

By H.R. Haldeman: 'The Ends of Nixon, Kissinger, and Crisis Reports

From the book "The Ends of Power," by H. R. Haldeman with Joseph Dillmon, to be published by Times Books. Copyright © 1978 by H. R. Haldeman and J. B. Darlow Inc.

A BRILLIANT, impulsive, witty gentleman with an engaging German accent, Henry Kissinger became a member of the White House team because Richard Nixon, in common with almost every President in history, had no love for the United States State Department. Franklin D. Roosevelt once said that dealing with the State Department is like watching an elephant become pregnant. Everything's done on a very high level, there's a lot of commotion, and it takes twenty-two months for anything to happen.

Nixon, himself intended to run foreign policy from the White House, as had Roosevelt. So he decided to install a Presidential assistant who would be chief of the National Security Council, and work directly under him in the White House.

And so a great team was born.

It is not known yet just how well Nixon and Henry worked together because two of their greatest triumphs are little known even now, and these triumphs involved two world crises as dangerous to the world as Kennedy's famous missile crisis—if not more so.

September 1970. Henry Kissinger charged into my office with a thick file under his arm. He slammed the file down on my desk. "Bob, look at this."

He opened the file and spread 8-by-10 pictures on my desk. They were air reconnaissance photos. "Well?" he asked. "Well!"

"Well, what?"

"Well, these are aerial photos. You can see that, can't you?"

"Yes."

"And the place is Cienfuegos, Cuba, isn't it?"

I'd never heard of Cienfuegos. Henry was bent over the pictures, peering at them angrily. "It's a Cuban seaport, Haldeman, and these pictures show the Cubans are building soccer fields." He straightened up. "I have to see the President now. Who's in there with him?"

I told him John Ehrlichman, Nixon's chief domestic adviser, was meeting with the President, but if it was that urgent, Henry could go right in. But for what reason? Was he going to burst into the Oval Office in the middle of an economic conference and shout, "The Cubans are building soccer fields?"

Henry stuffed the pictures back in the file and said to me, as patiently as he could, "Those soccer fields could mean war, Bob."

"Why?"

"Cubans play baseball. Russians play soccer."

And then I understood: The Soviets were back in Cuba. Soccer fields next to Cienfuegos meant one thing: The Soviets were constructing their own naval base in Cuba. When a Soviet ugra-class submarine tender arrived at Cienfuegos complete with barges equipped to handle radioactive waste, we knew the Soviets were installing a nuclear naval base in Cuba.

Ignoring the 1962 Agreement

This was a serious circumvention of the 1962 agreement between the Soviets and the United States, drawn up after the Cuban missile crisis, in which the Soviets agreed not to place nuclear missiles in Cuba in exchange for an understanding that we would not attack Cuba again.

FEBRUARY 17, 1978

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Insider's View

The Russian desire for "proximity" was based on a flaw in their technology. The United States was at that time far ahead of Russia in targeting electronics—we could pinpoint I.C.B.M. landings from half a world away. To counter this, the Soviets primarily relied upon enormous nuclear warheads that didn't need to be precisely targeted. At the same time, they reached for proximity to the United States through nuclear submarines and surface ships so that the need for precision guidance would be reduced.

But ships so far from the Soviet homeland required a support base, and Cuba, a Communist satellite, would be that base—unless Nixon stopped it.

By a self-serving literal reading of the 1962 agreement, the Soviets concluded that while they were specifically forbidden to base missiles on Cuban soil they were not expressly forbidden to base missiles from Cuba. In any case, the only way for them to find out how America would react was to go ahead and see, and that's exactly what they did.

Using the Stix missile system of rather cumbersome but extremely accurate surface-launched medium-range missiles somewhat similar to the now-obsolete American Regulus, the Soviets could reach their most important targets in preventing a maximally effective American retaliation.

Their strategy was as simple as it was brilliant. Across the Arctic reaches of North America the American Ballistic Missile Early Warning System (BMEWS) could catch any incoming missile attack early enough to allow time for a massive American retaliation. The consequences of the retaliation were unacceptable to the Russians and so the balance of terror was maintained. But like the "impregnable" Singapore and Maginot defense, BMEWS had a fatal flaw: It was only oriented to intercept an attack from the north. By maintaining the capability for a Stix-type attack resupplied from a Cuban base, the Soviets reach up behind BMEWS and within 15 minutes might be able to destroy all 21 American nuclear command headquarters which had nuclear release authority before sending their main attack over the pole.

By electronic monitoring of American military exercises in which our bases were alerted to prepare to execute a nuclear strike, the Soviets had learned which United States bases had the authority to pull the nuclear trigger

—command headquarters, such as the White House, the Pentagon, NORAD (Colorado Springs), CINCLANT (Norfolk), SAC (Omaha), and the like. If the Stix system would knock out enough of them, the resulting confusion might sufficiently delay the American retaliation to greatly reduce its effectiveness. In this United States command chaos the Soviet polar attack might even catch a good portion of our nuclear force on the ground. With the STIX capability, then, minimized retaliatory damage to the Soviet Union might well make a pre-emptive strike an acceptable possibility.

Choices That Nixon Faced

What to do? Henry and Nixon huddled with the National Security Council, State Department and military chiefs. The first option was to act exactly as Kennedy had: Make a dramatic announcement on television and confront the Soviets with a crisis of war or peace.

But Nixon was determined to go the other way, toward peace with the Soviets. So Henry saw Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin and quietly informed him that the naval base would not only destroy détente but spark an updated missile crisis. If the construction was halted, nothing more would be said.

A week passed. No word from the Russians. Kissinger made a veiled announcement in public which he knew the Soviets would understand, then got word to them again in private—and strongly—that the President would regard the construction of a nuclear naval base in Cuba as a “hostile act.”

The quiet pressure worked. On Oct. 22, Andrei Gromyko told Nixon that the 1962 understanding would be

upheld, and in November, construction of the base stopped completely.

In my first months at the White House, sensing that I would play a small role in historical events as the man closest to Nixon, I kept a log of some special events.

