



NIXON ON TAPE 1: The day they worked out



John Mitchell: Would he agree to shoulder the blame?

A 'damn painful' day in the life of Richard Nixon

Lewis Chester provides the setting for three long conversations from the Nixon tape transcripts. All took place on the same day, Saturday, April 14, 1973. Their object was to resolve the Watergate crisis once and for all...

MAY 5 1974

Watergate 11

how to make John Mitchell the scapegoat



THE NATURE of President Nixon's White House under stress emerges with most dramatic clarity from the transcripts for April 14, 1973. Although the record is disjointed, and sometimes confused, it provides the clearest insight into the elaborate scapegoating techniques developed to deal with the Watergate situation. The man made to measure for the role was John Mitchell, Nixon's one-time closest ally and confidant.

There was no time to lose. The strategy for containing the situation through John Dean, the president's legal counsel, had failed. The middle echelon figures like Jeb Magruder, Mitchell's deputy at the Committee to Re-elect the President, were getting ready to talk to the grand jury. The press and the Senate Watergate Committee were full of suspicions of presidential involvement in Watergate. The only way out seemed to be for the President to "crack" the case first.

For one day it seemed that it might be done, but there was one major problem: how could Mitchell be made to appreciate the inestimable advantages of a "scenario" that would almost certainly land him in jail. The President and his two closest aides, John Ehrlichman and Bob Haldeman, examined it at an elaborate role-playing session in the Executive Office building that morning.

Ehrlichman: I must say I am impressed with the argument that the President should be personally involved in it at this stage.

Nixon: Right. I agree.

Ehrlichman: Old John Dean had an interesting—got a phone call from him about 12.30—

Nixon: And you were here—

Ehrlichman: Oh, no. I was working on something I'll tell you about here.

Nixon: What did you do?

Ehrlichman: Well, not much last night.

Nixon: You mean another subject? Oh, no.

Haldeman: There is no other subject.

Ehrlichman: No. I'll tell you, last night I got home, I decided that I would sit down and try to put on paper a report to you what I have been doing since you asked me to get into this.

Nixon: Right.

Ehrlichman: I am concerned about the overall aspect of this and I want to talk about that before—I don't know what your timing is like.

Nixon: No problem.

Ehrlichman: We'll probably get back to it.

Nixon: Got plenty of time.

Ehrlichman: But Dean called and he said, "All right, here's a scenario which we've all been trying to figure out to make this go." He says, "The President calls Mitchell into his office on Saturday. He says, 'John, you've got to do this. And here are the facts: bing, bing, bing, bing.' And you pull this paper out here. 'And you've got to do this.' And Mitchell stonewalls you. So then John says, 'I don't know why you're asking me down here. You can't ask a man to do a thing like that. I need a lawyer. I don't

know what I am facing—you just really can't expect me to do this.' So the President says, 'Well, John, I have no alternative.' And with that the President calls the US Attorney and says, 'I, the President of the United States of America and leader of the free world, want to go before the grand jury on Monday.'"

Nixon: I won't even comment on that.

Haldeman: That's a silly—

Nixon: Typical of the thinking of—

Ehrlichman: We're running out every line. So that was 12.30 this morning. I, but I—

Nixon: I go before the grand jury. That's like putting Bob on national television . . .



'It's clear
. . . guilty
as hell'

Ehrlichman: Let's take it just as far as you call Mitchell to the Oval office as, a—

Nixon: No.

Ehrlichman: I'm essentially convinced that Mitchell will understand this thing.

Nixon: Right.

Ehrlichman: And that if he goes in it redounds to the Administration's advantage. If he doesn't then we're—

Nixon: How does it redound to our advantage?

Ehrlichman: That you have a report from me based on three weeks' work; that when you got it, you immediately acted to call Mitchell in as the provable wrong-doer, and you say, "My

God, I've got a report here. And it's clear from this report that you are guilty as hell. Now, John, for [expletive deleted] sake go on in there and do what you should. And let's get this thing cleared up and get it off the country's back and move on." And—

Haldeman: Plus the other side of this is that that's the only way to beat it now.

