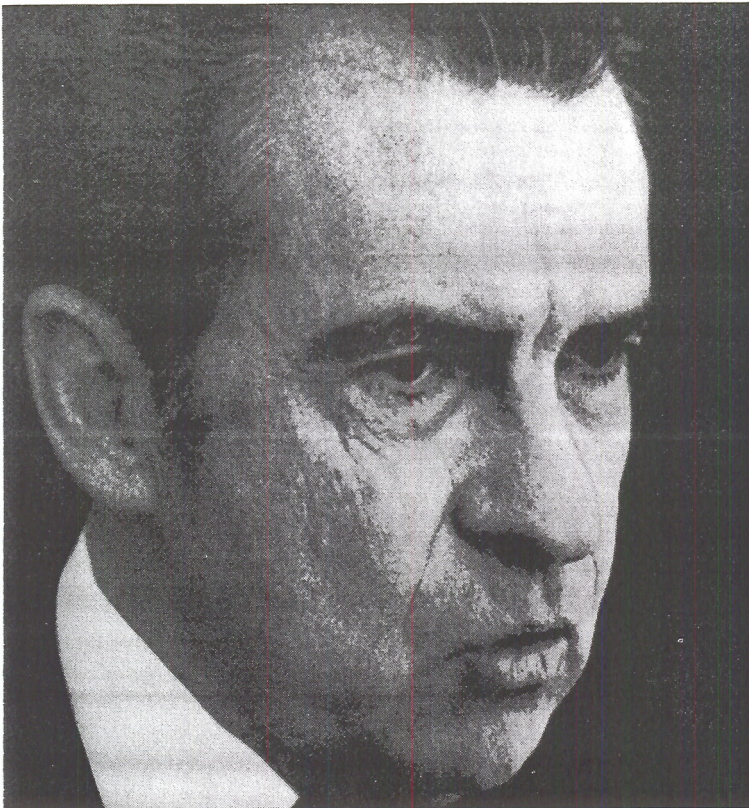


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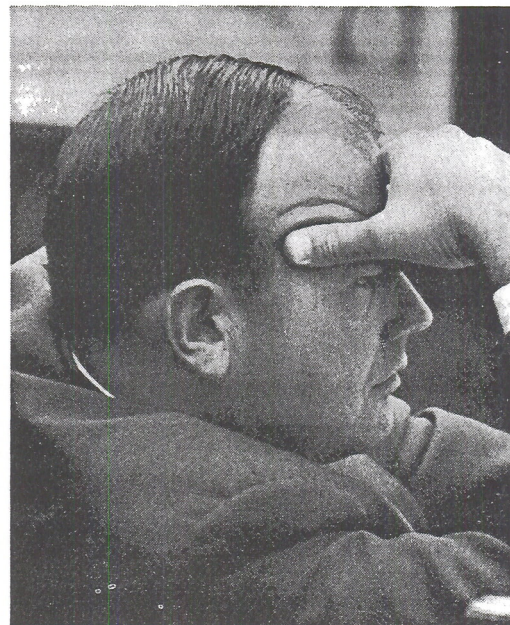
FRED J. MAROON—LOUIS MERCIER



DON CARL STEFFEN



STEVE NORTHUP



Clockwise from upper left: President Nixon after Watergate speech; Fired Presidential Counsel John W. Dean III; Former Nixon Adviser John Ehrlichman; Former White House Chief of Staff H.R. Haldeman; Former Attorney General Richard Kleindienst.

THE ADMINISTRATION/COVER STORY

Nixon's Nightmare: Fighting to Be Believed

HE had made his move. He had cleaned out his staff. He had faced the nation on TV. But Watergate still kept growing like a malignancy. Within less than a week after Richard Nixon had solemnly denied any personal involvement and promised to see justice done, one of his ousted aides threatened to implicate the President himself in a conspiracy to conceal White House involvement. The charge, whatever its ultimate authenticity and force, was only the latest of an incredible series of revelations and accusations that clouded the President's ability to govern and produced an unprecedented moral crisis for his Administration.

But first there came a remarkable and revealing interlude. On the day after his TV speech, the President strode solemnly into a meeting of his Cabinet. The members of his official family rose as one and applauded him. "I know that the American people are with you," said Secretary of State William Rogers. Added Republican National Chairman George Bush: "I want you to know that Republicans everywhere are strongly supporting you." White House Counsellor Anne Armstrong, the highest-ranking woman in the Administration, spoke up: "The people understand and appreciate what the President is doing."