Entry No. 26, entitled “Chinese in Warsaw,” hints at what may have been most dangerous of all the confrontations this nation has ever faced.

The confrontation was between China and the Soviet Union.

This is my log entry:

Log 26—Chinese in Warsaw

On December 10th Kissinger burst into my office in a great state of excitement to report that we had just received word that the Chinese in Warsaw had come to our embassy indicating that they wanted to meet with us, and, more significantly, that they wanted to use the front door. This latter point is significant because any meetings with the Chinese before had been with utmost secrecy, whereas the use of the front door would indicate that the Chinese were prepared to have it known that they were meeting with us.

The world has heard of the Soviet-Chinese border skirmishes in 1969 along the Ussuri River.

What it doesn't know is that the Soviets had moved nuclear-armed divisions within two miles of the border.

United States aerial photos revealed this grim story: hundreds of Soviet nuclear warheads stacked in piles. Eighteen thousand tents for their armored forces erected overnight in nine feet of snow.

For years, the Soviets had been buttonholing United States leaders. The message was always China, China, China. The Chinese must not be allowed to build nuclear capability.

As far back as 1962, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara asked the Air Force to make a feasibility study of a surgical strike on Chinese nuclear plants.

What the United States commanders found was that at that time, they didn't have a nuclear weapon in the entire stockpile “clean” enough for a surgical strike. Our smallest weapon would have ended up causing millions of fatalities from fallout.

As far as we knew, the Soviets had no “surgical” capability either—but that fact apparently would not stop them.

In 1969 there were several overtures by the Soviets to the United States for a joint venture in the surgical strike. Nixon turned the Soviets down, but was then informed, to his horror, that the Soviets intended to go ahead on their own.

Reversing U.S. Policy on China

Nixon for years had been this nation's foremost enemy of Communist China.

But by 1967 he had decided that Communist China was a fact of life.

When Nixon took office, one of his first priorities was a reopening of relations with China. His foreign affairs adviser, Kissinger, was rather a reluctant passenger those first six months.

Then came the Soviet-Chinese border clashes, surprising the rest of the world, which had seen the two countries as one great Communist monolith.

Kissinger and Nixon huddled. They decided they would send a signal to the Soviets that the United States was determined to be a friend of China.

How to send that signal? The United States and China had once held a series of meetings in Warsaw, but

those talks had broken off. Kissinger contacted Walter J. Stoessel Jr., United States Ambassador to Poland. His orders to Stoessel: Find the highest ranking Chinese envoy to Poland at a social function and tell him the United States wants to resume the Warsaw talks.

In the atmosphere of the time, when China was a bitter enemy of the United States, and their diplomats never uttered a word to each other, this approach at a party would be a seismic event. It ended up as high comedy. The chargé d'affaires at the Chinese embassy, Lei Yang, attending a Yugoslav reception, was so startled by Stoessel's approach, he turned and walked out of the door.

Stoessel ran down the stairs after him. Later, Chou En-lai told Kissinger in China: “If you want our diplomats to have heart attacks, approach them at parties and propose serious talks.”

On Dec. 10, Kissinger's unorthodox approach worked, as my log entry showed. The request to resume the Warsaw talks carried two messages. One to Peking, that we were ready to reverse our policy of enmity to China and reopen relations. The second to Moscow, that the United States and China had common interests and a Soviet nuclear strike might bring the Russians into confrontation with the United States.

A Decision to Make a Mistake

Meanwhile, Air Force intelligence studied the photos of Russian missiles and nuclear warheads. Their fallout studies showed the immensity of the catastrophe in store for the world. It was possible that without advance warning and precautionary measures every man, woman, and child in Japan would have died.

In addition to Japan, the fallout would spread across Korea and Pacific Islands where more than 250,000 American troops were stationed.

Major General George Keegan, Air Force chief of intelligence, was in Honolulu assaying the situation. He remembered that during the Cuban missile crisis in 1962, his Air Force commander in chief, Thomas Power, had said, “Make a little mistake. Send a message in the clear.”

Keegan went to the code room and told the clerks on duty he had a message so sensitive they had to leave the room while he transmitted it. He then sent a message to the Secretary of Defense “in the clear” (uncoded) as if by accident. The message said the United States had 1,300 nuclear weapons airborne—and named Soviet cities which were targeted for the bombs.

Keegan states there was a Middle Eastern army officer visiting Nikita Khrushchev at his Black Sea dacha when Khrushchev got that message. The officer said Khrushchev had four telephones on his desk and tried to pick them all up at once, calling Moscow. And that day the Russian ships turned back.

Keegan decided to try another message “in the clear”

that the Soviets would intercept.

This time the objective was to assure that the Soviets clearly understood that many thousands of Russian citizens in Siberia would also die as a consequence of nuclear fallout generated by a Soviet strike against China.

At the same time, United States intelligence sources saw that the Nixon-Kissinger rapprochement with China, begun in Warsaw, was having an electric effect on the Kremlin.

And just in time. The Soviets believed that if the Chinese nuclear plants were destroyed, China would not be a military threat to them for decades. They teetered on the edge for days watching the Chinese moving more and more under the United States security umbrella. Finally, the Soviets realized they no longer could take the chance. Intelligence photos showed their nuclear armed divisions were withdrawing from the Chinese border.

And Chinese leaders invited their old enemy to visit their country and resume relations at a time just before Nixon's re-election campaign in 1972, when it would have the greatest political effect in his favor.

The Need to Protect a President

MUCH HAS been made of the "Berlin Wall" that I am supposed to have constructed around Nixon. Why did I think—rightly or wrongly—that Nixon needed a wall of any kind?

First, Nixon was able to halt, through me, the unending flow of Government officials who "just had to see the President."

The other reason was that I soon realized that this President had to be protected from himself. Time and again I would receive petty vindictive orders. If I took no action, I would pay for it. The President never let up. I'd

say, "I'm working on it," and delay and delay until Nixon would one day comment, with a sort of half-smile on his face, "I guess you never took action on that, did you?"

"No."

"Well, I guess it was the best thing."

