

The Washington

The Weather

Today — Variably cloudy, high in upper 60s, low near 40. The chance of rain is 10 percent today, near zero tonight. Monday—Fair, high in upper 50s. Yesterday's temperature range was from 77 to 47. Details, C2.

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Nixon Says He Misjudged the

By George Lardner Jr.

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Long after the Watergate break-in that eventually led "to the end of my presidency," Richard Nixon looked on the burglary as "just a public relations problem that only needed a public relations solution."

The former president says in his memoirs—starting with excerpts today in a number of newspapers—that he was concerned for months primarily about the appearances of the raid, which was conducted June 17, 1972, on Democratic National Committee headquarters here by four men from Miami and a former Central Intelligence Agency security officer.

Not until nine months later, Nixon reports, did he finally realize that "what I had assumed... was the major Watergate problem—the question of who had authorized the break-

in—had been overtaken by the new and far more serious problem of the cover-up."

In the abbreviated narration offered by the first installment of the newspaper excerpts, and perhaps by the book itself, the former president skirts over a number of crucial questions presented at the 1974 cover-up trial and left unanswered then because the ailing Nixon did not appear as a witness.

Little is said, for instance, of the famous 18½-minute gap in one of Nixon's earliest Watergate conversations with H. R. (Bob) Haldeman, then White House chief of staff and since-convicted felon. Nixon says the White House tape of their remarks no longer exists, and he writes about the meeting as though he were not even a participant.

"What was said during the morning meeting will never be known completely because

the tape of that conversation is one with the 18½-minute gap."

According to the excerpts, Nixon has no independent recollection of what they did talk about:

"Some of what we talked about during these 18½ minutes can be reconstructed from the notes Haldeman took. According to them, one of my first reactions to the Watergate break-in was to instruct that my Executive Office Building office be checked regularly to make sure that I was not being bugged by anyone." According to Haldeman's notes, the conversation also reflected these thoughts, not mentioned in Nixon's excerpted memoirs:

"P.R. offensive to top this. Hit the opposition w/their activities. Points out libertarians have created public calousness. Do they justify this less than stealing Pentagon Papers, Ander-

Post

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Watergate Cover-Up

son file, etc.? We should be on the attack for diversion."

As for the break-in itself at DNC headquarters in the Watergate office building nearly six years ago, Nixon professes complete surprise.

He says he didn't find out about it until the next morning, June 18, when he returned to Key Biscayne from a brief trip to Grand Cay, a small island in the Bahamas owned by his old friend, Bob Abplanalp.

"When I got to my house I could smell coffee brewing in the kitchen, and I went in to get a cup," Nixon recalls. "There was a Miami Herald on the counter.

"On the front page was a small story headlined: 'Miami Held in D.C. Try to Bug Demo Headquarters'... They had all been wearing rubber surgical gloves. It sounded reposterous: Cubans in surgical gloves bug-

ging the DNC! I dismissed it as some sort of prank," Nixon says.

On the day after the break-in, Nixon says, he flew back to Washington on Air Force One and that night, June 18, made an entry in his diary about some "disturbing news from Bob Haldeman" that had been conveyed to him in mid-air.

Referring to the chairman of the Committee to Re-elect the President (CRP) and former attorney general, Nixon wrote: "... John Mitchell had told Bob on the phone enigmatically not to get involved in it ..."

The excerpt does not indicate whether Nixon or Haldeman demanded any elaborations of Mitchell's advice. Nixon then goes on to say that Haldeman "had also heard that the money found on the arrested men—over \$1,000 in bills—had apparently come from the CRP."