Nixon: Well—

Haldeman: From John Mitchell's personal viewpoint that's the only salvation for John Mitchell. I see no other way. And, obviously, once you've had it, you've got to admit—

Ehrlichman: Can I put in a larger picture on this? We kind of live day to day for these things, and forget.

Nixon: Yeah.

Ehrlichman: The perspective then will be put on this period.

Haldeman: Yeah.

Ehrlichman: Three months later.

Nixon: The point is whether or not, I think I've got the larger picture, all right, and I mean, in this regards, the point is this that we need some action before, in other words, is like my feeling about having the grand jury do it and the court system do it rather than [the] Ervin Committee. Now we want the President to do it rather than the grand jury.

Ehrlichman: No.

Nixon: And I agree with that.

Ehrlichman: Well, you're doing it in aid of the grand jury.

Nixon: No. I didn't mean rather than the grand jury but I mean to worm the truth, now look, the grand jury doesn't drag him in, he goes in as a result of the President's asking him to go in. . . .

Ehrlichman: I'm trying to write the news-magazine story for next Monday.

Nixon: Right.

Ehrlichman: Monday week, and if it is that "Grand Jury indicts Mitchell"—

Nixon: Right.

Ehrlichman: "The White House may have its cover up finally collapse last week when the grand jury indicted John Mitchell and Jeb Magruder."

Nixon: Right.

Ehrlichman: "Cracking the case was the testimony of a number of peripheral witnesses who, each of whom contributed to developing a cross triangulation and permitted the grand jury to analyse it" and so on and so forth. "The final straw that broke the camel's back was the investigator's discovery of this and that the other thing." That's one set of facts. And then the tag on that is, "White House Press Secretary Ron Ziegler said that the White House would have no comment."

Nixon: I know. I know. It can't be done.

Ehrlichman: The other one goes: "Events moved swiftly last week, after the President was presented with a report indicating for the first time that suspicion of John Mitchell and Jeb Magruder as ringleaders in the Watergate break-in were facts substantiated by considerable evidence. The President then dispatched so and so to do this and that and maybe to see Mitchell or something of that kind and these efforts resulted in Mitchell going to the US Attorney's office on Monday morning at 9 o'clock, asking to testify before the grand jury. Charges of cover-up by the White House were materially dispelled by the diligent efforts of the President and his aides in moving on evidence which came to their hands in the closing days of the previous week."

Nixon: I'll buy that.

Ehrlichman: OK . . .

Nixon: See, the difference is that the problem of my position up to this time has been, quite frankly, nobody ever told me a damn bit of this, that Mitchell



Haldeman, Ehrlichman and Nixon get together: what can persuade Mitchell to an "honourable course" that may jail him?

was guilty.

Ehrlichman: That's right.

Haldeman: Well, we still don't know. I will still argue that I think the scenario that was spun out, that Dean spun out on Mitchell, is basically the right one. I don't think Mitchell did order the Watergate bugging and I don't think he was specifically aware of the Watergate bugging at the time it was instituted. I honestly don't.

Ehrlichman: That may be.

[Material unrelated to Presidential actions deleted . . .]

Nixon: I don't think there's anybody that can talk to Mitchell except somebody that knows this case. There's one of two people. I can verse myself in it enough to know the thing, but I am not sure that I want to know. I want to say, Mitchell, look, I think that the attorneys for the committee, O'Brien, and I found this out, and I found out that, and I found that, and the grand jury has told me this, that—I just don't know, you know I mean? They talk about my going out—I am not trying to duck it, I just, John—and, I'll take this one on. The thing, John, is that there's nobody really that can do it except you. And I know how Mitchell feels. But

you conducted this investigation. I would, the way I would do it—Bob, you critique this—I'd go up, and I'd say, "The President has asked me to see you." That you have come today with this report, that these are the total facts indicating, of course, that the grand jury is moving swiftly, Magruder will be indicted, you think. Under the circumstances, I am suggesting—can't be in a position—that you [unintelligible] the grand jury and say I am responsible. I did not know, but I assume the responsibility. Nobody in the White House is involved, etc., and so on. We did try to help these defendants afterwards, yes. He probably would not deny that anyway. He probably was not asked that at an earlier time. But the defendants are entitled to that a—

Ehrlichman: But you're glossing that. I don't think you can do that.