Then another character entered the White House, Charles (Chuck) Colson. Unfortunately, Colson encouraged the dark impulses in Nixon's mind, and acted on those impulses instead of ignoring them.

Of course, if there were no Nixon, there would have

been no Colson in the White House. Nixon provided the output which all of us were ordered to put into action.

Another factor that I very soon became aware of was Nixon's insecurity about his truly humble background. He never let us forget that his mother had to scrub bedpans.

Nixon was more complex than the "classic case of insecurity." He tried to overcome that insecurity by imposing a rigid self-discipline to shield him from mistakes. That self-discipline was so tight it was unnatural. And when it burst, the effects were devastating.

But if that were the sum of Nixon, he would not be so fascinating, and I would never have gone to work for him—or stayed so long. Nixon had many strong, positive characteristics which are generally conceded even by his detractors: intelligence, analytical ability, judgment, shrewdness, courage, decisiveness, and strength. And, believe it or not, he had a "heart."

He absolutely hated the large formal dinners that he constantly had to host.

Detailed Critique of a Dinner

The day after our first formal state banquet at the White House, Nixon critiqued the dinner as if it had been a major military battle. One item more than any other drew his attention, the soup course. As he put it, "We've got to speed up these dinners. They take forever. So why don't we just leave out the soup course? Men don't really like soup."

That afternoon I met Manola Sanchez, Nixon's valet, in the hall. I asked, "Was there anything wrong with the President's suit after that dinner last night?"

Manola said yes, "He spilled soup down his vest."

Just what I expected. And that's why soup was never again served at a state banquet in the Nixon years.

In the White House by day we knew Henry Kissinger, the other half of our brilliant diplomatic team, as "the hawk of hawks." But in the evenings, a magical transformation took place. Touching glasses at a party with his liberal friends, the belligerent Kissinger would suddenly become a dove.

And the press, beguiled by Henry's charm and humor, bought it.

During the Christmas bombing of North Vietnam in 1972, Kissinger was strongly in favor of the bombing. Just two months before Henry had said, "Peace is at hand," and been criticized for political maneuvering before election day. But peace had been at hand, Kissinger said, and now the North Vietnamese were renegeing again. So he urged

the bombing.

It was therefore with some amazement that we read a column by James Reston in The New York Times after the bombing started saying, "Mr. Kissinger . . . has said nothing in public about the bombing in North Vietnam, which he undoubtedly opposes." The whole tenor of the column was that a split was developing between Kissinger and Nixon, and Reston provided a lot of "inside information" on Kissinger's current thinking that could only have come from Kissinger himself.

Nixon was furious and told me to "find out what the hell Henry's doing." I talked to Henry that day. He hotly denied that he had said anything about the bombing to anyone. In particular, he vehemently claimed he had never talked to Reston. He said, "I did not give Reston an interview."

But Reston's story implied that he had spoken to Kissinger. So we did some checking and found out that Kissinger had, in fact, conversed with him. I confronted Henry: "You told us you didn't give Reston an interview but in fact you did talk to him," and he said, "Yes, but that was only on the telephone."

Trying to Vex Kissinger

My own attitude toward Henry was great respect and affection tinged with amusement.

Almost every day around 1 o'clock I'd have lunch with Larry Higby in my office. About that time, Henry would drop in to find out what was happening and report on his own activities. But he also tried to read everything of interest on my desk.

We'd deliberately place letters or documents that looked very interesting in an exposed area. Then, when Henry got there, Higby would take his lunch tray and set

it on top of the paper, as if by accident, just as Henry started to read it. And everyone kept a straight face.

It always amused me that Henry, whose anger at leaks really started the 1969 F.B.I. national security wire-tapping, was constantly worried that his own telephone was tapped. Time and again he would pass me in the hall and say, "What do your taps tell you about me today, Haldeman?"

[Mr. Haldeman writes that President Nixon and Mr. Kissinger were confident that the Vietnam War could be ended. Toward that end, the President conceived the "madman theory"—he wanted the Vietnamese to believe that he would do anything to win the war and his finger was on the nuclear button.

[Mr. Kissinger took that theory and a generous offer of aid to the first Paris peace talks, Mr. Haldeman writes, but the theory collapsed. The Secretary of State found that the North Vietnamese wouldn't even negotiate. They saw no reason to do so. The mood in the United States had turned against the war, and it was merely a matter of time before the United States would have to pull out.]

Nixon was faced with a terrible decision.

He knew he had to act.

He decided to secretly bomb the North Vietnamese supply caravans which passed through Cambodia, a neutral country.

Bombing in secret would get the message to the North Vietnamese and prevent a flare-up of antiwar protests in the U.S., which would disable our peace negotiations in Paris. So the bombing began, but it wasn't a secret long. In May 1969 New York Times reporter William Beecher wrote a story which began: "American B-52 bombers in recent weeks have raised several Viet Cong and North Vietnamese supply dumps and base camps in Cambodia for the first time, according to Nixon Administration sources."

A Debate Over the Wiretaps

Kissinger was furious. Nixon was equally as angry.

Both of them were determined to find the source of the "leaks" to the press. A debate still lingers as to how the wiretapping program began.

Henry represents himself as a passive participant called into the Oval Office for a conference in late April, where he found J. Edgar Hoover with the President. Kissinger was told that a wiretapping program was under way, and was asked by Hoover only to supply names of people he suspected of leaking.

Nixon doesn't remember such a conference. Neither do I. But I do recall Henry's initial anger, which helped initiate the whole wiretap program.

