Judiciary Committee 24 Jul 74, the same day the Supreme Court ruled 8 to 0 that Nixon must surrender the 64 taped conversations subpoenaed by Leon Jaworski, and the day the House Judiciary Committee began its final, and public, debate on impeachment.

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