Nixon: All right.

Ehrlichman: I wouldn't want to—

Nixon: All right.

Ehrlichman: I wouldn't want to have you—

Nixon: All right. Fine. Fine. What would you say to him?

Ehrlichman: I'd say, ah—

Nixon: [Unintelligible.]

Ehrlichman: I'd say you know, face up up, John. And, you know. I've listened to Magruder, and he's, in my opinion he's about to blow and that's the last straw.

Nixon: And, also, Hunt is going to testify, too, we understand.

Ehrlichman: We've got to think of this thing from the standpoint of the President and I know you have been right all along and that's the reason you've been conducting yourself as you have.

Nixon: Right.

Ehrlichman: It's now time, I think, to rethink what best serves the President and also what best serves you in the ultimate outcome of this thing.

Nixon: Right.

Ehrlichman: I think we have to recognise that you are not going to escape indictment. There's no way. Far better that you should be prosecuted on

information from the US Attorney based on your conversation with the US Attorney, than on an indictment by a grand jury of 15 blacks and three whites after this kind of an investigation.

Nixon: Right. And the door of the White House. We're trying to protect it.

Ehrlichman: If the grand jury goes this way you've been dragged in by the heels. If you go down first thing Monday morning or yet this afternoon, and talk to the US Attorney, and say, OK, "I want to make a statement," then, two things happen. One, you get credit for coming forward. Two, you serve the President's interest. And I am here on behalf of the

Nixon: Let me put it this way. I can't watch [unintelligible]. Mitchell—this is going to break him up.

Haldeman: As to Watergate.

Nixon: Oh, I know, I know, and I don't think so. My idea is—it would be better, frankly, after Mitchell is indicted and then if we care—I don't think that is very good. I think it is a lot better for us to be forthcoming before he is indicted, not after. That problem for you to consider.

Ehrlichman: You asked me, "Do I want to cave now?" My feeling about this whole thing is that we ought to be looking at every nook and cranny for every device that there is to be forthcoming.

Nixon: Right.

Ehrlichman: And this is a place where we could do it. My sense of this whole case is that our best defence is that the President always wanted this to happen, and that we weren't being cute about this at all.

Nixon: All right, let's come to this. Ah, regarding the other side, he said: "Well, see our heads up there on the dock, and act like convicted criminals and it'd be bad for the White House. You're going to have that continuing thing—cover-up, cover-up, cover-up."

Haldeman: Rape is inevitable.

Nixon: That's the problem.

Nixon: We've come full circle on the Mitchell thing. The Mitchell thing must come first.



'Say the evidence isn't Jeb'

That is something today. We've got to make this move today. If it fails, just to get back to our position I think you ought to talk to Magruder.

Haldeman: I agree.

Nixon: And you tell Magruder, Now Jeb, this evidence is coming in you ought to go to the grand jury. Purge yourself if you're

perjured and tell this whole story.

Haldeman: I think we have to.

Nixon: Then, well, Bob, you don't agree with that?

Haldeman: No. I do.

Nixon: Because I think we do have to. Third, we've got the problem—

Haldeman: You should talk to [unintelligible] first though.

Ehrlichman: What really matters, Bob, is that either way—

Nixon: Yeah.

Ehrlichman: Who is ever [unintelligible].

Nixon: You see, the point is—

Haldeman: But don't use Jeb as a basis for the conversation.

Nixon: Yeah. Say that the evidence is not Jeb. I'd just simply say that these other people are involved in this. With Jeb. Although he may blow—

Ehrlichman: I can say that I have come to the conclusion that it is both John and Jeb who are diable. . . .

Nixon: How was Dean's—incidentally, what is the, is the diability of Hunt? I am thinking of the payoff thing.

Haldeman: Yeah.

Nixon: This business, somebody in—Dean, Dean. Dean asked,

told me about the problem of Hunt's lawyer. This was a few weeks ago. Needed sixty thousand or forty thousand dollars or something like that. You remember? I said I don't know where you can get it. I said, I mean, I frankly felt he might try to get it, but I didn't know where. And then, he left it up with Mitchell and Mitchell said it was taken care of and after [unintelligible]. Did he talk to you about that?