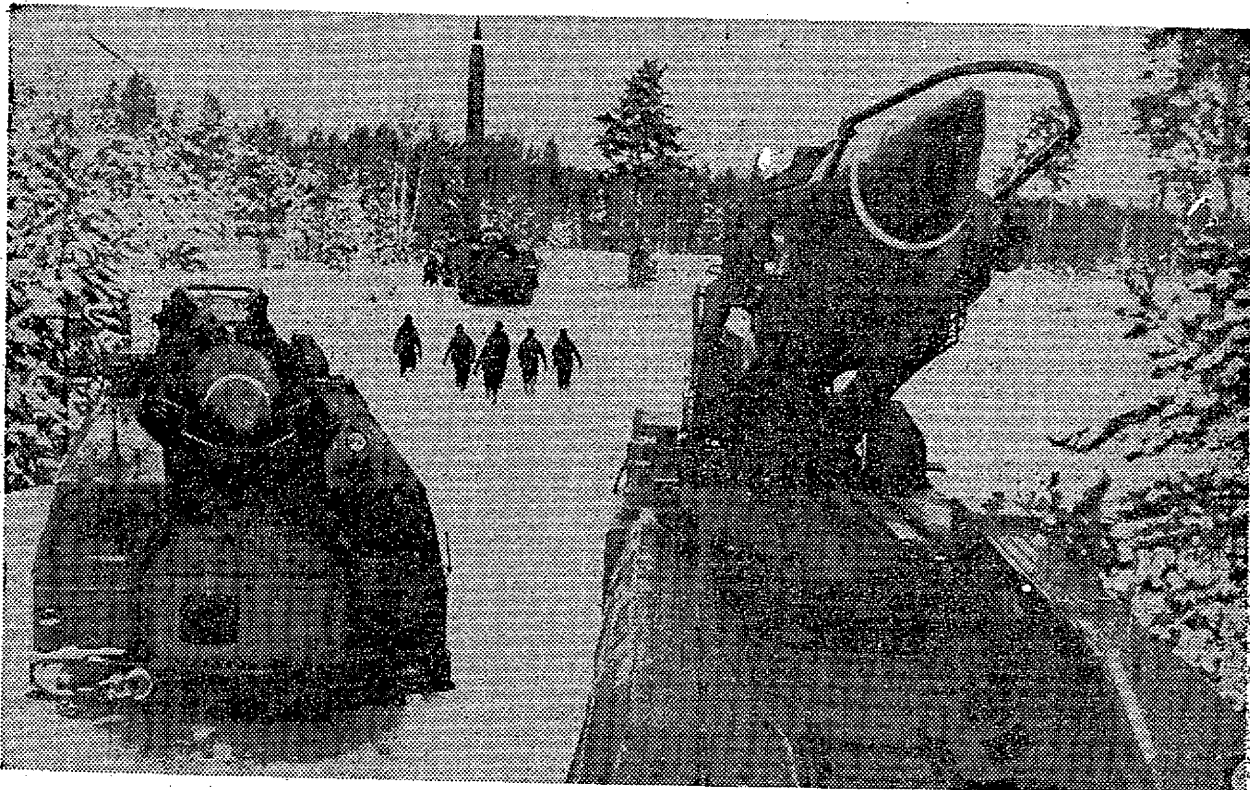
Nevertheless, Nixon was 100 percent behind the wiretaps. And I was, too.

And so the program started, inspired by Henry's rage but ordered by Nixon, who soon broadened it even further to include newsmen. Eventually seventeen people were wiretapped by the F.B.I. including seven on Kissinger's National Security Council staff and three on the White House staff.

There is one wiretap that is important in Watergate history because Nixon personally ordered it privately—by White House aides—not through the F.B.I. The tap was on influential columnist Joseph Kraft. Kraft, who had been a supporter of Nixon's, had now turned against him. The F.B.I. claimed that Kraft's telephone was "untappable." So Nixon called John Ehrlichman, who eventually turned to his one gumshoe: John Caulfield.

Caulfield hired an ex-F.B.I. man named John Ragan and another man whose name has been lost to history. As I heard it later, the two of them put a ladder up against a wall of Kraft's Georgetown home and planted a bug on one of his phones. They heard nothing but the maid for weeks—and she didn't speak English. It seemed the Kraft's were in Europe. Undaunted, Nixon told the F.B.I. to find out whether Kraft was "tappable" in Paris, where he was attending the peace negotiations. Through the French authorities, a mike was installed in his hotel room.

All this for nothing. The leaders were never discovered. But unintentionally and unknowingly an important precedent for Watergate had been established: the use of private White House personnel for wiretapping.



Mobile, nuclear missiles of the type deployed by the Soviet Union along the border with China Tass/Soufoto
"The Soviets had moved nuclear-armed divisions within two miles of the border. . . . [They] believed that if the Chinese nuclear plants were destroyed, China would not be a military threat to them for decades."

Learning the Details One at a Time

JUNE 17, 1972, a Saturday afternoon in Key Biscayne, Fla. I stretched and yawned. Across the terrace of our villa at the Key Biscayne Hotel, Larry Higby, my young deputy, read a book.

Two weeks ago I had returned with President Richard Nixon from Moscow where he had worked out the beginnings of the first meaningful disarmament agreement with the Soviets in this century, and had begun a new policy, which was being described as "détente," that could reverse twenty-seven years of cold war.

The President needed a rest, and he flew south on June 16.

Air Force One had dropped him off in the Bahamas where he went to Walker's Cay, owned by one of his friends, Robert Abplanalp, the aerosol-valve millionaire.

At 2:30 A.M., June 17, 1972, while Nixon slept in his friend's luxurious house in the Caribbean, three Cubans, one Italian-American, and a man named James McCord, had been arrested in the Democratic national Committee headquarters in the Watergate complex in Washington, carrying electronic wiretapping equipment.

Higby saw a familiar figure in bathing trunks walking toward us on the beach; trailing a long white paper in one hand. "Hey, look," said Higby, "Old Whaleboat." It was Ron Ziegler, the President's press secretary, whose Signal Corps name was "Whaleboat."

Ziegler handed me the sheet of paper. It was wire service copy. The news bulletin said that five men had been caught breaking into the Democratic national Committee headquarters in Washington.

(Watergate historians have always supposed that the heavens fell when those in the President's party in Florida learned the break-in had been discovered. Quit the reverse is true. My immediate reaction was to smile.)

Wiretappers invading the Democratic national Committee headquarters? They couldn't be our people, because nothing was to be gained. This was June 17, 1972. Nixon was leading Senator George McGovern, his likely Democratic rival, by 19 points in the Gallup Poll—an enormous,

indeed, unprecedented, lead at that stage of a Presidential campaign. So Nixon didn't need political information to defeat him.