Shambles. Fatigue lines marring his California-Florida tan ("he has aged ten or 15 years," said one dismayed adviser), the President expressed a mixture of gratitude, anger, determination. He praised two of his missing, newly removed aides, White House Chief of Staff H.R. Haldeman and Domestic Affairs Adviser John Ehrlichman, as "dedicated people." Looking at former Attorney General Richard Kleindienst, who also lost his job in the Watergate scandal shuffle, Nixon said, "We are going to miss you." Kleindienst replied, "It has been a privilege to serve with Richard Nixon"—and he left the room to more applause. Then the President's mood darkened and the old Nixon emerged. He assailed the "partisan" attacks from both the press and the Congress. "Their target was not Haldeman or Ehrlichman. I know well who their target is." Though Nixon did not identify himself as the target, everybody in the room fully understood.

He took a vindictive shot at Republican Senator Charles Percy for lead-

ing the passage of a Senate resolution urging the appointment of an independent prosecutor to dig into the deepening mess of Watergate. "Percy—his target is running for President," Nixon said. "He will never be as long as I'm around." Dry chuckling rose through the room, and one or two present clapped in approval. More calmly, the President concluded, "We have much to do. We must get on with it."

That meeting showed again the Nixon Administration's great capacity for self-deception, its strange isolation from reality. In the eyes of the country, the White House is a shambles. In a parliamentary democracy, the scandal would have toppled the government. The President's closest advisers were revealed as amoral men who considered themselves above the law in what they conceived to be their service to Richard Nixon. Arrogant for years with the Congress, with the bureaucracy, with the press, they were suddenly toppled from power in a sort of *Götterdämmerung* on the Potomac.

By last week, 17 of Nixon's associates and employees (see page 22) were under investigation by the Justice Department, the FBI, a federal grand jury or the U.S. Senate. The list will undoubtedly grow, and many could wind up behind bars for criminal activities committed while working for the President. These men had been selected by Nixon, helped lift him to power, took their ethical cues from him—and he had not yet publicly chastised any of them.

Every day brought new details that beggared the suspicions or fantasies of Nixon's enemies. Nothing seemed unbelievable any longer.

► John W. Dean III, who had been fired by the President as his chief counsel—ostensibly because he seemed hopelessly enmeshed in the Watergate concealments—told federal investigators that Nixon had personally congratulated him for helping cover up broad Nixon Administration involvement in the wiretapping. Dean claimed this had happened when he was called to Nixon's office last September, shortly after indictments were returned by a federal grand jury against only the seven men arrested at the time of the Watergate break-in. Dean described the meeting—in one version also attended by Bob Haldeman—as one full of "smiles." He

said that Nixon remarked to him: "Bob here tells me you've been doing fine work." If accurately reported by Dean, the meeting has grave implications. It means that Nixon knew some eight months ago that his high aides had worked to obstruct the various investigations in the case—and the President has been lying to the public about Wa-

UPI



NIXON SOON AFTER CHECKERS SPEECH (1952)
Responsibility, yes; blame, no.

tergate at least since that time. Dean's motives were certainly cloudy, and his story very much remains to be tested.

► Men on the White House payroll and directed by an assistant to Ehrlichman had broken into a psychiatrist's office with CIA equipment to obtain the psychiatric records of Daniel Ellsberg in order to find out about his "moral and emotional problems." The information, if not the method, had been specifically ordered up by the President. When Ehrlichman found out about the

THE NATION

break-in, he claims he merely told the burglars: "Don't do it again." His legal duty was to report the crime.

► Even more unbelievable, Ehrlichman only five weeks ago offered the job of FBI director to the judge presiding over the Ellsberg case, with the President himself making a brief appearance during the meeting.

► As previously reported (TIME, March 5), the FBI had tapped telephones of reporters and White House aides at Attorney General John Mitchell's direction in seeking leaks of Government information to the press. Last week Nixon ordered his aides not to answer any questions about those taps. The grounds for the gag: national security.

The episode of the Ellsberg psychiatrist raised particularly frightening questions. What kind of ethical climate does the President of the U.S. create when he orders his highest aides to pry into the morals and the state of mind



The Nixon Memorial.

How much did Nixon know about Watergate? The prevailing, serious answer: Much more than he has yet revealed (see Hugh Sidey's column on the subject page 19).

Even many Nixon critics are willing to believe that the President did not know in advance about the political-disruption campaign and the plans to bug the Democratic headquarters. But at the very least he created an atmosphere in the White House that led zealous aides to believe that they could go beyond the bounds of propriety and the law.