Ehrlichman: He talked to me about it. I said, John, I wouldn't have the vaguest notion where to get it.

Nixon: Yeah.

Ehrlichman: I saw him later in the day. I saw Mitchell later in the day—

Nixon: What happened?

Ehrlichman: And he just said, "It's taken care of." . . .

Ehrlichman: Mitchell is roughly two hours away, at best.

Nixon: I think, I think he's going to come down and do it today. I think, Bob, I think you have to go out and call him now. And ask him if he can come down.

Ehrlichman: Tell him we'll send an airplane for him.

Haldeman: [Unintelligible].

Nixon: Yeah.

Haldeman: By the time we get a plane mobilised and up there it takes longer. We'll send it if he is playing golf or something.

Nixon: I know. He may be gone. But the point I made was this

Ehrlichman: [Unintelligible] I think we're going to be—well, you can put

Nixon: We did not cover up, though, that's what decides, that's

what's decides.

Haldeman: [Unintelligible] to go testify.

Nixon: My point is that if three of us talk here, I realise that, frankly—Mitchell's case is a killer. Dean's case is the question. And I do not consider him guilty. Now that's all there is to that. Because if he—if that the case, then half the staff is guilty.

Ehrlichman: That's it. He's guilty of really no more except in degree.

Nixon: That's right. Then others.

Ehrlichman: Then a lot of—

Nixon: And frankly then I have

been since a week ago, two weeks ago.

Ehrlichman: Well, you see, that isn't, that kind of knowledge that we had was action knowledge, like the kind of knowledge that I put together last night. I hadn't known really what had been bothering me this week.

Nixon: Yeah.

Ehrlichman: But what's been bothering me is—

Nixon: That with knowledge, we're still not doing anything.

Ehrlichman: Right.

Nixon: That's exactly right. The law and order. That's the way I am. You know it's a pain for me to do it—the Mitchell thing is damn painful.

Ehrlichman: Sure.

Nixon: Is he coming?

Haldeman: Yes, sir. I said, "Do you want to let us know what plane you're on so we can pick you up?" He said, "No, let me [unintelligible]."

Nixon: Run over this. Do you delay your meeting with Magruder until you see him?

Ehrlichman: I don't think it



'37 seconds to your doorstep'

really matters. It runs over this whole thing and having knowledge and having to act on it.

Nixon: My point is that I think you better see Magruder before you see him. No. I guess you're—

Ehrlichman: It doesn't matter, in my opinion.

Nixon: You should see Magruder today. That's the main thing.

Ehrlichman: I think we ought to make a similar call to Magruder.

Haldeman: I should do it. I should call Jeb and say that things have developed and all this and—

Nixon: Yeah.

Haldeman: Well, I didn't say that to Mitchell.

Ehrlichman: It doesn't matter.

Nixon: Oh, Mitchell. He knows better, say that to Jeb.

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Haldeman: When I say it to Jeb it'll take probably 37 seconds for him to turn up on your doorstep.

Nixon: Oh, that's all right. It's all right. I think we should do it before you see Mitchell. Of you, do you feel uncomfortable about telling him?

Ehrlichman: No. As I say, I think it's almost immaterial as to which I see first. It's the fact of doing it rather than any particular sequence. . . .

Nixon: I would, also, though. I'd put a couple of things in and say, Jeb, let me just start here by telling you the President



'This thing has got to stop'

holds great affection for you and for your family. I was just thinking, I was thinking last night, this poor little kid.

Haldeman: Yeah, beautiful kids.

Nixon: Lovely wife and all the rest, it just breaks your heart. And say this, "this is a very painful message for me to bring—I've been asked to give you, but I must do it and it is that." Put it right out that way. Also, I would first put that in so that he knows I have personal affection. That's the way the so-called clemency's got to be handled. Do you see, John?

Ehrlichman: I understand.
Haldeman: Do the same thing with Mitchell.

