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THURSDAY,

Nixon Sheds Little

By Bob Woodward
Washington Post Staff Writer

Richard M. Nixon last night held to the main lines of his Watergate defense in a much-touted television interview which shed little new light on the scandal that propelled him out of the presidency.

The 90-minute interview produced an emotional acknowledgement from Nixon that "I let down my friends. I let down the country. I let down our system of government . . ."

But on the whole the President stuck to positions that had been carefully laid out during the period of intense legal deliberation between the June 17, 1972, Watergate burglary and Nixon's Aug. 9, 1974, resignation.

Under prodding by interviewer David Frost, the former President pointedly denied committing any illegal act, but readily acknowledged the impropriety of his Watergate conduct.

"While technically I did not commit a crime, an impeachable offense . . . there are legalisms" he said. "As far as the handling of this matter is concerned, it was so botched-up.

"I made so many bad judgments. The worst ones, mistakes of the heart, rather than the head."

Frost presented Nixon with the record of his own words in the Oval Office. Nixon acknowledged that he went "right to the edge of the law . . . a reasonable person could call that a

cover-up. I didn't think of it as a cover-up."

Nixon acknowledged he "said things that were not true" and considered courses of action he should not have even contemplated.

But he went no further than he did in his resignation speech 2½ years ago in expression of regrets and acceptance of responsibility for the final outcome of Watergate.

"If they want me to get down and grovel on the floor, no. Never. Ah, because I don't believe I should."

The interview leaves many of the Watergate questions unresolved.

On last night's interview show Frost did not ask Nixon who erased the famous 18½ minutes of a tape of a

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New Light on Scandal

Nixon meeting with his White House chief of staff, H.R. Haldeman, three days after the Watergate arrests.

Frost did ask Nixon what happened during that meeting. Nixon said, "Haldeman's notes, ah, are the only recollection I have of what he told me."

Text: Pages A16-17.

Those notes show that Nixon ordered a public relations offensive on Watergate and nothing more.

Nixon also made no judgment on the guilt or innocence of his former top aides who have been convicted in the Watergate cover-up.

He did have words of praise for

Haldeman, calling him "not a Germanic Nazi storm trooper, but just a decent, respected crew-cut guy. That's the way Haldeman was. Splendid man."

Nixon also gave no ground on his longtime claim that he first learned the details of the Watergate criminal cover-up during the famous March 21, 1973, meeting he had with his counsel, John W. Dean III.

As the tape of that meeting has previously revealed, Nixon did consider paying blackmail demands by Watergate conspirator E. Howard Hunt. Last night he maintained he considered authorizing the payments to protect national security and possible embarrassment that Hunt might cause the administration.

"I considered it for reasons that I thought were very good ones. Ah, I would not consider it, ah, for, ah, the other reasons, which would have been in my view, bad ones," he said last night.

Frost also confronted Nixon with a tape transcript not made public before the interviews were conducted.

The tape is of a Feb. 13, 1973, meeting between Nixon and his special counsel, Charles W. Colson, in which Nixon worried about what might happen if "one of the seven [Watergate defendants] begins to talk. That's the problem."

After Frost read this portion to

See NIXON, A14, Col. 3

NIXON, From A1

Nixon, the former President said that he was worried that the seven, some of whom had been involved in Central Intelligence Agency work, might embarrass the administration by exposing covert activities.

Nixon last night said that as of that date he was not aware that anyone else was involved criminally.

"I didn't know of anybody at that point; nobody on the White House staff; not John Mitchell; ah, anybody else, ah, that I believed, ah, was involved . . . ah, criminally."

This appears to contradict the Feb. 13, 1973, transcript, which shows that Nixon was aware of Mitchell's involvement.

At that meeting, Nixon and Colson discussed who might step forward and take responsibility for Watergate.

Nixon: Well, who the hell do you think did this? Mitchell? He can't do it, he'll perjure himself so he won't admit it. Now that the problem. Magruder?

[Jeb Stuart Magruder was Mitchell's deputy at the Nixon re-election committee.]

Colson: Ah, I—I know Magruder does.

Nixon: Well then he's perjured himself, hasn't he?

Colson: Probably.

Later in the conversation Nixon said, "Mitchell seems to have stonewalled it up to this point."

Frost last night did not ask Nixon about that portion of the transcript.

Reiterating a line of defense made before resigning, Nixon said last night, "I did not have a corrupt motive . . . My motive was pure political containment."

Interviewer Frost, on the other hand, voiced his own opinion that the Watergate record showed Nixon was a cover-up conspirator.

Nixon said that the interview would give viewers an opportunity to "make up their own minds." At one point he

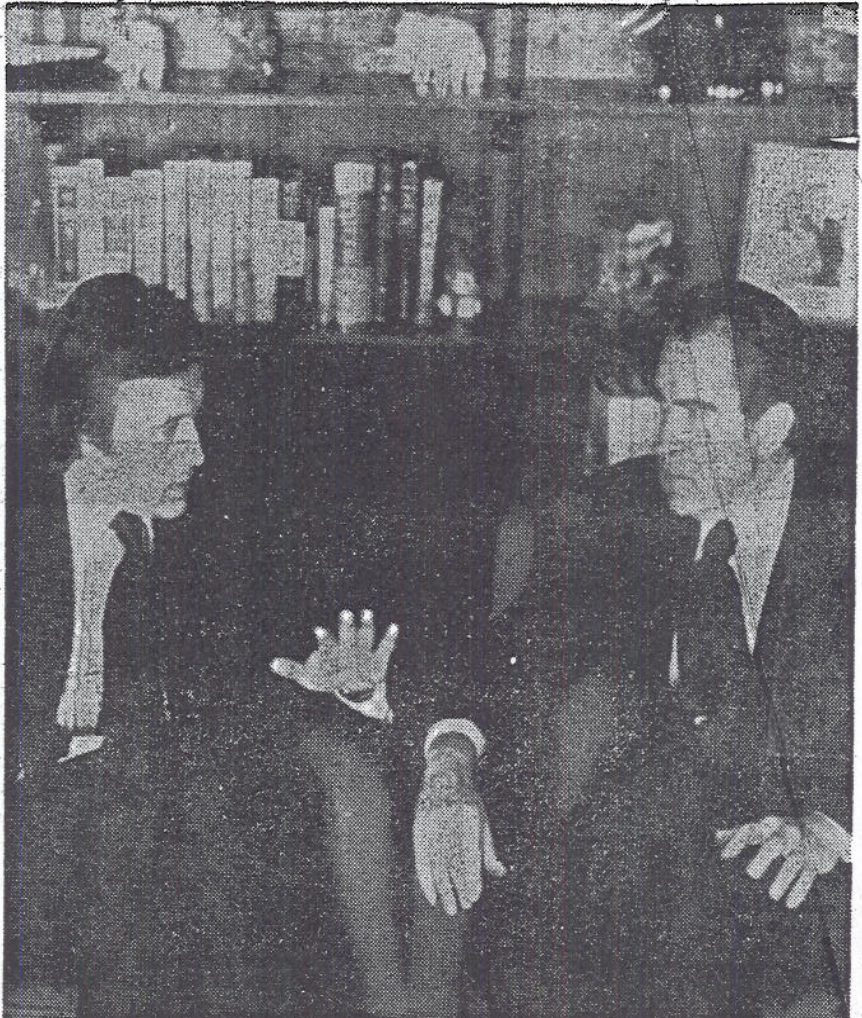
called Frost the "attorney for the prosecution," adding, "Let me make the case as it should be made . . . defense."

At one point, Nixon actually suggests that he acted as a defense attorney for his aides. This, he explained to Frost, made such advice as "Just be damned sure you, say, 'I don't remember. I can't recall,'" was "proper advice for one who, as I was at that time, beginning to put myself in the position of a attorney for the defense . . ."

Much of the interview centered on Frost bombarding Nixon with incriminating quotes from the tapes, and at times Nixon quoting back exculpatory phrases.

Nixon said that while in office during the Watergate period he was confronted with partisanship on the part of the Senate Watergate committee staff, the Watergate Special prosecutor's staff, the staff of the House Judiciary Committee, which conducted the impeachment inquiry, and by the news media.

No conspiracy, no coup, brought about his resignation, Nixon said. "I brought myself down. I gave 'em a sword. And, they stuck it in, and they twisted it with relish. And, I guess if I'd been in their position, I'd a done the same thing."



Associated Press

David Frost and Richard Nixon: the interview leaves many questions unresolved.

6 Va. Lobbyists Fail On Filing Deadline

Six lobbyists at the 1977 General Assembly failed to make the deadline for filing their reports on expenses and activities.

The penalty for missing the deadline at the close of business Tuesday—60 days after the adjournment of the General Assembly—is \$50 a day each for the lobbyist and his employer.

