

Two years after the Water

ANALYSIS

By Harry Kelly
Chicago Tribune

WASHINGTON — It is an anniversary. But hold the candles. It is not a gala time. The mood is harsh:

Unbelievably, it was only two years ago, at 2 a.m., June 17, 1972, that the five nervous men wearing burglars' gloves were arrested in the Democratic National Committee offices.

"What was Watergate?" the President mused not quite a year later. "A little bugging."

But it was the beginning of the end of many things.

It has become what H. R. Haldeman, in a moment of insight, feared it might become "an unbelievable disaster for us."

At this stage the people appear impervious to new Watergate developments, wanting it over soon, immediately — yesterday, if possible — but suspecting, according to the polls, that the President was involved and disappointed in the quality of the Presidency as disclosed by the White House transcripts.

One by one the mighty have fallen, the youngish,

well-barbered, ambitious men in Ivy League suits who were driven to and from work in shiny black White House cars and who considered themselves all-powerful.

Before entering a federal prison, Jeb Stuart Magruder, former Presidential aide and deputy director of the Committee to Reelect the President, explained the arrogance of power of presidential advisers even when faced with trying to get James McCord out of jail. He wrote in his book:

"Perhaps we were grasping at straws, but we all believed that some way out could be found; after all we were the government; until very recently John Mitchell had been attorney general of the United States. It did not seem beyond our capacities to get one man out of D.C. jail."

And apparently the atmosphere of power was particularly heady when soaring above the clouds in the presidential jet. Magruder recalled that "calls from Air Force 1 were a joke among those who didn't often travel with the President. He and Haldeman and Chapin and others in the traveling entourage would get up there, 30,000 feet above the earth, and something would happen to them. It must have been the closed-in atmosphere, or perhaps the plane's well-stocked bar, or something about the altitude that made them feel god-like, but they would invariably begin to rain

gate break-in: a dark time

down (telephone) calls upon us mere mortals back on earth, and there was no way to talk to them or reason with them."

Now they have been brought rudely to earth, and as justice closes in, sometimes gently and sometimes with the dread steely click of a locked door, the men who courted power make their acts of contrition.

When there were suggestions a year ago that Nixon could save himself by coming forward to repent and ask forgiveness of the voters, Presidential Press Secretary Ronald Ziegler expressed his scorn.

"Contrition is bull---," said Ziegler.

But it wasn't to Herbert "Bart" Porter. At least not finally it wasn't. Porter seemed to be the essence of the young Nixon aide — ambitious, hard-working, articulate, well-groomed. His lies to the original Watergate grand jury had hidden the extent of the conspiracy.

But after finally confessing to the prosecutors and pleading guilty to lying to the FBI, Porter explained, "it sounds corny but I think it was the right thing to do. I think we should let the truth come out and let the American people judge. It would be the greatest therapy for the coun-

try. Lord knows, we preach it to our children, we should practice it."

And then there was Charles Colson, the White House's professional tough guy who swore he'd "walk over my grandmother" to make sure Nixon was re-elected. Colson, in the torment of his spirit, according to friends, found God in a prayer group with Sen. Harold Hughes of Iowa.

After months of claiming innocence and scheming to outwit justice, Colson suggested at the prayer group the idea he carried out seven days later: A decision to plead guilty and to accept the risk of prison and disbarment.

And the one regarded by friends as the most pure of heart. Egil "Bud" Krogh, devout Christian Scientist, Ehrlichman protege and director of the "plumbers" who found he could no longer use "national security" as the excuse for the Ellsberg break-in:

"It struck at the heart of what this government was established to protect, which is the individual rights of each individual . . . The reason I pleaded guilty — was that I no longer wanted to be associated with that basic violation of a principle of individual rights. In addition to that, I pled guilty because that conduct deserved to be convicted — it needed to be convicted."