Nixon: Oh, Mitchell? Well you could say to Mitchell. I think you've got to say that this is the toughest decision he's made and it's tougher than Cambodia, May 8 and December 18 [date of decision to bomb Hanoi in 1972] put together. And that he just can't bring himself to talk to you about it. Just can't do it. And he directed that I talk to you. You see, what I am doing, John is putting you in the same position as President Eisenhower put me in with Adams. But John Mitchell, let me say, will never go to prison. I agree with that assumption. I think what will happen is that he will put on the damnest defence that—the point you have, your suggestion is that he not put on a defence. You're suggesting he go in and say, "look, I am responsible here?" "I had no knowledge but I am responsible?" And nobody else had—that's it. Myself. That's it, and I want to. This thing has got to stop. Innocent people are being smeared in this thing. . . .

Nixon: What are you going to suggest that he do, John?

Ehrlichman: Well, if he asks me, what do you want me to do? I am going to say, "If you

what I ask you, what I would suggest, you would pick up the phone or you would allow me to pick it up and call Earl Silbert and make an appointment today and go over and talk with the US Attorney about this case with counsel."

Haldeman: I'll see the President and tell him you're going to go.

Ehrlichman: No.

Haldeman: OK.

Ehrlichman: "Well, you're asking me in effect to go down and enter a guilty plea." And I would say, "Look, John, you're the only one who knows the basic [unintelligible] to go and to decide whether there's any room with what you know and the ultimate action of the jury through which you might pass unpunished. I can't make that judgment for you and I don't have any right to make it for you. All I'm saying is that if we're looking at this thing from the standpoint of the President, today is probably the last day that you can take that action, if you're ever going to take it to do the President a bit of good."

Nixon: "Do you realise, John, that from the White House, I mean, Colson, maybe Haldeman are going to get involved in this thing too?"

Ehrlichman: Well, here again, we're looking at this thing not from the standpoint of any other individual. "We are looking at



Jeb Magruder: "Lovely wife and all the rest, it just breaks your heart," said Nixon.

it from the standpoint of the Presidency and that's the only way I think you and I can approach this."

Nixon: And I'd go further and say, "The President has said let the chips fall where they may. He will not furnish cover for anybody." I think you ought to say that.

Ehrlichman: That's right. . . . Now, let's suppose Mitchell turns us down cold, and says I'm going to preserve my rights. I'm going to fight every inch of turf and so on and so forth. OK. That's right. But at least you, having accumulated all

this knowledge this week, have tried to get this thing out, so that sometime two months from now, three months from now, a year from now when there's a panic you can say on the 14th of April

Nixon: It's the 13th.

Ehrlichman: 14th—14th day of April.

Nixon: This is the 14th—Saturday.

Ehrlichman: Yeah. Friday was the 13th, yesterday. On April 14th—

Nixon: No, seriously, as I have told both of you, the boil had to be pricked. In a very different sense—that's what December 18th was about. We have to prick the boil and take the heat. Now that's what we are doing here. We're going to prick the boil and take the heat. I—am I overstating?

Ehrlichman: No. I think that's right. The idea is, this will prick the boil. . . .

Ehrlichman: I would like a record of my conversation with both Magruder and Mitchell. I think personally that maybe I ought to get my office geared up so that I can do that.

Nixon: [unintelligible] or do you remove that equipment?

Ehrlichman: Yeah.

Nixon: I do here for my meetings with Henry but I don't know.

Ehrlichman: I think it's better if I do it over there.

Nixon: Why don't you just gear it up? Do you know, do you have a way to gear it up.

Ehrlichman: Yeah. I've done it before.

Nixon: Well go gear it. No, no. Well, wait a minute. No, I think that's too—

Haldeman: [unintelligible].

Nixon: Who will? I would just have it so that you will know that what we've got here. I don't want to hear the record, I want to say. So these guys, don't have me hear the record.

Haldeman: [Unintelligible]. I don't know whether to tell you or not, but there is certainly a purpose for me to sit in on the meeting.

Nixon: I think you should.

Haldeman: Maybe that's it. That would give you a witness for one thing. If either of those people were questioned and you don't have anybody else, you've got a problem.

Nixon: And then when Mitchell says, Bob, you know you were in this too. What's Bob Haldeman say?

Ehrlichman: Well, he won't. He won't.