Secretary of the Commonwealth Pat Perkinson said she will send letters to the delinquent filers reminding them

to send a check to cover the fines along with their reports.

She identified the six who failed to file the reports as:

- Daniel P. Ward, Annandale, representing WTVT Channel 53.
- Taylor Cousins, Falls Church, representing the Consumer Congress of Virginia.
- Robert B. Woodward, Merrifield, lobbyist for the Heavy Construction Contractors Association.
- Richard Alan Samuels, Charlottes-

ville, of the Printing Industries of the Virginias.

- Philip S. Marsteller of Richmond, American Insurance Association.

- Dan McLane Price, Norton, Wise County Chamber of Commerce.

Mrs. Perkinson said her office sent letters April 4 to the 616 lobbyists registered for the 1977 session reminding them of the filing deadline. These were followed by post cards to both the lobbyists and their employers April 21.

"My political life is over. I will never yet, and never again have an opportunity to serve in any official position. Maybe I can give a little advice from time to time. And, so, I can only say that in answer to your question, that while technically, I did not commit a crime, an impeachable offense . . . there are legalisms. As

far as the handling of this matter is concerned, it was so botched-up. I made so many bad judgments. The worst ones, mistakes of the heart, rather than the head, as I pointed out. But let me say, a man in that top judge . . . top job, he's gotta have a heart, but his head must always rule his heart."

Nixon Stirs All the Old Memories

He Returns to Confess He Is Guilty of Having a Kind Heart

By Haynes Johnson
Washington Post Staff Writer

Now we know. Richard Nixon has confessed. He is guilty, not as charged, not as he is so widely believed to be by so many, not as the master conspirator plotting his crimes, but as an old friend betrayed. He is guilty of a kind heart.

That, in essence, is what Nixon offered by way of explanation, if not defense, last night. He entered our living rooms again after an absence (not coincidentally) of a thousand days to the accompaniment of drums, literal and figurative—the drums of intense publicity and the sound of drums signaling his return on camera.

Then he proceeded, for the next 90 minutes, to give us all the familiar Nixon responses we have all seen for more than a generation. Those advance reports about Nixon being broken—or shattered—or even shaken by the withering interrogation of David Frost are in error. Nixon is in control throughout. He offers little that is new, and less that is of substance.

Richard Nixon last night stirred all the old memories, and employed all

the old devices. He evoked eerie echoes of his Checkers speech, and of countless Nixon performances over the years since then:

He was tolerant about his enemies, those in the press, and the Congress and the country who have hounded him for so long. He understood that there was a "Fifth Column" in his term, out to bring him down. And who knows what the CIA was really doing? he wondered aloud.

He was willing to admit mistakes, and more than his share. He wasn't

Commentary

vigilant enough, he hadn't moved aggressively.

But he didn't commit any crimes. He didn't commit any impeachable offenses. He didn't participate in an obstruction of justice. Not in his view, at least. What he did was done in the best interests of his friends—and, in the end, of his country.

He had impeached himself, he explained. He had taken that historic step of resigning to spare the nation the agony of having a President in the dock of the Senate for six months.

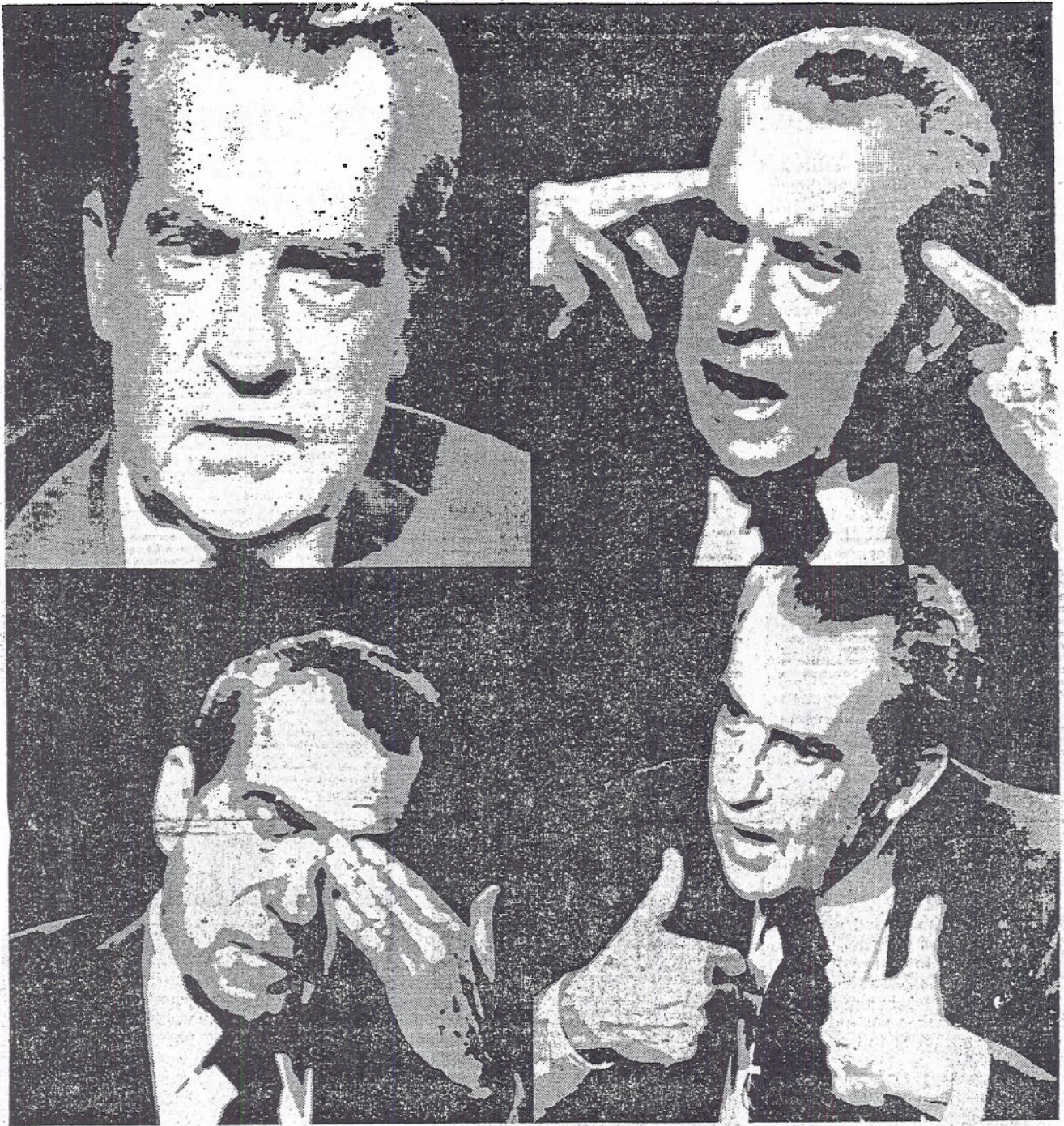
He had a deep regret about it all. But he wasn't going to blame anybody else. He was going to take it like a man. If "they" wanted him to get down and grovel on the floor—well, that wasn't the way of Richard Nixon. "No," he said as forcefully as he could. And then, quickly, he added, an even stronger: "Never."

At the beginning of the TV program, David Frost steps forward with a prologue about Nixon's fall, which he correctly calls the most dramatic in our political history. Then he asks: "Why? What went wrong with the Nixon presidency? How did the grand design get mixed-up with domestic abuses, great and petty?"

We don't learn the answers to those questions. But who, really, thought we would?

What we see instead is something else. It is a pathetic picture that flashes across our TV screens. There is the former President of the United States, parrying questions about criminality with rationalizations about his real motives, his real intent, and all for the price of what probably will be a million-dollar deal.

See SHOW A15, Col. 1



Photos from Time magazine; design by Terry Dale—The Washington Post

SHOW, From A1

The Nixon we see looks remarkably unchanged. His jaws are more pronounced, his voice tones even deeper than remembered, but he shows scarce evidence of the scars he carries. He comes on somber, serious, a study in blue, but poised and ready. The only traces of change are in his speaking delivery: he slurs his words at times, he stammers more often. Uh, uh, uh, and ah, ah are heard throughout.

What remains notably the same is Nixon's manner. He plays for sympathy, and he uses all the techniques of his long and stormy past.

Nixon takes us back to Dwight Eisenhower's time, and equates Ike's troubles with Sherman Adams with his over Watergate.

To this viewer, the most fascinating moment in the show comes as Nixon shifts the blame from himself to his most trusted aides, H.R. Haldeman and John Ehrlichman. He kills them with kindness and high unctio-

"I didn't want to have them sacked as Eisenhower sacked Adams," he says, after saying how heart-rending that experience was for him personally.

