



H. R. Haldeman Diaries Collection, January 18, 1969 – April 30, 1973

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Thursday, April 1.

Calley dominated the day today. The President started out with a 9:00 meeting with Ehrlichman and me to review the general situation and his conversation on the subject last night with Connally. He feels that he can't temporize on this that he-- and that he cannot that the military advice. He makes the point that the military are not concerned really with the honor of the military service; they're concerned with the system of which they're a part. They want to prove to the liberals that they move expeditiously within the system, and if the President moves in and commutes the sentence, they're back where they started. He feels that there's not enough in it for us to fight for the military. The lawyers, on the other hand, provide no political gain for us in their argument. We do have to be for orderly process, but we've got to act on the basis of what does us the most good. He feels that maybe there's a position to be taken that an act of passion on the part of the President wouldn't be a bad thing to do at this point. He feels that we've got to move now, making the statement that the President will review this in the appeal process and will order that he be-- he, Calley, be allowed to remain in an apartment. That was his earlier thinking.

I raised the question of bringing Latimer, Calley's lawyer, out, and the President definitely doesn't want to do that. He feels that we've got to consider the political factor as primary. He feels strongly we've got to move today in some way and particularly likes the idea of letting Calley stay in his apartment rather than in the stockade or the penitentiary, and he asked for everyone to work out the options on this. The President's point is: let's see if this time there isn't a way that we can be on the side of the people for a change, instead of always doing what's cautious, proper, and efficient.

He then had a session with Henry and made the point there that we're dealing really with the bigger cause, which is the question of how can we hold enough support for a year and a half to maintain our conduct of the war. He then outlined to Henry the line he would take if he moved for a Calley commutation, which would be to outline his Quaker attitude toward war. Add Calley



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and Medina and all of the My Lai people into one bundle; cover the obsolete idea that war is a game with rules; and say that America has made it clear, or given a clear indication by this trial, that we don't condone this, but when men serve their country you cannot, during this crisis of war, follow this line unless there's a direct, clear breach of orders. He feels we've got to get it raised above this case. Make the point the war is bad, so we've got to avoid more bad wars. It's got to be dealt with not on the merits of the case; there is no reasonable doubt of his technical guilt, but there is doubt regarding the motive or whatever. It gets to the question of whether this man is a criminal who should be treated like Manson, and the answer is no. He wants to use some of the doves' own arguments and turn them against them. He asked us along these lines, to develop a game plan immediately for early moves.

The President then left for his meeting with the aerospace people regarding employment, while we put some of our plans together.

He reassembled Finch, Connally, and Ehrlichman, and me, with Ziegler in and out, and Kissinger in for a small period. At noon he made the point that if we don't move, the support we have for withdrawal from Vietnam, etcetera, will evaporate or become discouraged. We've got to keep our eye on the main ball, which is to maintain our public support. He feels that the question is, we either do something Monday or we temporize for a year or two. He thinks he can indicate that he's ordered the file out to study and that he's ordered the General to release Calley to his apartment. He then picked up the phone and called Admiral Moorer and issued the order releasing Calley from the stockade. When he hung up, he made the comment that at least a President can do something once in a while. He then said of Admiral Moorer, "That's the one place where they say "yes, sir," instead of "yes, but"" Kissinger was in and discussed Laird's reaction to the Moorer call. He was quite distressed. Laird wanted to talk to the President, the President refused the call and told Henry to take it for him. We all were out for a little while. The President reassembled Kissinger, Ehrlichman, and me at 2:45 to review the whole thing again and decided that our options were either to move now or to sit it out for a while. The idea was raised of suspending the sentence while affirming the conviction. Kissinger strongly



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recommended we wait a couple of weeks to follow a pattern of thoughtful, deliberate action. Let the doves get further out, and more of them get out on the limb on it. He felt that if we do this commutation move before the Wednesday night speech, it will release the doves from their restrictions, and thus they'll hit harder on the speech because they won't be as confused. If we do wait, we would announce now that the President will review as soon as the commanding general receives the report from the judge advocate.

The President agrees with my feeling that he can't go on-- be in the position of going on television Wednesday night without taking any action regarding Calley. The general public reaction has been stupendous, and we can't simply ignore it. We spent a great deal of time talking the whole thing over, as we have all during the day, and the question is what we really concluded. We left it up in the air for tonight, but we'll have to make a decision first thing tomorrow morning. The Republican Senators got going on their attack on the doves, and it worked extremely well. Hugh Scott and Bill Brock took the lead on it and did a very good job.

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Audio Cassette 6, Side A.
Duration: 30 seconds

We got back into the Helene Drown flap again tonight. As she was camping in the patio waiting for the President to come home. So he didn't go home instead remained stuck in his office where he had dinner with Bebe. He's asked Ehrlichman to move in again and tell Helene she's no longer welcome—which John's agreed to do and I guess will do tomorrow. The whole thing is still incredible.



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End of April 1.