I tried to visualize the scene: a darkened political office, burglars prowling, flashlights wavering. Whose operation did that sound like?

"Good Lord," I thought, "they've caught Chuck Colson."

If Charles Colson was involved, he could very well have been on one of his projects for the President of the United States.

Chuck Colson had become the President's personal "hit man." He had signed up an ex-C.I.A. agent named Howard Hunt to work for him and thereafter became very secretive about his exploits. Years later I heard of such wild schemes as the proposed fire-bombing of a politically liberal foundation (Brookings) in order to retrieve a document Nixon wanted; feeding LSD to an anti-Nixon commentator (Jack Anderson) before he went on television; and breaking into the offices of a newspaperman (Hank Greenspun) who was supposed to have documents from Howard Hughes that revealed certain secrets about Nixon.

"Should I inform the President?" Ziegler asked.

I thought it over. John Ehrlichman, assistant to the President for domestic policy, was in Washington. The break-in had happened almost 15 hours ago. If any real problem had surfaced he would have telephoned me by now.

So I said, "I don't think there's anything to worry the President about."

This was his year. In the past six months he had

not only begun the disarmament talks with the Soviet Union, he had dramatically reopened diplomatic relations with China and—finally—he was about to end the crippling, suicidal Vietnam War.

Nothing could hurt him now.

Next day, back at home in Key Biscayne, Richard

Continued on following page.

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Nixon, sipping coffee, walked through his kitchen and saw a New York Times on the counter. Idly, he thumbed through it. On page 30, Nixon stopped. A news story about the break-in appeared there.

The President wasn't concerned at all by the break-in. In fact, he was amused. "Track down Magruder and see what he knows about it," the President said.

Jeb Magruder, a 38-year-old public relations specialist, was "our man at C.R.P.," the Committee for the Re-election of the President. At the White House, where he previously had been employed, I had found him eager but unrelaxable.

When the Committee for the Re-election of the President was first being staffed, I saw a chance to reassign him to a position that was less demanding and better suited to him. At the No. 2 post of C.R.P., he simply would be following the orders of a strong leader, John Mitchell, who would be moving over from Attorney General to campaign chairman.

Then toward the end of the confirmation hearings for Richard Kleindienst as Mitchell's successor as Attorney General, the International Telephone and Telegraph scandal surfaced with its politically explosive charge that in exchange for a \$400,000 political contribution to the Republican Party, John Mitchell's Justice Department had made a favorable settlement of an antitrust case against the multinational corporation. Kleindienst demanded the hearings be reopened so he could deny the charges.

In 1977, Richard Nixon said that the secret story of Watergate is that it would never have happened if not for Martha Mitchell's illness—and the resultant diversion of John Mitchell's attention.

A Problem of Supervision

Well before the break-in, I made my first Watergate mistake by leaving Magruder in charge at C.R.P. without the direct and continuing supervision of John Mitchell.

We could, and should, have moved a new campaign manager in, either temporarily or permanently.

A new manager would never have permitted the break-in, and there would have been no Watergate.

The White House switchboard found Magruder at the Beverly Hills Hotel in California. He was nervous and his sentences faltered. His words were disturbing.

The break-in was sponsored by the C.R.P. after all. But in a special way.

"Those guys were operating on their own, Bob. They just got carried away."

"What guys?"

"McCord. He's our security man at C.R.P. He works for Gordon Liddy."

I hung up quickly, and tracked down John Ehrlichman by telephone.

"We're in a bit of a bind on this one, Bob," he told me. "One of those Cubans had a check on his person signed by Howard Hunt."

Hunt's name alerted me. It was the link to Chuck Colson, whom I had first suspected. In fact, Hunt was Colson's toy. If Colson was involved through Hunt, this could involve the Oval Office, too.

This made me very anxious to talk to Mr. Colson. I reached him and he was worried. He said, "You gotta believe me, Bob. It wasn't me. Tell the President that."

But when I called the President, I relaxed again,

because I found him as cool about the break-in as he had been before. Colson's name apparently never even occurred to Nixon, even when I mentioned Hunt.

Calm, cool, even amused. What an effort that façade must have cost him. It wasn't until years later that I learned that the "calm" Nixon had been frantically telephoning Chuck Colson himself about that "unimportant" break-in. Calm? At one point he was so upset he threw an ashtray across the room, according to Colson.

On Tuesday, June 20, the buzzer rang. It was the President summoning me. We were about to begin one of the most fateful conversations in Watergate history. For this was to be the meeting in which 18½ minutes of taped conversation was mysteriously erased.

I stepped into Nixon's White House office.

We spent the first part of that conversation on gov-

ernment and campaign business. Then we turned to the D.N.C. break-in. That discussion occupied only about 18½ minutes.

Because that particular 18½ minutes was subsequently erased from the tape of that meeting—and only that particular 18½ minutes—a great deal of interest naturally has arisen as to how we spent that short period and what we said to each other.

Since the discovery of that gap, I've racked my brain trying to remember what was said.

Reconstructing a Key Conversation

Now, looking back, taking all the new evidence of what was really going on that week, I wonder if one of my conversations with Nixon about Colson didn't take place June 20. With that thought in mind I've reconstructed the way the conversation might have gone.

NIXON: On that DNC break-in, have you heard that anyone in the White House is involved?

HALDEMAN: No one.

NIXON: Well, I'm worried about Colson.

HALDEMAN: Why?

NIXON: The FBI's starting their investigation, and I know one thing, I can't stand an FBI interrogation of Colson.

Colson can talk about the President, if he cracks.

You know I was on Colson's tail for months to nail Larry O'Brien on the Hughes deal. Colson told me he was going to get the information I wanted one way or the other. And that was O'Brien's office they were bugging, wasn't it? And who's behind it? Colson's boy, Hunt.

[For years, the Haldeman book says, Nixon had been trying to get proof that Lawrence O'Brien was working as a lobbyist for Howard Hughes while serving as chairman of the Democratic National Committee. Mr. Haldeman writes that his retainer from Hughes was reportedly \$180,000 a year.