He recalls, with solemn mien, how Henry Petersen, the Justice Department prosecutor, had told him he must fire them. Oh, no, he can't, they've got to have a chance to prove their innocence, they say they're not guilty, Nixon says he replied. And then, ap- provingly, he tells us that Petersen says that act speaks well for him as a man but not as a President.

"And, in retrospect, I guess he was right," Nixon responds. "So, it took me two weeks to work it out, tortuous long sessions. You've got hours and hours of talks with the, which they resisted. We don't need to go through all that agony."

He recites the subsequent emotion

of telling his aides they must go. It's at Camp David, the tulips are out, the tears are flowing.

They agreed to leave, Nixon tells us, and then, in his defense, "so it was late, but I did it. I cut off one arm and then cut off the other arm."

Yet he carefully lets us know that he believes them guilty. In the single most arresting passage of the interview, Nixon says:

"Now, I can be faulted, I recognize it. Maybe I defended them too long; maybe I tried to help them too much, but I was concerned about them. I was concerned about their families. I felt that they in their hearts felt they were not guilty. I felt they ought to have a chance at least to prove that they were not guilty, and I didn't want to be in the positions of just sawing them off in that way."

Then, his peroration:

"And, I suppose you could sum it all up the way one of your British prime ministers summed it up, Gladstone, when he said that the first requirement for a prime minister is to be a good butcher." Well, I think the great story as far as summary of Watergate is concerned, I ah, I did some of the big things rather well. I screwed up terribly in what was a little thing, and it became a big thing."

At this point Richard Nixon delivers his own epitaph.

"But I will have to admit," he says, "I wasn't a good butcher."

After all the years of division and scandal and acrimony, that's what Watergate comes down to him. He wasn't a ruthless enough butcher to carve up his friends.

Throughout his first televised interview Nixon comes over as basically at ease. He wears the mantle of the experienced elder statesman, wronged, misunderstood, given to mistakes, but not about to demean himself by descending to the level of his enemies.

He does, of course, let us know who those enemies are.

With an air of weary resignation, he confesses to having made some misleading statements. But in the next breath he sticks in his knife:

"Ah, I notice for example, the editor of The Washington Post, the managing editor, Ben Bradlee, wrote a couple a three months ago, something to the effect that, ah, as far as his newspaper was concerned, he said, 'We don't print the truth. We print, ah, what we know. We print what people tell us, ah, ah, and this means that we print lies.'"

The statements he himself made were, he tells us, "on the big issues, true." He concedes, really only this: "the statements were misleading in exaggerating (because of the enormous political attack I was under."

Last night's program was billed as a dramatic and historic encounter between Nixon and his opponent, the relentless David Frost. It was nothing of the sort. Frost's manner was laconic and low-keyed throughout. He did ask his questions, but he seemed almost diffident in doing so. And at times Frost seemed caught up in Nixon's own responses, even to the point of unwittingly helping.

Near the end, after Nixon admits to about as much as he will concede—"I have a very deep regret"—Frost interjects:

"You got caught up in something

"Yeah," Nixon replies.

"... and then it snowballed," Frost added.

Richard Nixon picks up that gift without a missing beat.

"It snowballed," he says.

By the very end of the program, Frost looks as though he's swept up by the Nixon responses. After Nixon describes the maudlin scene where he and the others from Congress vent their emotions on the day he resigns,

Frost appears drained emotionally. It's Frost who seems to need the reassurance.

"This has, ah, ... this has been more—" he begins, fumbling for words.

In the ultimate irony of the evening, it's Richard Nixon who comes to David Frost's defense.

"Been tough for you?" Nixon says, smiling a bit.

Frost stammering, anseers: "Well, no, but I was going to say that, ah, I feel we've ..."

Again, Nixon speaks up confidently. "Covered a lot of ground," he says.

"... Been through life almost, rather than an interview," Frost says in tones of awe.

The tables have been turned. Frost had met his match. But then no one ever claimed David Frost had more experience at that sort of thing than Richard Nixon.

Nixon: 'I Was Trying to Contain It Politically . . .'

Here is the text of David Frost's televised interview with former President Nixon:

Frost: It was on the night of June the 17, 1972, that five men were arrested breaking into the Democratic National Committee headquarters in Washington, D.C. It turned out later that the break-in had involved such key Nixon supporters as Howard Hunt and Gordon Liddy, and had been planned by the President's own re-election committee, headed by former Atty. Gen. John Mitchell and his assistant Jeb Magruder. Bob Haldeman, the President's chief-of-staff, was with Mr. Nixon in Florida when the break-in occurred. They returned to the White House on June the 19th, and they met on a number of occasions during the next few days. Two meetings are regarded as key: the first occurred on the morning of June the 20th, and included a discussion of Watergate, a White House tape of that discussion was later found to have been erased, the famous '18½ minute gap'. The President met again with Haldeman on June 23. In that conversation, Mr. Nixon is told that the FBI is moving into problem areas in its Watergate probe. Haldeman suggests and Nixon agrees, that the CIA be instructed to ask the FBI not to proceed any further with its investigation of the burglary.

Mr. President, to try and review your account of Watergate, in one program, is a daunting task, but we'll press first of all through the sort of factual record and the sequence of events as concisely as we can, to begin with. But just one brief preliminary question. Reviewing now, your conduct over the whole of the Watergate period, with the additional perspective now of three years out of office and so on, do you feel that you ever obstructed justice, or were part of a conspiracy to obstruct justice?

Nixon: Well, in answer to that question, I think that the best procedure would be for us to do exactly what you're going to do on this program; to go through the whole record in which I will say what I did; what my motives were; and, then I will give you my evaluation as to whether those actions or anything I said, for that matter amounted to what you have called an 'obstruction of justice.' I will express an opinion on it, but I think what we should do is to go over it, the whole matter, so that our viewers will have an opportunity to know what we are talking about. So that in effect, they,

as they listen, will be able to hear the facts, make up their own minds. I'll express my own opinion. They may have a different opinion. You may have a different opinion. But that is really the best way to do it, rather than to preclude it in advance and maybe prejudice their viewpoint.

F: I'm very happy to do that 'cause I think the only way really to examine all of these events is on a blow-by-blow account of, of what occurred. So, beginning with June 20 then, what did Haldeman tell you during the 18½-minute gap?

N: Haldeman's notes are the only recollection I have of what he told me. Haldeman was a very good notetaker because, of course, we've had other opportunities to look at his notes and he was very ... he was making the notes for my presidential files. The notes indicated...

F: P.R. offensive and ...

N: That's right.

F: ... all of that.

N: Well, of course, they ... the notes were ...

F: Diversion.

N: Well, you've asked me what it was. My recollection was that the notes showed ... "check the EOB to see whether or not it's bugged." Obviously, I was concerned about whether or not the other side was bugging us. I went to say, "Let's get a public relations offensive on what the other side is doing in this area and so forth" and in effect, "don't allow the Democratic opposition, ... build this up into basically, ... blow it up into a big political issue." Those were the concerns expressed. And I have no recollection of the conversation except that.

F: But as far as your general state of knowledge, that evening, when you were talking with Chuck Colson on the evening of June the 20, it suggests that from somewhere your knowledge has gone much further. You say, "If we didn't know better, we'd have thought

the whole thing had been deliberately botched." Colson tells you, "Bob is pulling it all together. Thus far, I think we've done the right things to date." And you say, "...basic..." he says, "Basically, they're all pretty hard-line guys." And you say, "You mean, Hunt?" And he says...and you say, "Of course, we're just gonna leave this where it is with the Cubans. At times, I just stonewall it." And you also say, "We gotta have lawyers smart enough to have our people delay." Now, somewhere you were pretty well informed by that conversation on June 20.

N: As far as my information on June 20 is concerned, I had been informed by ...with regard to the possibility of Hunt's involvement, whether I knew on the 20th or the 21st or 22nd, I knew something...I learned in that period about the possibility of Liddy's involvement. Of course, I knew about the Cubans and McCord, who were all picked up at the scene of the crime. Now, you have read here excerpts out of a conversation with Colson. And let me say as far as what my motive was concerned, and that's the important thing. My motive was, in everything I was saying, or certainly thinking at the time, was not to try to cover up a criminal action. But to be sure that as far as any slipover, or should I say slop-over, I think would be a better word. Any slop-over in a way that would damage innocent people, or blow it into political proportions...it was that that I certainly wanted to avoid.

F: So, you invented the CIA thing on the 23rd, as a cover?

N: No. Now, let's use the word 'cover-up' though in the sense that it had...should be used and should not be used. If a cover-up is for the purpose of covering-up criminal activities it is illegal. If, however, a cover-up as you have called it, is for a motive that is

not criminal, that is something else again. And, my motive was not criminal.