It is far harder to believe that after the Watergate arrests the President did not have at least a suspicion of the cover-up. If he was not suspicious, he knew even less about some of his own aides than the press did. How could so many of his loyal men lie to him so long? Why did Nixon wait until March to start a tough investigation of his own? And if Dean is right, of course, Nixon knew all about the concealment.

Over the weekend preceding the TV speech, Nixon retreated to the solitude of Camp David in Maryland's Catoctin Mountains accompanied by his Irish setter, King Timahoe, and his equally faithful speechwriter, Ray Price.

The dismissal of Haldeman and Ehrlichman, those two dour Germanic guardians of the Oval Office, seemed mandatory. Neither wanted to quit. Haldeman, a former J. Walter Thompson ad agency vice president from Los Angeles, had participated in all of Nixon's campaigns since 1956, when he was an advancement man for Nixon's re-election as Vice President. He had become probably the second most powerful man in the Government because he determined just who could see the President or whose memos would reach Nixon's desk. Ehrlichman, a Seattle bond lawyer who had been a U.C.L.A. classmate of Haldeman's, had joined the Nixon team as an advancement man in the 1960

campaign against John Kennedy. He had become almost the equivalent in domestic affairs of Henry Kissinger in foreign policy.

The pair's involvement in the Watergate case and related skulduggery could no longer be ignored. Haldeman was said by some federal investigators to control a secret cash fund, which was used to pay off the seven men arrested in the Watergate headquarters of the Democratic National Committee last June to keep them from implicating higher officials. He also was reported to have authorized a covert "dirty-tricks" drive against Democratic presidential candidates. As for Ehrlichman, in addition to his actions in the Ellsberg case, he had condoned the destruction of some files taken from the office of one of the Watergate wiretappers.

On Friday night, April 27, as Nixon gazed gloomily at the distant lights of Washington from the rustic presidential cabin in Camp David, Md., he knew his two longtime servants had to be sacrificed. He summoned Presidential Press Secretary Ronald Ziegler on Saturday and asked him to help prepare their resignation statements. Probably his closest remaining confidant, William Rogers, arrived to help advise him.

On Sunday, both Haldeman and Ehrlichman asked to see Nixon, still resisting the idea of quitting. Nixon said he had no choice. The meeting was intensely emotional. Explained one White House aide: "That was a traumatic thing to do. The President had seen more of them than he had of his own family. And they had seen more of him than they had of their families."

Attorney General Richard Kleindienst was also summoned to Camp David. Though he had not been implicated in the Watergate scandal, many of his associates had been—so many that he had, properly, withdrawn from the investigation. Also, under his direc-



of a man accused of stealing Government documents? Should the Government emulate the tactics of the accused? If the White House condoned that kind of treatment of a defendant, why would any Nixon aides expect him to object if they stooped to similar tactics against the men who more directly challenged Nixon's power, such as his potential opponents for President, or perhaps his critics in the Senate? Who might be next? Where does it stop? Declared one of the highest Administration officials last week: "When the Watergate bugging business came out, I felt moral indignation. But this stealing records from a man's psychiatrist—that is beyond indignation. It makes me physically sick."

The dominant question remained:

tion, the original Justice Department investigation and prosecution of the Watergate wiretappers had been lax and limited. No serious attempt had been made to find out who had ordered the wiretappers to break into and bug the Democratic National Headquarters last June, who had paid them, or who had approved the whole operation. Kleindienst offered his resignation voluntarily, but he was dismayed when Nixon insisted that his departure be announced at the same time as those of Ehrlichman, Haldeman and John Dean.

Dean, handsome and a smooth operator, had risen to his high-level post with virtually no experience as a practicing attorney, but with frequent demonstrations of loyalty to Nixon. But when his name became deeply involved with Watergate, he started scurrying for self-protection. He went to Justice Department prosecutors and told about the meetings he had attended at which the Watergate wiretapping plans were discussed. He revealed that former Attorney General John Mitchell had attended the meetings. Dean has asked for immunity against prosecution from the Justice Department in return for telling all he knows. So far, it has not been granted. He now could be making his sensational charges in an attempt to convince prosecutors that the knowledge he has would be worth their giving him the immunity.