[After the I.T.T. scandal broke, O'Brien, as Democratic chairman, naturally used it in an effort to discredit

the Republicans. Mr. Haldeman says that that gave President Nixon and his aide Mr. Colson still another reason for wanting to discredit Mr. O'Brien.]

In the months ahead Nixon was to fight an epic battle to prevent disclosure of the tapes. And when finally he was forced to turn over some of them, there was further embarrassment. Unexplained gaps and erasures, including the famous 18½-minute conversation of June 20th.

My own perception had always been that Nixon simply began to erase all of the Watergate material from the tapes.

But Nixon was the least dexterous man I have ever known: clumsy would be too elegant a word to describe his mechanical aptitude. Reportedly, Pat Nixon once said that when they were courting, "Dick almost killed himself trying to learn to roller skate."

So I believed that Nixon had started trying to erase the tapes himself, but realized it would take him ten years in fits and starts. (The investigators counted five different starts in the 18½ minutes alone.)

But now, I'm confused, because Nixon referred to that 18½-minute gap (in a telephone call after I resigned) in this way: "Rose's 18 minutes."

Lamenting the Tapes

In the whole story of the White House recording system the one question asked over and over again by both friends and foes of Nixon is "Why didn't he destroy the tapes?"

In a telephone call long after I left the White House, Nixon laughed wistfully and said, "You know it's funny, I was just listening to one of the early April tapes of a meeting between you and me. I had completely forgotten this, but in that meeting I said to you, 'Bob, maybe we should get rid of all those tapes and just save the national security stuff.' And you said no, you thought we should keep them. Oh, well."

As far as I know, that April conversation was the closest he ever came to any idea of destroying the tapes.

A 3d-Rate Burglary, a Big Problem

JUNE 23, 1972. I was waiting for the President's buzzer to sound, summoning me to our regular early morning conference that always began the President's day.

The telephone rang, startling me. But it wasn't the President's buzzer. John Dean, the President's counsel, was on the line. In an instant my serenity was shattered as the young voice spoke urgently, beginning with these upsetting words:

"Bob, the DNC break-in is becoming a real problem. They're out of control over at the bureau. Gray doesn't know what the hell to do, as usual."

"What have they found so far?"

"They traced one check to a contributor named Ken Dahlberg. And apparently the money was laundered out of a Mexican bank, and the F.B.I. has found the bank."

I made notes as Dean plowed ahead.

"But our whole problem now is to stop the F.B.I. from opening up a whole lot of other things. I don't know where that money trail is going to lead from that Mexican bank if they start checking. Who knows what contributors' names are going to pop up if they start down that track. John Mitchell and Maurice Stans are really worried about that." He paused. "They say they have to turn off that up everything and spread this mess a lot wider than it is."

I instantly understood the basis for the concern about the revelation of contributors' names. Although it doesn't seem to be very important now—after all that has transpired since—at that time this was a big issue. The Committee for the Re-election of the President had collected an enormous precampaign war chest during the period when the law did not require the disclosure of the names of campaign donors. Much of the money had come from sources who, for various reasons, did not want their contributions known. Some were strong Democratic contributors who were either playing both sides or abandoning their own party; some were concerned for business reasons; some just didn't want to get on the "sucker lists."

The Democrats had made a major political issue in April out of the fact that the Committee for the Re-election of the President started the campaign reporting period with some \$10,000,000 cash on hand, and refused to reveal the names of the donors of this money. This was perfectly legal but politically damaging. But C.R.P. had stood firm on the ground that the contributions were legally made with the assurance that they would not be identified.

The F.B.I.'s Mistaken Theory

Now I said, "Fine, just tell me the bottom line and keep it brief. Who does the F.B.I. think did the break-in? Have they got a theory?"

Dean said, "Well, that's the good news. The F.B.I. is convinced it's the C.I.A. James McCord and the Cubans are all ex-C.I.A. people. Practically everyone who went in there was connected to the agency. And now the F.B.I. finds a Mexican bank involved which also sounds like the C.I.A."

Dean told me other welcome news. The F.B.I. had cleared Chuck Colson on the basis of his F.B.I. interrogation. Then returned to the C.I.A. angle. "Gray has been looking for a way out of this mess. I spoke to Mitchell, and he and I agree the thing to do is for you to tell Walters that we don't know where that Mexican investigation is going to lead. Have him talk to Gray—and maybe the C.I.A. can turn off the F.B.I. down there in Mexico." I hung up, wondering at a coincidence. Three nights ago, Nixon had called me, suggesting I tell Ehrlichman that the Cubans were in the Bay of Pigs. The implication was that there was some sort of connection between that C.I.A. operation and Watergate. Now the F.B.I. also thought there was a connection, but this prior conversation with Nixon has another significance. It led me to make a crucial—even historical—error.

I did something I shouldn't have done. Dean had suggested that I call Gen. Vernon Walters at the C.I.A. I knew Walters well. Normally, I would have simply called him over to my office at the White House and asked

him if he would help us out. whether he would have turned me down or not doesn't matter. The fact is there never would have been the "smoking gun" conversation in the Oval Office that resulted in Nixon's resignation, if I had just called Walters, myself, as I usually would have.

Ironically, it was one remark that Nixon had made earlier in his telephone call on June 20 that caused me to change my routine. His surprising reference to the Bay of Pigs had puzzled me. Nixon obviously knew something about the C.I.A. that was unknown to me, and I felt I should check with him before asking Walters to help.

And so I walked into the Oval Office and as it turned out sealed Nixon's doom, as soon as I closed the door.

Nixon listened silently as I read from my notes about Dean's report on the Mexican bank connection.

Nixon wanted to know if they had traced the money to the contributors.

I said, "They've traced to a name, but they haven't gotten to the guy yet, Ken Dahlberg. He gave \$25,000 in Minnesota and the check went directly to this guy Barker."

In the next colloquy I realized Nixon was thinking in deeper political terms than I. He asked me if the money was traceable from C.R.P., and I said yes. He said, "I'm just thinking, if the contributors don't cooperate, what do they say? That they were approached by the Cubans? That's what Dahlberg has to say, the Texans, too."