I didn't believe that we were covering any criminal activities. I didn't believe that John Mitchell was involved. I didn't believe that, for that matter, anybody else was. I was trying to contain it politically. And that's a very different motive from the motive of attempting to cover-up criminal activities of an individual. And so there was no cover-up of any criminal activities. That was not my motive.

F: But, surely in all you've just said, you have proved exactly that that was the case, and that there was a cover-up of criminal activity because you've already said, and the record shows, that you knew that Hunt and Liddy was involved. You'd been told that Hunt and Liddy were involved. At the moment

when you told the CIA to tell the FBI to "Stop period," as you put it ... At that point, only five people had been arrested. Liddy was not even under suspicion. And so you knew, in terms of intent. And you knew in terms of foreseeable consequence that the result would be that, in fact, criminals would be protected. Hunt and Liddy, who were criminally liable, would be protected. You knew about them. The whole statement says that "We ... we're gonna ..." Haldeman says, "We don't want you to go any further on it. Get them to stop. They don't need to pursue it. They've already got their case." Walter's notes that he said, "Five suspects had been arrested, this should be sufficient." You said, "Tell them, don't go any further into this case period." By definition, by what you've said and by what the record shows, that per se was a conspiracy to obstruct justice because you were limiting it to five people. When even if we grant the point that you weren't sure about Mitchell, you already knew about Hunt and Liddy and had talked about both, so that is obstruction of justice ..."

N: Now just a moment.

F: ... period.

N: That's your conclusion.

F: It is.

N: But, now let's look at the facts. The fact is: that as far as Liddy was concerned, what I knew was ... was only the fact that he was the man on the committee, who was in charge of intelligence operations. As far as Hunt is ... was concerned, and if you read that tape you will find I told them 'to tell the FBI,' — they didn't know apparently — 'and the CIA that Hunt was involved.' And so there wasn't any ... any attempt to keep them from knowing that Hunt was involved. The other important point to bear in mind when you ask "what happened?" and so forth is that what happened two weeks later. Two weeks later when I was here in San Clemente, I called Pat Gray, the then FBI director on the phone, to congratulate the FBI on a very successful operation they had in apprehending some hijackers in San Francisco, or some place abroad. He then brought up the subject of the Watergate investigation. He said that there are some people around you who are mortally wounding you, or would ... might mortally wound you because they're trying to restrict this investigation. And I said, "Well, have you talked to Walters about this matter?" And I said, "Yes." He said, "Does he agree?" He said, "Yes." I said, "Well Pat," I know him ... had known him very well, of course, from over the years, I did call him by his first name. I said, "Pat, you go right ahead with your investigation." He has so testified, and he did go ahead with the investigation."

F: Yes, but the point is that obstruc-

tion of justice is obstruction of justice, if it's for a minute, or five minutes, much less for the period June 23rd to July the 5th, when I think it was when he talked to Walters and decided to go ahead, the day before he spoke to you on July the sixth. It, it, it's obstruction of justice how...for however long a period, isn't it? And, also, it's no defense to say that the plan failed, that the CIA didn't go along with it, refused to go along with it, that it was transparent. I mean, if I try and rob a bank and fail, that's no defense. I still tried to rob a bank. I would say, you still tried to obstruct justice and succeeded for that period. He's testified they didn't interview Ogarrio...

N: Now, let's—

F: ...They didn't do all of this. And so I would say it was a successful attempt to obstruct justice for that brief period.

N: Now just a moment. You're again making the case, which of course, is your responsibility, as the attorney for the prosecution. Let me make the case as it should be made, even if I were not the one who was involved for the defense. The case for the defense here is this: you use the term 'obstruction of justice'. You perhaps have not read the statute with regard to respect...obstruction of justice...

F: Well, I have.

N: Obstruction...tell, I'm sorry, of course, you probably have read it. But possibly you might have missed it because when I read it, many years ago, in...perhaps when I was studying law, although the statute didn't even exist then, because it's a relatively new statute, as you know. But in any event, when I read it even in recent times, I was not familiar with all of the implications of it. The statute doesn't require just an act. The statute has the specific provision one must corruptly impede a judicial...

F: Well, you ... a corrupt...

N:...matter.

F: ...endeavor is enough.

N: A con ...con...all right, we'll...a conduct...endeavor. Corrupt intent. But it must be corrupt, and that gets to the point of motive. One must have a corrupt motive. Now, I did not have a corrupt motive.

F: You...you were—

N: My motive was pure political containment. And, political containment is not a corrupt motive. If so, for example, we ...President Truman would have been impeached.

F: But, the point is that ... the point is that you cling ... motive can be helpful when intent is not clear. Your intent is absolutely clear; it's stated again, "Stop this investigation here period." The



By George Rebb for The Washington Post

foreseeable, inevitable consequence, if you'd been successful, would have been that Hunt and Liddy would not have been brought to justice. How can that not be a conspiracy to object ... obstruct justice?

N: No. Wait a minute. "Stop the ...

F: You would have protected ...

N: Stop the ...

F: ... Hunt and Liddy from guilt.

N: Stop the investigation. You still have to get back to the point that I have made previously, that when I ... that that my concern there, which was conveyed to them, and the decision then was in their hands. My concern

was having the investigation spread further than it needed to.

F: Well ...

N: And, as far as that was concerned, I don't believe, as I said we turned over the fact that we knew that Hunt was involved, that a possibility that Liddy was involved. But under the circumstances —

F: You didn't turn that over though, did you?

N: What?

F: You didn't turn that over.

N: No, no, no, no. We turned over the fact that Hunt, that, that Hunt was ... was involved.

F: You never told anyone about Liddy though.

N: No, not at that point.

F: Now after the Gray, after the Gray conversation, the cover-up went on. You would say, I think, that you were not aware of it. I, I think, was arguing that you were a part of it as a result of the June the 23rd conversations. But, you would say, that you were ...

N: Are you sure I was a part of it, as a result of the June 23rd conversations?

F: Yes.

N: After July 6th when I talked to Gray?

F: I would have said that you joined the conspiracy which you, therefore, never left.

N: Yes, no. Well, then we totally disagree on that.

F: But, I mean, ...the...that...that's... those are the two positions.

N: That's right.

F: Now you in fact, however, would say that you first learned of the cover-up on March the 21st. Is that right?

N: On March 21st ... was the date when I was first informed of the fact. The important fact to me in that conversation was of the blackmail threat that was being made by Howard Hunt, who was one of the Watergate participants, but not about Watergate.

F: So, during the period between those two dates, between the end of June, beginning of July, and March the 21st, while lots of elements of the cover-up as we now know were continuing, were you ever made aware of any of them?

N: No. I ... I don't know what you're referring to.

F: Well, for instance, the ...your personal lawyer, Herbert Kalmbach, coming to Washington to start the raising of \$219,000 of hush-money, approved by Haldeman and Ehrlichman. They went ahead but without... without clearing it with you?

N: That was one of the statements that I've made, which, after all of the checking we can possibly do...we checked with Haldeman, we checked with Ehrlichman. I wondered, for ex-

ample, if I had been informed. If I had been informed that money was being raised for humanitarian purposes, to help these people with their defense, I would certainly have approved it. If I had been told that the purpose of the money was to raise it for the purpose of keeping 'em quiet, I would have been...disapproved it.

F: But...

N: But the truth of the matter is that I was not told. I did not learn of it until the March period.

F: But in that case, if that was the first occasion, why did you say in such strong terms to Colson, on...February the 14th, which is more than a month before, you said to him, "The cover-up is the main ingredients, that's where we gotta cut our losses. My losses are to be cut. The President's loss has gotta be cut on the cover-up deal."

N: Why did I say that?

F: February the 14th.

N: Well, because I read the American

papers. And in January the stories that came out, they're not...not just from The Washington Post, the famous series by some unnamed correspondents, who have written a best-selling book since then. But The New York Times, the networks and so forth were talking about hush-money. They were talking about clemency pay...for cover-up and all the rest. It was that that I was referring to at that point. I was referring to the fact that there was a lot of talk about cover-up and that this must be avoided at all cost.

F: But, there's one very clear, self-contained quote, and I read the whole of this conversation of February the 13th, which I don't think's ever been published, but ... and there was one very clear quote in it that I thought was ...

N: It hasn't been published, you say?

F: No, I think it's ... it's available to anybody who consults the records but ...

N: Oh, yes.

F: ... but people don't consult all the records.

N: I just wondered if we'd seen it.

F: Well, I'm sure ... I'm sure you have, yes. But ... where the President says this, on Feb. 13, "When I'm speaking about Wa ..." This is to Colson. "When I'm speaking about Watergate, though, that's the whole point of ... of the election. This tremendous investigation rests unless one of the seven begins to talk. That's the problem." Now, in that remark, it seems to me that someone running the cover-up couldn't have expressed it more clearly than that could they?

