

What Nixon Now Admits On Watergate

Washington

In a forthcoming television interview, Richard Nixon admits he sought to "politically contain" the Watergate scandal — and says he made a mistake by trying to use the CIA to block investigations into it.

Bits of the interview and of previously undisclosed White House tapes implicating Nixon further in the Watergate scandal appeared in major newspapers and news magazines yesterday, amid suggestions the leaks were orchestrated to get maximum publicity for the television show.

Newsweek and Time magazines came out yesterday evening with cover stories on Nixon, quoting portions of the David Frost interviews which begin Wednesday night on stations across the country.

CBS' "60-Minutes" program also included a segment about the Frost-Nixon interviews.

In the TV interview, according to Time magazine, Nixon discusses his reasons for the Watergate containment:

My motive 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 slip-over — or should I say slop-over, I think, would be a better word — (to prevent) any slop-over in a way that would damage innocent people.

We weren't going to allow people in the White House, people in the committee, at the highest level who were not involved, to be smeared by the whole thing," Nixon said. "In other words, we were trying to politically contain it."

In the Time magazine article, Frost is quoted as asking about Nixon's efforts to use the Central Intelligence Agency and warnings against interfering with national security matters to get the FBI off the Watergate investigation.

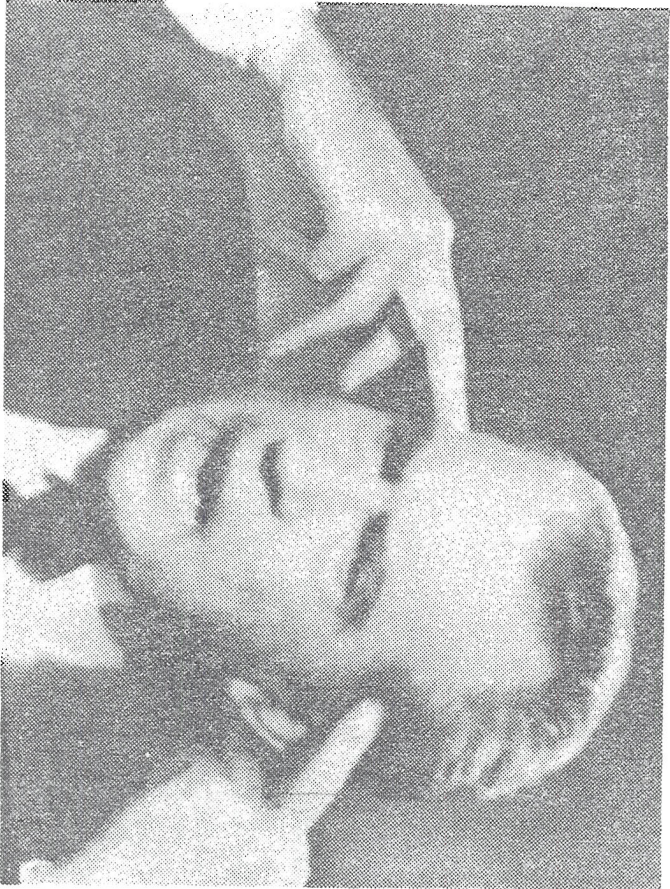
For the first time, Nixon, his face betraying his discomfort, admits publicly that his repeated claim that he was only trying to keep the FBI out of national security matters is "untrue," the Time account said.

"He concedes: 'It was a grievous mistake to have gotten the



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NIXON ON THE TV SHOW
'A grievous mistake'



Richard Nixon gestured as he spoke to David Frost during the television interviews

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CIA involved in this thing," Time said.

Another account, in Newsweek, quotes Nixon as conceding his actions were motivated by politics — not national security. But Nixon is quoted as saying his personal knowledge of Watergate events is "very limited."

After some reports circulated last week indicating that Frost's four televised interviews with Nixon contained little in the way of sensational news, and Business Week magazine reported that much of the commercial time remained unsold, transcripts appeared yesterday in the Washington Post and New York Times of White House conversations implicating Nixon further in the Watergate coverup.

ABC News quoted Robert Zelnick, editor-in-chief of Frost's production team, as saying the British television star and entrepreneur had access to the secret Oval Office transcripts seven months ago.

There was widespread speculation that Frost or his agents made the transcripts available to the two newspapers. The transcripts were prepared for use in the Watergate coverup trials but were never admitted into evidence.

Normally, only prosecutors and defense lawyers would have access to the transcripts.

Special Watergate Prosecutor Charles Ruff said yesterday that no one on his staff leaked the transcripts.

Defense attorneys also denied passing the material to reporters.

"None of this matter came from our office or any of my staff — or former staff," Ruff told reporters.

"I don't know where David Frost might have got them (the tapes)," former assistant special prosecutor Richard Ben-Veniste said. "They didn't get them from the special prosecutors."

The transcripts were among 28 tapes prepared for the Watergate coverup trial but never introduced as evidence. Ruff said the tapes are sealed from the public by order of a three-judge federal court panel, at least until the Supreme Court decides whether Nixon or the government owns them.

"The tapes are located in the Executive Office Building," Ruff said. "Copies of certain tapes are

located in the special prosecutor's office."

John Wilson, defense attorney for former Nixon aide H.R. Haldeman, said there were probably "a dozen ways," the tapes could have been leaked to the news media. He said he was unsure if he had ever seen these specific tapes, and speculated that Frost might have been instrumental in leaking them to bolster publicity about his interviews with Nixon.

There was no answer at Nixon's home yesterday to telephone calls inquiring about the new Watergate coverup reports. Frost could not be reached for comment either.

Former White House counsel Charles Colson, who participated in many of the new conversations with Nixon, dismissed the transcripts.

"This is a beautiful PR (Public Relations) job for David Frost," Colson said. "I'm astonished that so much news could be made out of old hash. There's some gross inaccuracies, gross distortion."

The transcripts included:

- A Nixon-Colson conversation on June 20, 1972, three days after the Watergate burglary, in which Nixon talks about being involved in "a dangerous job," and uses the Watergate catchword "stonewall" for the first time. This is the same day that investigators found an 18½-minute gap on a tape in which Nixon and Haldeman discussed the break-in.

- A Nixon-Colson conversation on Jan. 8, 1973, in which the President purportedly discusses hush money for the Watergate burglars — several months before the subject was brought up in other tapes. Colson said this tape is already public, and the term "hush money" is not in the Watergate prosecutor's transcript.

- Several statements showing Nixon was preoccupied with the possibility of being impeached in April of 1973 — more than a year before the House Judiciary Committee began its hearings. "We kept one jump ahead of the (expletive) sheriff," he complains to Haldeman at one point. On April 26, Nixon asks Haldeman: "My God, what the hell have we done to be impeached?"

There were conflicting reports on what Nixon told Frost in the Watergate interview.

The Times quoted a source familiar with the contents as saying that there were some "climactic moments" late in the interview, but that Nixon had "stonewalled" Frost most of the time.

The Post said Frost had been prepared to use the new transcripts to trap Nixon into Watergate admissions — much as a prosecuting attorney would do in a trial.

Other portions of the new transcripts reveal:

- Nixon was concerned that John Dean would reveal that Thomas A. Pappas, a prominent Republican, was involved in the effort to raise hush money.

- Nixon characterized Supreme Court Justices William Brennan and Thurgood Marshall as "boobs."

- Nixon voiced confidence that existence of the White House taping system would never be made public and told Haldeman: "I don't think it should ever get out that we taped this office."

United Press