Nixon: I think, Bob, shouldn't sit in because Haldeman is. No. I think, so. That gives you the witness. And also Mitchell feels he's got a friend there. And he knows that you're not just doing this on your own, freewheeling it. . . .

The President met Haldeman and Ehrlichman in the Oval Office after lunch. But Ehrlich-

man had dismal news of Mitchell's failure to co-operate.

Nixon: All finished?

Ehrlichman: Yes, sir. He's an innocent man in his heart and in his mind and he does not intend to move off that position. He appreciated the message of the good feeling between you and him.

Nixon: He got that, huh?

Ehrlichman: He appreciated my—

Nixon: How did you get him here? Give us a little chapter and verse.

Ehrlichman: Well, I started out by saying that the subject was so difficult for you to talk to him personally about that you had asked me to do this.

Nixon: What did you next say?

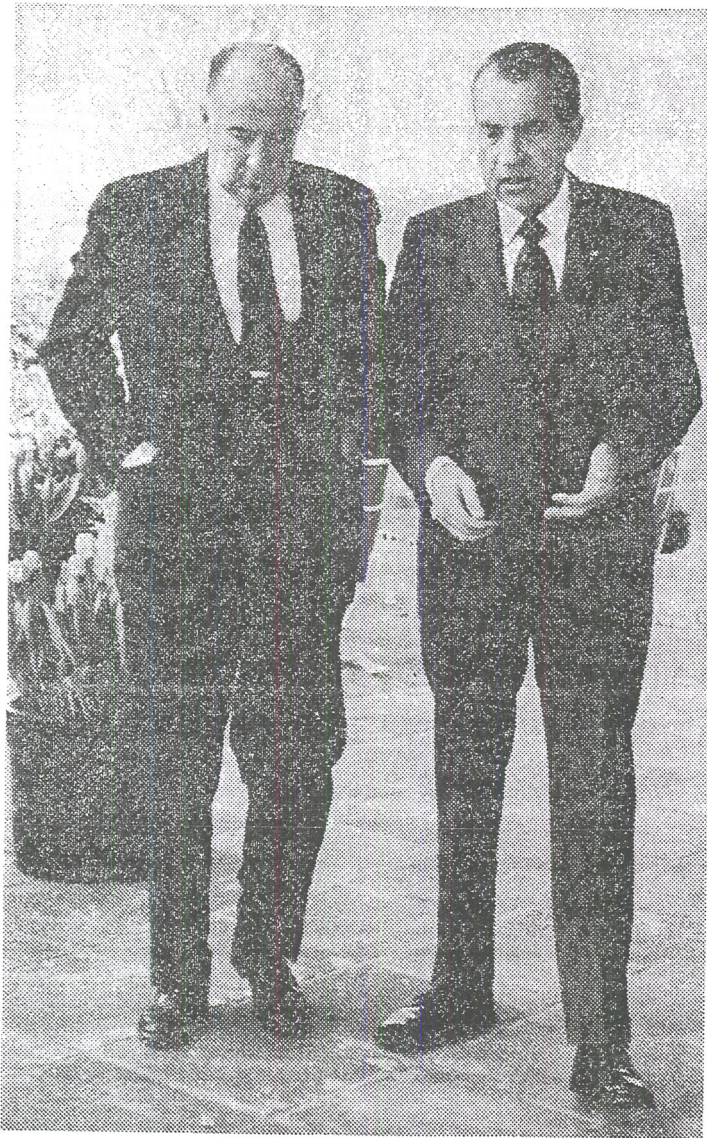
Ehrlichman: That you had me doing this. That I had presented you with a set of conclusions that were admittedly hearsay, but that pointed in the direction of his ex-soldier and Jeb's and other people and that you were having me systematically talk to these people because in the course of this investigation we had discovered a frame of mind on the part of some people that they should stand mute in order to help the President, and that your sense was that the Presidency was not helped by that, and that it was not my purpose to tell anybody what he should do, but only to tell him that as far as your view of the interest of the Presidency were concerned, that they were not served by a person standing mute for that reason alone.

Now, there might be plenty of reasons why a person might want to stand mute to put the Government out to prove it. And that, wasn't the question. Then he, said, "Well, what you say to me is that the President is reserving to me all my options," and I said, "of course he is, John. The only thing that he doesn't want you to feel is that you don't have the option of going in and copping, if you want to do so. You have completely every option to go in or not to go in."