N: What .. what do you mean by one of the seven beginning to talk? I've ... how many times do I have to tell you that as far as these seven were concerned, the concern that we had, cer-

tainly that I had, was that men who worked in the kind of a covert activity, men who of course realize it's dangerous activity to work in, particularly since it involves illegal entry, that once they're apprehended, they are likely to say anything. And the question was, I didn't know of anybody at that point. Nobody on the White House staff, not John Mitchell, anybody else, that I believed was involved ... criminally. But on the other hand, I certainly could ... could believe that a man like Howard Hunt, who was a prolific book-writer, or any one of the others under the pressures of the moment, could have started blowing and putting out all sorts of stories to embarrass the administration, and, as it later turned out in Hunt's case, to blackmail the President to provide clemency, or to provide money, or both.

F: I still just think, though, that one has to go contrary to the normal ... normal usage of language of almost 10,000 gangster movies to interpret "this tremendous investigation rests, unless one of the seven begins to talk; that's the problem," as anything other than some sort of conspiracy to stop him talking about something damaging ...

N: Well, you can ... you can state ...

F: ... to the press, and making the speech.

N: ... you can state your conclusion, and I've stated my views ...

F: That's fair.

N: So now we go on with the rest of it.

F: What President Nixon knew of the cover-up before March 21 is disputed, but there is no dispute that on March 21, John Dean did lay out many of the key elements of the cover-up for the President. Dean recited the history of the break-in and listed the criminal liability of top presidential aides like Haldeman and Ehrlichman, and Dean himself for actions which followed the burglary. Dean told the President that hundreds of thousands of dollars had been paid to keep the Watergate burglars silent through their January trial. He said, further, their sentencing was only two days away. Howard Hunt was now demanding a payment of \$120,000 for continued silence. And Dean suggested that the price tag for blackmail could total \$1 million. The period following the meeting on March 21, up to April 30, when Haldeman and Ehrlichman resigned, is crucial. The President would later claim that he worked to get the truth out during this period. His critics

would claim that he continued to cover it up.

Looking back on the record now, of that conversation, as I'm sure you've done, in addition to the overall details, which we'll come to in a minute, bearing in mind that a payment probably was set in motion prior to the meeting and was certainly not completed until late the evening of the meeting, wouldn't you say that the record of the meeting does show that you endorsed or ratified what was going on with regard to payment to Hunt?

N: No, the record doesn't show that at all. In fact, the record actually is ambiguous until you get to the end and then it's quite clear. And what I said ... the ... later in the day, and what I said the following day, shows what the facts really are and completely contradicts the fact ... the point that has been made, and again here's a case where Mr. Jaworski in his book conveniently overlooks, what actually was done, and what I did say the following day, as well as other aspects of it.

Let me say I did consider the payment of \$120,000 to Hunt's lawyer and to Hunt for his attorney's fees and for support. I considered it, not because Hunt was gonna blow, using our gangster language here, on Watergate, because as the record clearly shows, Dean says, "It isn't about Watergate, but it's going to talk about some of the things he's done for Ehrlichman."

As far as the payment of the money was concerned, when the total record is read, you will find that it seems to end on a basis which is indecisive. But I clearly remember, and you undoubtedly have it in your notes there, my saying that the ... "The White House can't do it." I think for my ... was my last words. Because I had gone through the whole scenario with Dean and I laid it out. I said, "Look, what would it do...I mean, when you're talking about all of these people, what would it cost to take care of them for..."

F: Well, no, I'm ... I've...

N:...and we talked about \$1 million. And, I said, "Well, you could raise the money, but doesn't it finally get down to a question of clemency?" And, he said, "Yes." I said, "Well, you can't provide clemency and that would be wrong for sure." Now, if clemency's the bottom line, then providing money isn't going to make any sense.

F: But, when you ... we talk about the money, the \$120,000 demand that, in fact, he got \$75,000 of that evening, bearing in mind what you were saying earlier about, reading that the overall context of the conversation, the ...is there any doubt, when one reads...reading the whole conversation:

1. "You could get \$1 million and you

could get it in cash. I know where it could be gotten."

2. "Your major guy to keep under control is Hunt?" "Don't you have ...

3. "Don't you have to handle Hunt's financial situation?"

4. "Let me put it frankly: I wonder if that doesn't have to be continued?"

5. "Get the million bucks, it would seem to me that would be worthwhile."

6. "Don't you agree that you'd better get the Hunt thing?"

7. "That's worth it, and that's buying time."

8. "We should buy the time on that, as I pointed out to John."

9. "Hunt has at least got to know this before he's sentenced."

10. "First, you've got the Hunt problem, that ought to be handled."

11. "The money can be provided. Mitchell could provide the way to deliver it. That could be done. See what I mean?"

12. "But, let's come back to the money." They were off on something else here, desperate to get away from the money; bored to death with the continual references to the money. "A million dollars and so forth and so on. Let me say that I think you could get that in cash."

13. "That's why your immediate thing ... you've got no choice with Hunt but \$120 or whatever it is, Right?"

14. "Would you agree that this is a buy-time thing? You'd better damn well get that done, but fast."

15. "Now, who's gonna talk to him? Colson?"

16. "We have no choice."

And, so on. Now reading as you've requested ...

N: All right, fine.

F: ... Within the whole context, that is ...

N: Let me, let me just stop you right there. Right there. You're doing something here which I am not doing, and I will not do throughout these broadcasts. You have every right to. You were reading there out of context, out of order, because I have read this and I know ...

F: Oh, I know.

N: ... it really better than you do.

F: I'm sure you do.

N: And, and I should know it better because I was there. It's no reflection on you ... You know it better than anybody else I know, incidentally, and you're doing it very well. But I am not going to sit here and read the thing back to you. I could have notes here, as you know, I've participated on all of these broadcasts without a note in front of me. I've done it all from recollection. I may have made some mistakes.

F: No, you ...

N: But not many, I

F: ... I ... you, you certainly have done

that ...

N: Now, let me say this, and let me say ...

F: and I agree with you, it's your life were talking about.

N: ... that in this instance, that in this instance, the very last thing you read, "Do you ever have any choice with Hunt?" It ... why didn't you read the next sentence? Why did you leave it off?

F: It carried on.

N: No, no. The reason ... the next sentence says, as I remember that so well, "But, you never have a choice with Hunt. Do you ever have one?" Rhetorically, you never have a choice with

Hunt because, when you finally come down to it, it gets down to clemency. Now why after all of that horror story? And it was. I mean, even considering that, I mean, must horrify people. Why would you consider paying money to somebody who's blackmailing the White House? I've tried to give you my reasons. I was concerned about what he would do. But my point is: after that, why not? Why don't you do what was not done by Mr. Jaworski in his book? What was not done by Mr. Doar before the Senate Judiciary Committee? Read the last sentence. The last sentence which says, after that, "You never have any choice with Hunt, because it finally comes down to clemency." And I said six times in that conversation, you didn't read that in your 10 things, six times I said, "You can't provide clemency."

F: No, I said ...

N: "It's wrong for sure."

F: No, I never said there ... I never said there that you did provide clemency, nor was I talking about ...

N: My point is ...

F: ... but, I was ...

N: My point is ...

F: ... all right, let me quote ...

N: My point is that without ...

F: ... let me quote to you then. I've been through the record. I want to be totally fair. And let me read to you the last quote on the transcripts, that I can find about this matter then. You said, "Why didn't I go to the last one?" I read 16 and I, and I thought that was enough, but ... we could have read many more than that. But the last thing in the transcripts I can find about this subject was you talking on April 20, and you were recollecting this meeting and you said, that you said to Dean and to Haldeman, "Christ, turn over any cash we got." That's your recollection of the meeting on April 20 when you didn't know you were on television.

N: Of course I didn't know I was on television. On April 20, it could well have been my recollection. But my point is: I wonder why, again, we haven't followed up with what hap-

pened after the meeting? Let me tell you what happened after the meeting. And, and you were, incidentally, very fair to point out, and the record clearly shows, that Dean did not follow up in any way on this. The payment that was made ... Dean didn't know it. I didn't know it. Nobody else knew it. Apparently, was being made contemporaneously that day through another source.

F: The next ... the next ...

N: Yeah.

F: ... the next morning Mitchell told Haldeman that it had been paid.

N: Yeah.

F: And in a later transcript you agree with Haldeman, that he told you. You say you say, "Yes." You reported that to me.

N: Yes. I understand.

F: Now, you were ...

N: Now, let me ...

F: ... you were very soon aware it had gone through.