Wit that remark I realized Nixon thought the connection of the Watergate burglars to C.R.P. might be avoided. I didn't think there was much chance of that with McCord under arrest, so I steered Nixon off that course, and back to the C.I.A.

Nixon's Directions to Misled

He gazed out of the window, then turned to me. "When you get the C.I.A. people in say, 'Look, the problem is that this will open up the whole Bay of Pigs thing again!' So they should call the F.B.I. in and for the good of the country don't go any further into this case. Period."

Richard Helms, the C.I.A. director, and General Walters entered John Ehrlichman's office at 1:30. I laid out the situation. Helms surprised me by revealing he had already talked to the F.B.I. director about Watergate on the previous day. He said he had made it plain to Gray that the C.I.A. was not connected to Watergate in any way, and none of the suspects had worked for the agency in the last two years.

Elegantly put, with just the right tone of injured innocence. Of course, the Ervin committee would later discover the pious statement was three-fourths baloney. The C.I.A. was connected to the Watergate matter in innumerable ways; indeed, at least one of the burglars, Martinez, was still on the C.I.A. payroll on June 17, 1972—and almost certainly was reporting to his C.I.A. case officer about the proposed break-in even before it happened. The first lawyer in the police precinct when the burglars were brought in the night of June 17 was a reportedly C.I.A.-connected attorney, there to represent men who had allegedly retired from the agency and had no connection with it.

Now in Ehrlichman's office the C.I.A. was stonewalling me. "Not connected." "No way." Then I played Nixon's trump card. "The President asked me to tell you this entire affair may be connected to the Bay of Pigs, and if it opens up, the Bay of Pigs may be blown."

Turmoil in the room. Richard Helms, the C.I.A. director, gripping the arms of his chair, leaning forward and shouting, "The Bay of Pigs had nothing to do with this. I have no concern about the Bay of Pigs."

Silence. Finally, I said, "I'm just following my instruction, Dick. This is what the President told me to relay to you."

Helms was settling back. "All right," he said. But the atmosphere had changed. Surprisingly, the two C.I.A. officials expressed no concern about the request that Walters go to see Gray. And Walters later testified



White House Photograph

H. R. Haldeman, Richard Helms and President Nixon at Key Biscayne, Fla.

"Nixon obviously knew something about the C.I.A. that was unknown to me. . . . He might have been reminding Helms, not so gently, of the cover-up of the C.I.A. assassination attempts [on] Fidel Castro."

that when he and Helms went downstairs they talked briefly and Helms said, "You must remind Mr. Gray of the agreement between the F.B.I. and the C.I.A. that if they run into or expose one another's 'assets' they will not interfere with each other."

Meaning: "F.B.I., stop the investigation." Just what Nixon wanted.

I went back to see the President and told him his strategy had worked.

And so the "smoking gun" conversations were created to rest, stored on a reel, in a closet gathering dust until August 1974.

What 'Bay of Pigs' Meant

Years later, former CBS correspondent Dan Schorr called me. He was seeking information concerning the F.B.I. investigation Nixon had mounted against him in August 1971.

Schorr later sent me his fascinating book, "Clear the Air." In it I was interested to find that evidence he had gleaned while investigating the C.I.A. finally cleared up for me the mystery of the Bay of Pigs connection in those dealing between Nixon and Helms.

It seems that in all of those Nixon references to the Bay of Pigs, he was actually referring to the Kennedy assassination.

As an outgrowth of the Bay of Pigs, the C.I.A. made several attempts on Fidel Castro's life. The deputy director of plans at the C.I.A. at the time was Richard Helms.

Unfortunately, Castro knew of the assassination attempts all the time. On Sept. 7, 1963, a few months before John Kennedy was assassinated, Castro made a speech in which he was quoted, "Let Kennedy and his brother Robert take care of themselves, since they, too, can be the victims of an attempt which will cause their death."

After Kennedy was killed, the C.I.A. launched a fantastic cover-up. Many of the facts about Lee Harvey Oswald unavoidably pointed to a Cuban connection.

1. Oswald had been arrested in New Orleans in August 1963 while distributing pro-Castro pamphlets.

2. On a New Orleans radio program he extolled Cuba and defended Castro.

3. Less than two months before the assassination Oswald visited the Cuban consulate in Mexico City and tried to obtain a visa.

And when Nixon said, "It's likely to blow the whole Bay of Pigs," he might have been reminding Helms, not so gently, of the cover-up of the C.I.A. assassination attempts on the hero of the Bay of Pigs, Fidel Castro—a C.I.A. operation that may have triggered the Kennedy tragedy and which Helms desperately wanted to hid.

An Effort That Was Bound to Fail

WHAT IS our conclusion? We do not yet know the whole Watergate story, and may never know it. President Nixon feared a Colson role in the break-in and suspected that John Mitchell might also be involved. He wanted to protect them. In addition, he feared the revelation of what he called "other things," including both national security matters and Colson political projects.

The cover-up collapsed because it was doomed from the start. Morally and legally it was the wrong thing to do—so it should have failed. Tactically, too many people knew too much. Too many foolish risks were taken. Too little judgment was used at every stage to evaluate the potential risks vs. the gains. And when the crunch came, too many people decided to save their own skins at whatever cost to the President or anyone else. Especially John Dean, the President's young legal counsel.

Thus, there were many players in the Watergate drama—and behind them all lurks the ever-present shadow of the President of the United States.

Had Watergate been handled through the usual White House staff system, and been managed by Nixon in his usual fashion, it would never have happened in the first place. And even if it happened, it would have been handled in such a way as to avoid the disaster that it eventually became.

A Problem Outside the White House

Why was this problem dealt with differently? Partly because the Democratic National Committee headquarters break-in was completely a political problem, coming under the responsibility of the Committee to Re-elect the President instead of the White House (the whole reason for setting up C.R.P. was to handle political operations outside of the White House).

This particular problem was also handled differently because either the President did not know or did not choose to tell us, what it was really all about and what he wanted done about it.