The Speech. On Monday, Ziegler announced the stunning staff changes in Washington. Nixon remained at Camp David to craft his TV speech with Writer Price. He arrived at his Oval Office just 90 seconds before air time, looking and sounding nervous. A bust of Abraham Lincoln and a photo of Nixon's family had been placed within camera range. The occasion was reminiscent of Nixon's celebrated Checkers speech of 1952, in which he admitted that he had drawn on a secret \$18,000 campaign fund (an almost touchingly modest figure by current measurement) that had been donated by California political supporters, but denied using it for any personal, nonpolitical purpose.

The Watergate speech was disconcertingly ambivalent. Nixon resorted to an odd and habitual rhetorical device, explaining—as he often has done in his past speeches on Viet Nam—that he was rejecting “the easiest course” and pursuing the more difficult one. In this case, “the easiest course would be for me to blame those to whom I delegated the responsibility to run the campaign.” Placing the entire blame on subordinates, however, would not have been the easier course—because it would not have washed. To avoid accepting responsibility for the actions of so many men acting in his name would have been impossible.

Nevertheless, Nixon proceeded, in effect, to blame others by distancing himself from their activities. He had been preoccupied during the 1972 campaign, he said, with his “goal of bring-

THE PRESIDENCY/HIGH SIDEY

Guilty Until Proven Innocent?

AT lunch a former Nixon Cabinet officer glumly wondered whether the President could survive the Watergate scandal. In that way he tacitly signaled his own doubts that Richard Nixon was innocent.

At breakfast in another part of Washington still another former Cabinet officer showed the same doubts. If evidence surfaced linking the President to the bugging or the cover-up, he said, he did not want to hear about it or think about it.

All last week Republican and Democratic Senators talked the same way in their private moments. Even some members of the federal judiciary confessed to old friends that although they did not want to believe that the President was implicated their years of experience in the great legal struggles of this nation left them, at this time at least, with the sad sense that Nixon had played a key role in the tragic drama.

If George Gallup's figures are correct—that half the people of the U.S. do not believe the President's protestations of innocence—the percentage of disbelievers in the federal city must run to 80% or 90%. All of this and more, most of it bubbling beneath the surface, point up Richard Nixon's staggering problem of restoring his credibility. While the law states that a man is innocent until proved guilty, the perverse ways of human nature and the singular circumstances of Watergate have reversed this fundamental rule. Nixon now stands guilty in many minds until he proves himself innocent.

This city has remained Democratic despite Nixon's efforts to make it bipartisan, so its feelings tend to be exaggerated. The fraternity of ex-White House aides believes that it would be impossible for a President to remain as ignorant of events as the White House indicates. “You don't lie to a President,” said one former White House aide. “I can't imagine any man working with the President who would keep such facts from him,” said another.

“I never entered the Oval Office without being awed,” insisted one veteran of two Administrations. “You can't lie in that atmosphere. Too much is at stake.”

It is this repeal of human nature that baffles even the Republicans who still stand with Nixon. The “I run my own campaign” declaration and the “supercrat” image, which have been so assiduously fostered by the Nixon people for years now, are declared “inoperative.” All this defies conventional logic—and that is the President's problem.

There are, nonetheless, a few people who claim that is precisely the case, that Nixon, as no other President in history, lived aloof while his men did the dirty work. We knew that Nixon was isolated, but we did not know how much. While we proclaimed the power of John N. Mitchell and H.R. Haldeman, we fell far short of reality. Perhaps Nixon was subjected to a form of presidential management that the outside world never knew and was never allowed to see. Perhaps these singularly antisocial men imposed their own withdrawal syndrome on the Oval Office, letting Nixon sink excessively into the lonely quiet that he relishes and believes he needs in order to husband his energy. Richard J. Whalen, once a Nixon campaign speechwriter and thinker, quit in disgust before Nixon entered the White House over just that issue—the specter of a President being in a “soundproof, shockproof bubble.” Back in 1972 Whalen wrote: “No potential danger is more ominous in a free society than the secret leaching away of presidential authority from the man the people chose to the men he chooses. To whom are they responsible? To him and their own consciences, of course, which is the essence of the danger when a President is protected even from the knowledge of what is said and done in his name.”

Not many are buying Whalen's observations yet. But if they are true and that is the explanation for this bizarre episode, then what a terrible tragedy it is for Nixon and the nation that those men were allowed to hide in their offices and keep their special operation such a secret. Had we known more, Nixon might not stand so suspect today. Better yet, giving the President the benefit of every doubt, had there been less White House secrecy, Watergate might never have been conceived.

NIXON IN THE OVAL OFFICE WITH (FROM LEFT) HALDEMAN, CHAPIN & EHRlichMAN