N: That's right. But my point is: The question we have is whether or not the payment was made as a result of a direction given by the President for that purpose. And the point is: It was not. And the point is that the next morning ... you talk about the conversation, and here again, you probably don't have it on your notes here, but on the 22nd, I raised the whole question of payments. And, I said, and I'm compressing it all, so we don't take too much of our time on this, I said, "As far as these fellows in jail are concerned, you can help them for humanitarian reasons, but you can't pay ... but that Hunt thing goes too far. That's just damn blackmail." It would have been damn blackmail if Dean had done it. Now that's in the record. And, that's certainly an indication that it wasn't paid.

F: But later on that day at some point, according to your later words to Haldeman, you were told that it had been paid.

N: That ... I, I agree, that I was told that it had been paid. But what I am saying here is that the charge had been made that I directed it, and that it was paid as a result of what I said at that meeting. That is ... that charge is not true and it's proved by the tapes, which in so many cases can be damaging. In this case, they're helpful.

F: Well, there's two concerns to be said to that. One is: I think that the, the ... my reading of the tapes tells me, trying to read in an open-minded way, that that the writing, not just between the lines, but on so many of the lines that I quoted, is very, very clear that you were in fact endorsing at least the short-term solution of paying this sum of money to buy time. That would be my reading of it. But the ... the other point to be said is: Here's Dean, talking about this hush-money for Hunt, talk-

ing about blackmail and all of that. I would say that you endorsed or ratified it. But let's leave that on one side...

N: I didn't endorse or ratify it.

F: Why didn't you stop it?

N: Because at that point I had nothing to ... no knowledge of the fact that it was going to be paid. I'd had no knowledge of the fact that the ... what you have mentioned in the transcript of the next day, where Mitchell said he thought it'd been taken care of. I think that was what the words were or words to that effect. I wasn't there. I didn't ... I don't remember what he said. That was only reported to me. The point that I make is this: It's possible ... it's a mistake that I didn't stop it. The point that I make is: That I did consider it. I've told you that I considered it. I considered it for reasons that I thought were very good ones. I would not consider it for the other reasons, which would have been in my view, bad ones.

F: But that night though, the night of the 21st. I mean, in the conversation with Colson after you'd been exchanging dialogue about getting off the reservation, and so on, Colson said to you something about the fact that "It's the stuff after the cover-up. I don't care about the people involved in the

See TEXT, A17, Col. 1

TEXT, From A16

cover-up; it's the stuff after that's dangerous, Dean and other things, and the things that have been done." And you said, as I'm sure you know, "You mean with regard to the defendants. Of course, that was ... that had to be done. (laughs)", whatever that means. But, I mean, so that night you were saying that had to be done. You were realizing that doing something for the defendants was a necessity.

N: No, I don't interpret that, that way at all. I, I ...

F: How do you recall it?

N: I can't recall that ... I can't recall that conversation, and I can't vouch for the, the accuracy of the transcription on that. But I do say ...

F: That's absolutely ... it's an exhibit of the Watergate trial.

N: ... that ... the statements ... the tapes that have been made public, on the 22nd, with regard to my ... and the one on the 21st as well, with regard to the whole payments problem, I think are very clear with regard to my attitude.

F: But, on the short term point, that was an exhibit, and, part of the basic file at the trial was that conversation, Colson saying, "It's the stuff after that's dangerous." And you saying, "You mean with regard to the defendants. Of course that was ... that had to be done. (Laughs)." I mean, that's abso-

lutely on the record, and authenticated and played publicly.

N: Well, I can't interpret it at this time.

F: One of the other things that people find very difficult to take in the Oval Office on March the 21st, is the ... is the coaching that you gave Dean and Haldeman on how to deal with the grand jury without getting caught. And saying that "Perjury's a tough rap to prove." As you'd said earlier, "Just be damned sure you say, 'I don't remember. I can't recall.'" Is that the sort of conversation that ought to have been going on in the Oval Office, do you think?

N: I think that kind of advice is proper advice for one who, as I was at that time, beginning to put myself in the position of an attorney for the defense, something that I wish I hadn't had the re ... felt I had the responsibility to ... to do. But I would like the opportunity, when the question arises, to tell you why I felt as deeply as I did on that point. Every lawyer, when he talks to a witness who's going before a grand jury, says, "Be sure that you don't volunteer anything. Be sure if you have any questions about anything, say that you don't recollect. Be sure that everything ... that you state only the facts that you're absolutely sure of." Now, on the other hand, I didn't tell them to say, 'Don't forget, if you do remember.' that then would be suborning perjury. And I did not say that.

F: One of the things you repeated many times, but I suppose most memorably or most clearly on August 15, 1973. You said, "If anyone at the White House or high up in my campaign had been involved in wrong-doing of any kind, I wanted the White House to take the lead in making that known. On March 21, I instructed Dean to write a complete report of all that he knew on the entire Watergate matter." Now, when one looks through the ... the record of what had gone on just before and after March 21, on March 17th, the written statement from Dean, you asked for a "self-serving God-damned statement denying culpability of principal figures." When he told you that the original Liddy plan had involved bugging, you told him to omit that fact in his document and state it was for ... the plan was for totally legal intelligence operation. March 20, as I'm sure you know, you said, "You want a complete statement, but make it very incomplete." On March 21, after his revelations to you, you say, "Understand, I don't want to get all that God-damned specific." And Ehrlichman and you, when you're talking on the 22nd, and he's talking of the Dean report, he says, "And the report says, 'Nobody was involved.'" And, there's several other quotes to that effect. Was that

the Dean report that you described? It wasn't the same as what you described on August 15th was it?

N: Well, what you're leaving out, of course, which is in that same tape that you've just quoted from is a very, very significant statement. I said, that John Dean should make a report. And, I said we've ... we have to have a statement. And then I went on to say, "And if it opens doors, let it open doors." Now with regard to the report being complete, but incomplete, what I meant was this, very simply: I meant that we should state what he was sure of, what he knew. Because one day he would say one day ... thing, another day, he'd say something else. I didn't want him to answer, and you'll find that also in one of the tapes, I said, "Don't go into every charge that has been made. Go into only what you know. And particularly go in hard on the fact, which he had consistently repeated over and over again. No one in the White House is involved." That's what I wanted him to do.

F: But then you have a discussion in the meeting with Haldeman, Ehrlichman, Mitchell, Dean, where you're deciding what the policy's going to be. 'Is it going to be a hangout, i.e., is it going to be the whole of the truth? And, in end, it's decided that it's going to be one of great phrases of Watergate, a modified, limited hangout. Which is why I suggest the other quotes that I've quoted to you are decisive. And, then, Ehrlichman goes on to say, "I'm looking at the future." And he says, "Now we already know it's a modified, limited hang-out." And, you can't have a modified, limited version of the truth. I mean it's obviously not going to be the whole of the truth. "I am looking at the future," assuming some corner of this thing comes unstuck at some time, you (that's you) are in a position to say, "Look, that document I've published is a document I relied on, that is the report I relied on." And you respond, "That's right." Now, you've decided the document's going to be modified. It's going to be limited. And

then you're going to rely on that document, and so you're going to be able to blame it on Dean. And it seems to me that that is consistent with all the quotes that I have quoted, and not the "one door quote" that you have quoted.

N: That's your opinion, and I have my opinion. Dean was sent to write a report. He worked on it. And he certainly would have remembered a phrase that was, let me say, a lot more easy to understand than modified hang-out or whatever Ehrlichman said. He would remember, "If it opens doors; it opens doors." I meant by that

I was prepared to hear the worst as well as the good.

F: What I don't understand about March the 21st, is that I still don't why you didn't pick up the phone and tell the cops. I still don't know when you found about the things that Haldeman and Ehrlichman had done, that there is no evidence anywhere of a rebuke, but only of scenarios and excuses, et cetera. Nowhere do you say, 'We must get this information direct to ...' whoever it is, the head of the Justice Department, criminal investigation, or whatever. And nowhere do you say to Haldeman and Ehrlichman, 'This is disgraceful conduct.' And Haldeman admits a lot of it the next day. So you're not relying on Dean, 'You're fired.'

N: Well could I take my time now to, to address that question?

F: Hmm.

N: I think it will be very useful to, you know, what I, what I was going through. It wasn't a very easy time. I think my daughter once said that, 'There really wasn't a happy time in the White House, except in a personal sense, after April 30th, when Haldeman and Ehrlichman left.' You know, it's rather difficult to tell you four years later how you felt. But I think you'd like to know. Something new.