One of the reasons for my lack of concern after the Watergate break-in was my complete confidence that President Nixon had always told me everything of any importance, and that I therefore always had all the information I needed to assess the relative dangers at any time. But if my theory of the break-in is correct, then it is obvious to me now that this confidence was, at least in this case, misplaced.

Colson and Nixon had been operating in an area to which I paid little attention, but one which I should have realized could potentially cause a problem.

Yet I preferred running the risk of Colson's getting out of control to losing his value to me in filling Nixon's need for lengthy discussion and planning in many political areas which I would have had to handle if Colson hadn't been there.

So, perhaps arrogantly, I went on my way, confident that Watergate was a "third-rate burglary" fouled up by some of the people at C.R.P. and that any political attempt to tie it to the White House would fail.

This was perhaps Nixon's most important mistake. For if he had concluded that the break-in resulted from Colson's implementation of a Presidential desire to link Larry O'Brien to Howard Hughes, it must have been obvious to him that the bulkheads we had assumed would contain the break-in to C.R.P. would never hold.

Many people have wondered why Watergate was not handled better. It's a fair question. The answer may be that we did not know what we were dealing with until it was too late. We thought we knew at the time, but a key part of the puzzle was withheld from us. Most of us would have been willing to sacrifice ourselves, if necessary, to save the Presidency that we believed in. But we couldn't even do that because we didn't know the real situation. And because we didn't know, many of us weren't even

concerned at first—especially as the President gave us no hint.

This claim of a lack of concern throughout the White House seems to be hard for most people to swallow. But in the days when it was happening, it was only a very small blip on the overall radar screen of White House activity, interest and concern.

A Few Crucial Tapes

For example, all the tapes that were thought to be useful in finding out what actually had gone on in the Watergate cover-up were subpoenaed. They covered a few days in June, one in September, a few in January. It was not until the end of February that there was any real White House concentration on Watergate and by then the cover-up was practically over.

I remember a stiflingly muggy Washington summer day in 1973, in the fifth floor attic room of the Executive Office Building with its corrugated tin roof and almost unbearable heat. Even the little window air conditioner had given up and was just dripping water on the floor as the ice which jammed it melted in the heat. I had been locked in there for more than two hours and despite the urgency of my work on my files, which had been stacked there

after being confiscated from my office and the offices of my staff, I was about to give up.

The ever-present Secret Service agent was obviously not enjoying his task any more than I was mine. He had to make sure that I didn't take any of the files or make any notes from them.

I finally finished sorting the huge stack of yellow sheets that were my notes of all my meetings with the President for the Watergate period—from June 1972 until my resignation in April 1973.

I couldn't resist pointing out to the Secret Service agent the difference between the two piles of paper in front of me. The pile of pages that had any mention of Watergate on them was less than a half inch high. The pile of all the other non-Watergate pages was over a foot high. Clear indication of the relative importance of Watergate when it was happening.

I continue to have the utmost respect for the President that Richard Nixon could have been, and usually was; and utmost sorrow for the tragedy that brought him to his present state, thereby depriving this nation and the world of the continuing leadership of the man I believe uniquely fitted the overwhelming demands of the times.

Pride Undiminished by Events

Few men in all history have had the privilege of being raised as high as I was; and few have had the tragedy of being brought as low. It has been an enriching experience in all of its phases. I am eternally grateful for all of it and for what it has taught me.

I have paid a terrible price for that privilege, but I have had plenty of time to reflect on the question of whether it was worth it. There is absolutely no doubt in my mind today that if I were back at the starting point, faced with the decision of whether to join up, even knowing what the ultimate outcome would be, I would unhesitatingly do it.

When several of us from the White House were at Camp David, the Presidential retreat, planning the reorganization of the Government in 1972, some classic feuds came to a climax there. The mightiest was the long-running show: Kissinger vs. Rogers. The President's national security adviser against the Secretary of State.

Both Rogers and Kissinger would bring their complaints to me. Rogers, a very nice, considerate man, could still explode, with some reason, when he learned that secret negotiations were going on without his knowing it. "How can I testify on the Hill, or communicate with the

Soviets, if I don't know everything that's going on, he would say.

Henry, on his part, viewed the entire State Department monolith as a conspiracy of thousands of men and women "out to get me."

In November 1972, we moved to resolve this long-standing feud by replacing Rogers as Secretary of State with a man who could work better with Henry.

Despite the popular press belief, Henry Kissinger did not want or expect to be Secretary of State in 1972.

From my many conversations with Henry in those days, I know that he realized that the true foreign affairs power position was his National Security Council post at the White House. The Secretary of State was a figurehead.

Nixon wrestled with the problem for months. Bill Rogers was his oldest friend in government. Nixon didn't want to hurt Rogers, but he knew Henry was right.

Easing Out Rogers

So Nixon called in Henry and we talked it out. It was decided Bill Rogers would be asked to resign at the end of Nixon's first term. Henry agreed strongly with Nixon's choice of a successor, a man he liked and could work with, the Ambassador to Germany, Kenneth Rush. But Henry had spoken to me in a corridor of the White House: "I won't believe it until I see it, Haldeman. That Rogers will never quit. He'll be with me until I die."

I had the unenviable task of telling Richard Nixon's closest personal friend in the Government that Richard Nixon had decided it was now time for him to leave.

In rather cold tones, he told me, "I feel very strongly that it is not in either my interest or the President's for me to resign at this time." So I went to see the President.

As I rather expected, the President was not up to fighting it out with his old friend, and he agreed to Rogers's concept of a commitment to leave by mid-June.

I didn't blame Nixon. But I wasn't happy either because I dreaded the words Nixon would say next: "You tell Henry."

I told him Bill Rogers would leave in June for certain.

How ironic is history on all levels. I ended up in Camp David five months later with Bill Rogers and Richard Nixon talking resignation, all right. Only this time it was Rogers telling Nixon that I must resign instead of the other way around.

Ironically, it was because Rogers did not resign as he wanted him to in November that Henry ended up Secretary of State himself.

And Kenneth Rush became the Secretary of State who never was.