And he said, well, he appreciated that, but he had not been taking the position he had for the reason that he thought he was necessarily helping or hurting the Presidency, but he said, "You know, these characters pulled this thing off without my knowledge." He said, "I never saw Liddy for months at a time." And he said, "I didn't know what they were up to and nobody was more surprised than I was." We had this meeting, and he lobbed mud balls at the White House at every opportunity. It was very interesting how he dragged it in. One after the other. . . .

Ehrlichman: Mitchell's theory—

Nixon: Whatever his theory is, let me say, one footnote, is that throwing off on the White House won't help him one damn bit.



Nixon with Mitchell, once his closest confidant: "I don't think Mitchell did order the Watergate bugging," Haldeman declared, "... I honestly don't."

Ehrlichman: Unless he can peddle the theory that Colson and others were effectively running the committee through Magruder and freezing him out of the operation, which is kind of the story line he was giving me.

Haldeman: Did he include me in the others? . . . That I was freezing him out of the operation?

Ehrlichman: That you, in other words—he didn't say this baldly or flatly, but he accumulated a whole bunch of things: it's Colson, Dean and Bob working with Magruder, and that was sort of the way the line went.

Nixon: No. The White House wasn't running the Campaign Committee.

Haldeman: He's got an impossible problem with that. The poor guy is pretty sad if he gets up there and says that. It is a problem for us, there is no question about it, but there is no way he can prove it.

Ehrlichman: He had a very, very bad tremor—

Nixon: He has always had it.

Ehrlichman: Well, I have never noticed it as bad as this.

Nixon: So, you've done your [unintelligible] . . .

Nixon: I guess we're not surprised at Mitchell, are we?

Haldeman: No. It's partly true.

Nixon: Hm.

Haldeman: What he's saying is partly true. I don't think he did put it together.

Nixon: He shouldn't — he shouldn't throw the burden over here, Bob, on you. Now, frankly, Colson I understood, Colson certainly put the heat on over there. I don't think John seriously [unintelligible] unless you put them up to this thing.

Haldeman: [unintelligible] I didn't. He knows I didn't. No question of that.

Nixon: I should think he knows it. [unintelligible], huh?

Haldeman: That's what he says.

Nixon: You know he'll never—he'll never [unintelligible]. What do you think about that is as possible thing—does a trial of the former Attorney General of the United States bug him? This damn case.

Haldeman: I don't know whether he [unintelligible] or not . . .



But Jeb decides to tell

That afternoon, after being told by Jeb Magruder that he had been to the Federal Prosecutor, Ehrlichman had phoned Attorney - General Richard Kleindienst to say that Magruder was implicating people "high and low." Shortly afterwards Ehrlichman and Haldeman and the President met again in the Executive Office building. With the failure of the Mitchell tactic, the question arose of how long could Haldeman survive.

Nixon: [unintelligible] ought to resign which I [unintelligible].

Haldeman: I'm not suggesting—I'm not suggesting I'd like to resign. I would not like to.

Nixon: Yeah.

Haldeman: I'd be willing to, without creating any sticky problems.

Nixon: The duty of our, all our, the duty of our whole staff

thing to do now, have done. Indict Mitchell and all the rest and there'll be a horrible two weeks — a horrible, terrible scandal, worse than Teapot Dome and so forth. And it isn't—doesn't have anything to do with Teapot.

Ehrlichman: Yeah.

Nixon: I mean there is no venality involved in the damn thing, no thievery or anything of that sort of thing. Nobody got any papers. You know what I mean?

Ehrlichman: Yeah. That's true.

Haldeman: Glad to hear it.

Nixon: The bad part of it is the fact that the Attorney General, and the obstruction of justice thing which it appears to be. And yet, they ought to go up fighting, in my view, a fighting position on that. I think they all ought to fight. That this was not an obstruction of justice, we were simply trying to help these defendants. Don't you agree on that or do you think that's my—is that—

Ehrlichman: I agree. I think it's all the defendants, obviously.

Nixon: I know if they could get together on the strategy, it would be pretty good for them.