You see, I had been through a, a very difficult period when President Eisenhower had the Adams problem. And I'll never forget the agony he went through. Here was Adams, a man that had gone through the heart attack with him, a man that had gone through the stroke with him, a man that had gone through the ileitis with him, a man had been totally selfless, but he was caught up in a web. Guilty? I don't know. I considered Adams then to be an honest man in his heart. He did have some misjudgment. But, in any event, finally Eisenhower decided, after months of indecision on it. And he stood up for him in press conferences over and over again, and Haggarty did. He decided he had to go. You know who did it? I did it. Eisenhower called me in and asked me to talk to Sherm. And so here was the situation I was faced with: Who's going to talk to these men? What can we do about it? Well, first, let me say that I didn't have anybody that could talk to them but me. I couldn't have Agnew talk to them because they didn't get along well with him. Bill Rogers wasn't happy with them either, and so, not having a vice president or anybody else. And Haldeman, my chief-of-staff himself being one involved, the only man that could talk to them was me. Now, when I did talk to them, it was one of the most, I would say difficult periods, heart rending, hard to use the adjectives

that are adequate, experiences of my life. I'll never forget when I heard that on April 15 from Henry Petersen that they ought to resign and Kleindienst thought they ought to resign. And it took me two weeks ... I frankly agreed, incidentally, in my own mind that they had to go on the basis of the evidence that had been presented. But I didn't tell them that at that point. I, when I say, 'I agreed with it,' I didn't fully reach that conclusion because I still wanted to give them a chance to survive. I didn't want to have them sacked as Eisenhower sacked Adams, and then have ... and Adams goes off to New Hampshire and runs a ski lodge and never prosecuted for anything. Sacked because of misjudgment, yes; mistakes, yes. But an illegal act, with an immoral, illegal motive? No. That's what I feel about Adams, and that's the way I felt about these men at that time.

Now let me tell you what happened. I remember Henry Petersen coming in on that Sunday afternoon. He came in off his boat. He apologized. He, for being in his sneakers and pair of blue jeans, and so forth, but it was very important to give me the update on what had ... the developments that had occurred up to April 15. And he said ... he gave me a piece of paper indicating that they had knowledge of Haldeman's participation and the \$350,000, and they had knowledge of Ehrlichman's participation in ordering or what they indicated that Ehrlichman had, had told Hunt to deep ... told, the, Gray to deep-six ...

F: Six.

N: ... some papers and so forth and so on. And he said, 'Mr. President, these men have got to resign. You've got to fire 'em.' And I said to him, I said, 'But Henry, I can't fire men simply on the basis of charges. They've got to have their day in court. They've got to have a chance to prove their innocence. I've got to see more than this because they claim that they're not guilty.' And Henry Petersen, very uncharacteristically, because he's very respectful, a Democrat, career Civil Service, splendid man, sat back in his chair and he said, 'You know, Mr. President, what you've just said, that you can't fire a man simply on the basis of charges that have been made and the fact that they ... their continued service will be embarrassing to you, you've gotta have proof before you do that.'

He said, 'That speaks very well for you as a man. It doesn't speak well for you as a President.' And, in retrospect, I guess he was right. So it took me two weeks to work it out, tortuous long sessions. You've got hours and hours of talks with them, which they resisted. We don't need to go through all that agony. And I remember the day at Camp David when they came up. Haldeman came in first, he's standing as

he usually does, not a Germanic storm trooper, but just a decent, respected crew-cut guy. That's the way Haldeman was; splendid man. And he says, 'I disagree with your decision totally.' He said, 'I think it's going to eventually ... you're going to live to regret it, but I will.' Ehrlichman then came in. I knew that Ehrlichman was bitter because he felt very strongly he shouldn't resign. Although, he'd even indicated that Haldeman should go and maybe he should stay. And I took Ehrlichman out on the porch at Aspen, you've never been to Aspen, I suppose. That's the presidential cabin at Camp David, and it was springtime. The tulips had just come out. I'll never forget, we looked out across ... it was one of those gorgeous days when, you know, no clouds were on the mountain. And I was pretty emotionally wrought-up and I remember that I could just hardly bring myself to tell Ehrlichman that he had to go because I knew that he was going to resist it. I said, 'You know, John, when I went to bed last night ...' I said, 'I hoped.' I said, 'I hoped, I almost prayed I wouldn't wake up this morning.'

Well, it was an emotional moment, I think there were tears in our eyes, both of us. He said, 'Don't say that.' We went back in. They agreed to leave, and so it was late, but I did it. I cut off one arm and then cut off the other arm.

Now I can be faulted, I recognize it. Maybe I defended them too long. Maybe I tried to help them too much. But I was concerned about them. I was concerned about their families. I felt that they in their hearts felt they were not guilty. I felt they ought to have a chance at least to prove that they were not guilty, and I didn't want to be in the position of just sawing them off in that way. And I suppose you could sum it all up the way one of your British Prime Ministers summed it up, Gladstone, when he said that 'the first requirement for a Prime Minister is to be a good butcher.' Well, I think the great story as far as summary of Watergate is concerned, I, I did some of the big things rather well. I screwed up terribly in what was a little thing and became a big thing, but I will have to admit I wasn't a good butcher.

F: Would you go further than 'mistakes?' That you've explained how you got caught up in this thing ... you've explained your motives. I don't want to quibble about any of that, but just coming to the sheer substance, would you go further than 'mistakes?' The word that seems not enough for people to understand.

N: Well, what would would you express?

F: My goodness, that's a ... I think that there are three things since you

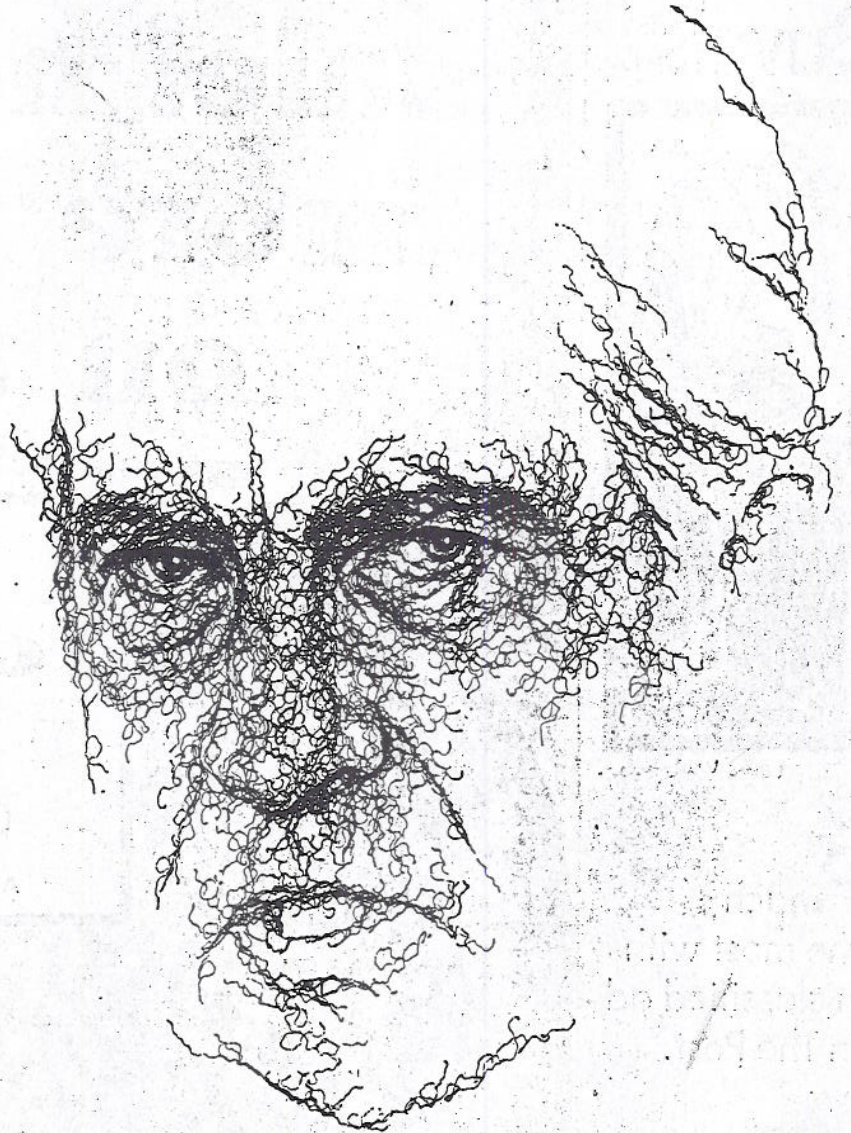
asked me, I would like to hear you say. I think the American people would like to hear you say: One is ... "there was probably more than mistakes, there was wrong-doing." Whether it was a crime or not? Yes, it may have been a crime too. Secondly "I did..." and I'm saying this without questioning the motives, right? "I did abuse the power I had as President, or not fulfill the totality of the oath of office." That's ... that's the second thing. And, thirdly, "I put the American people through two years of needless agony and I apologize for that." And I say that you've explained your motives. I think those are the categories. And I know how difficult it is for anyone and most of all you, but I think that people need to hear it, and I think unless you say it you're going to be haunted for the rest of your life.

N: I well remember that when I let Haldeman and Ehrlichman know that they were to resign, that I had Ray Price bring in the final draft of the speech that I was to make the next night. And I said to him, "Ray," I said, "if you think I ought to resign," I said, "put that in too, because I feel responsible." Even though I did not feel that I had engaged in these activities consciously. Insofar as the knowledge of or participation in the break-in, the approval of hush-money, the approval of clemency, et cetera. The various charges that have been made. Well, he didn't put it in. And I must say that at that time I seriously considered whether I shouldn't resign. But, on the other hand, I feel that I owe it to his-

tory to point out that from that time on April 30, until I resigned on August 9, I did some things that were good for this country. We had the second and third summits. I think one of the major reasons I stayed in office was my concern about keeping the China initiative, the Soviet initiative, the Vietnam fragile peace agreement, and the added dividend; the first breakthrough in moving toward, not love, but at least not war in the Mideast.

F: You've —

N: And now coming back to the whole point of whether I should have resigned then and how I feel now. Let me say, I ... just didn't make mistakes in this period. I think some of my mistakes that I regret most deeply came with the statements that I made afterwards. Some of those statements were misleading. I notice, for example, the editor of the Washington Post, the managing editor, Ben Bradlee, wrote a couple or three months ago, something to the effect that as far as his newspaper was concerned, he said, "We don't print the truth. We print what we know. We print what people tell us, and this means that we print lies." I would say that the statements that I



By George Rebh for The Washington Post

made afterwards, were ... on the big issues, true; that I was not involved in the matters that I have spoken to ... about; not involved in the break-in; that I did not engage in the ... and participate in, or approve the payment of money or the authorization of clemency, which of course were the essential elements of the cover-up. That was true.

But the statements were misleading in exaggerating in that enormous political attack I was under. It was a five-front war with a fifth column. I had a partisan Senate committee staff. We had a partisan, special prosecutor staff. We had a partisan media. We had a partisan Judiciary Committee staff in the fifth column. Now under all these circumstances my reactions in some of the statements and press conferences and so forth after that, I want to say right here and now: I said things that were not true. Most of them were fundamentally true on the

big issues, but without going as far as I should have gone and saying perhaps that I had considered other things, but had not done them.

F: Well ... you mean that ...

N: And, for all those things I have a very deep regret.

F: You got caught up in something ...

N: Yeah.

F: ... and then it snowballed.

N: It snowballed. And it was my fault. I'm not blaming anybody else. I'm simply saying to you that as far as I'm concerned, I not only regret it. I indicated my own beliefs in this matter when I resigned. People didn't think it was enough to admit mistakes, fine. If they want me to get down and grovel on the floor, no. Never. Because I don't believe I should. On the other hand there are some friends who say, "Just face them down. There was a conspiracy to get you." There may have been. I don't know what the CIA had to do.

Some of their shenanigans have yet to be told according to a book I read recently. I don't know what was going on in some Republican, some Democratic circles, as far as the so-called impeachment lobby was concerned. However, I don't go with the idea that there ... that what brought me down was a coup, a conspiracy, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. I brought myself down. I gave 'em a sword. And they stuck it in, and they twisted it with relish. And I guess if I'd been in their position, I'd a done the same thing.

F: But what I'm really saying is that in addition to the untrue statements that you've mentioned, could you just say, with conviction, I mean, not because I want you to say it, that you did do some covering up? We're not talking legalistically now, I just want the facts. I mean, that you did do some covering up. That there were a series of times when maybe, overwhelmed by your loyalties, or whatever else, but as you look back at the record, you behaved partially protecting your friends, or maybe yourself, and that in fact you were, to put it at its most simple, a part of a cover-up at times?

N: No I... I again, I again respectfully will not quibble with you about the use of the terms. However, before using

the term, I think it's very important for me to make clear what I did not do and what I did do. And then I will answer your question quite directly. I did not in the first place, commit a ... the crime of obstruction of justice. Because I did not have the motive required for the commission of that crime.

F: We've ... we've had our discussion on that, and we disagree on that, but that's ...

N: The lawyers can argue that. I did

not commit, in my view, an impeachable offense. Now the House has ruled overwhelming that I did. Of course, that was only an indictment and would have to be tried in the Senate. I might have won. I might have lost. But even if I'd won in the Senate by a vote or two, I would have been crippled and the ... in any event, for six months the country couldn't afford having the President in the dock in the United States Senate, and there can never be an impeachment in the future in this country without voluntarily impeaching himself. I have impeached myself. That speaks for itself.

F: How do you mean, "I have impeached myself?"

N: By resigning. That was a voluntary impeachment. And now what does that mean in terms of whether I... you're wanting me to say that I... participated in an illegal cover-up? No. Now, when you come to the period, and this is the critical period, that when you come to the period of March 21st on, when Dean gave his legal opinion that certain things, actions taken by Haldeman, Ehrlichman, Mitchell, etcetera, and even by himself, amounted to a legal cover-up and so forth. Then I was in a very different position, and during that period, I will admit, that I started acting as lawyer for their defense. I will admit that acting as lawyer for their defense, I was not prosecuting the case. I will admit that during that period, rather than acting primarily in my role as the chief law enforcement officer in the United States of America, or at least with responsibility for the law enforcement, because the attorney general is the chief law enforcement officer, but as the one with the chief responsibility for seeing that the laws of the United States are enforced, that I did not meet that responsibility. And to the extent that I did not meet that responsibility. To the extent that within the law, and in some cases going right to the edge of the law in trying to advise Ehrlichman and Haldeman and all the rest as to how best to present their cases, because I thought they were legally innocent, that I came to the edge. And under the circumstances, I would have to say that a reasonable person could call that a cover-up. I didn't think of it as a cover-up. I didn't intend it to cover-up. Let me say, if I intended to coverup, believe me, I'd a done it. You know how I could 'a done it? So easily? I could have done it immediately after the election simply by giving clemency to everybody and the whole thing would have gone away. I couldn't do that because I said clemency was wrong. But now we come down to the key point. And let me answer it in my own way about how do I feel about the American people? I

mean how, whether I should have resigned earlier, or what I should say to them now. Well, that forces me to rationalize now and give you a carefully prepared and cropped statement. I didn't expect this question, frankly though, so I'm not going to give you that, but I can tell you this ...

F: Nor did I.

N: ... I can tell you this: I think I said it all, in, in one of those moments that, that you're not thinking. Sometimes you say the things that are really in your heart. When you're thinking in advance, then you say things, you know, are tailored to the audience. I had a lot of difficult meetings those last days before I resigned, and, and the most difficult one and the only one where I broke into tears, frankly, except for that very brief session with Ehrlichman up at Camp David. It was the first time I cried since Eisenhower died. I met with all of my key supporters just a half-hour before going on television. For 25 minutes, we all sat around in the Oval Office. Men that I'd come to Congress with. Democrats and Republicans. About half and half, wonderful men. And at the very end, after saying, well, thank you for all your support during these tough years. Thank you for the ... particularly for what you've done to help us end the draft, and bring home the POWs and have a chance for building a generation of peace, which I could see the dream that I had possibly being shattered. And, thank you for your friendship, little acts of friendship over the years, you know, you sort of remember, you know, with a birthday card and the rest. Then, suddenly, you haven't got much more to say, and half the people around the table were crying. Les Arends, Illinois, bless him, he was shaking, sobbing, and I get ... just can't stand seeing somebody else cry, and that ended it for me. And I just, well, I must say, I sort of cracked up. Started to cry, pushed my chair back, and then I blurted it out, and I said, "I'm sorry. I just hope I haven't left you ... let you down." Well, when I said, "I just hope I haven't let you down," that said it all. I had. I let down my friends. I let down the country. I let down our system of government and the dreams of all those young people that ought to get into government, but I think it's all too corrupt and the rest. Most of all, I let down an opportunity that I would have had for 2½ years to proceed on great projects and programs for building a lasting peace, which has been my dream, as you know from our first interview in 1968, before I had any ... thought I might even win that year. I didn't tell you I didn't think I might win, but I

wasn't sure. Yep, I ... I, I let the American people down, and I have to carry that burden with me for the rest of my life.

My political life is over. I will never yet, and never again have an opportunity to serve in any official position. Maybe I can give a little advice from time to time. And, so, I can only say that in answer to your question, that while technically, I did not commit a crime, an impeachable offense ... there are legalisms. As far as the handling of this matter is concerned, it was so botched up: I made so many bad judgments. The worst ones, mistakes of the heart, rather than the head, as I pointed out. But let me say, a man in that top judge ... top job, he's gotta have a heart, but his head must always rule his heart.

F: This has ... this has been more —

N: Been tough for you? (Laughter)

F: Well, no, but I was going to say that I feel we've ...

N: Covered a lot of ground.

F: ... been through a life almost rather than an interview, and, we thank you.