Ehrlichman: Well, I think undoubtedly, that will shake down.

Nixon: I would think that the US Attorney's [unintelligible].

Haldeman: Thank you, sir.

Ehrlichman: Yes, sir.

Late that night, the President calls Ehrlichman to express further doubts about Haldeman's position:

Nixon: Re-think a little bit more about that Haldeman thing. My present thinking—he raised it himself you know, this business—but I just think you've got to fight for somebody. I don't know. But what is your feeling at the moment?

Ehrlichman: I don't think he is in that bad shape. I may be kidding myself, but I— . . .

Nixon: But when you are in a battle, if you are going to fight a battle, you are going to fight it to the finish. And the thing about Bob, as I say, is this: I get back to a fundamental point. Is he guilty or is he not? In my view, he is not, you know.

Ehrlichman: Yep.

Nixon: And if he isn't—even if it means that the whole country and the Congress and all the members of the Senate and House say resign, resign. The President says, No. I will not take a resignation from a man who is innocent. That is wrong. That is contrary to our system and I am going to fight for him.

Ehrlichman: Uh, huh. . . .

Nixon: Fine. Well, John, you have had a hell of a week—two weeks. And of course poor Bob is going through the tortures of the damned.

Ehrlichman: Yeah. That family thing is rough.

Nixon: I know the family thing. But apart from the family thing, you know, he is a guy that has just given his life, hours and

hours and hours you know, totally selfless and honest and decent. That is another thing. Damn it to hell, I am just about to say. Well, you know you get the argument of some, anybody that has been charged against, you should fire them. I mean you can't do that. Or am I wrong?

Ehrlichman: No, you are right.

Nixon: Well, maybe I am not right. I am asking. They say, clean the boards. Well, is that our system?

Ehrlichman: Well that isn't a system. You know, that is a machine. That's—

Nixon: That's right. I feel, honestly—I mean, apart from the personal feeling we both have for Bob, don't you? But you know, I raised this myself. One way out is to say, well look, as long as all these guys have been



'No way
to run a
railroad'

charged, out they go and they can fight this battle and they can return when they get cleared. It is not good, is it?

Ehrlichman: You know I don't think it is. I don't think that is any way to run a railroad. I think—

Nixon: I suppose that would probably be the deal of purists. What does Len think on that? Does he think that, or—

Ehrlichman: I don't know. I think you have to show—

Nixon: Well, that is irrelevant—

Ehrlichman: Some heart on the thing.

Nixon: Well, the point is, whatever we say about Harry Truman, etc. while it hurt him a lot of people admired the old bastard for standing by people.

Ehrlichman: Sure—

Nixon: Who were guilty as hell.

Ehrlichman: Yep.

Nixon: And damn it I am that kind of person. I am not one who is going to say, look, while this guy is under attack. I drop him. Is there something to be said for that, or not?

Ehrlichman: I don't think, number one, I don't think you would gain anything by it. The problem doesn't go away.

Nixon: No they will say, oh, that Nixon's top person, closest man to him, in the office four or five hours a day, and out he goes. Everything must be wrong.

Ehrlichman: Yep—that is it. That is like separating Siamese twins.

On April 30, President Nixon announced the resignations from the White House staff of Bob Haldeman and John Ehrlichman.

though is to play their role—

Haldeman: I'm free from some other things that I can cut loose, which I could do. The problem that is there on the other side is, there is some pluses to it. What about that?

Nixon: With an attorney-general added in? — And a White House counsel, possibly.

Haldeman: Pretty big bag, John.

Ehrlichman: The biggest.

Nixon: Policy, that's the point.

Haldeman: Yeah. . . .

Nixon: Well, you fellows need a rest.

Haldeman: Rest? There's that damn dinner.

Ehrlichman: We'll grin at the White House correspondents.

Haldeman: That's no rest, that's work.

Nixon: Well, a year from now. It will soon be different.

Ehrlichman: Oh, yeah.

Nixon: Nope, seriously—

Ehrlichman: Six months.

Nixon: Nope, sooner than you think. Let me tell you, John, this thing about all this that has concerned me is dragging the damn thing out. Dragging it out and being — and having it be the only issue in town. Now the