In 2 Years, Watergate

At End, Nixon Had Lost Confidence of Populace

By R. W. APPLE Jr.

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WASHINGTON, Aug 8 — It and speeches were advertised was a tragedy in three acts. In 1972, Richard M. Nixon— they raised more questions a man who had often failed, than they answered. Ultimately, who had been derided by the fashionable and the intellectual, who had made and remade himself into a winner—arrived at the pinnacle of his career. In drag down the Republican party with him, he ended the agony with the resignation so many onto the defensive. And in 1974, he fell from power, humiliated as no predecessor has ever been.

who had always considered him one of their own, and he had lost even some of his old friends.

He had been brought low by the Watergate scandal and the whole galaxy of ancillary horrors—by the participation of his closest associates in them, by his own protracted efforts to explain them away, and, finally, by his public admission that he had been an early participant in efforts to conceal the facts of Watergate. But even before this damaging admission, most of the American people had concluded that he was not the kind of man they wanted to lead them, and he was left increasingly alone in the White House, a leader who had squandered his trust. Scarcely had Mr. Nixon taken the oath of office for his second term when the Watergate scandals, at most a minor irritant in June, 1972, blew apart his carefully contrived world. One revelation piled on another. The White House responses swung erratically from defense of the President's aides to their resignations.

Each time, the explanations and other the had been and frenzied effort to hide the truth about them.

The Fielding Break-In

Some of the seeds were sown even before 1972. On the night of Sept. 3, 1971, a team of burglars led by E. Howard Hunt Jr., a former Central Intelligence Agency operative, broke into the office of Dr. Lewis Fielding, a psychiatrist who had treated Dr. Daniel Ellsberg, the man who turned over the Pentagon papers to newspapers. Mr. Hunt was on the White House pay-roll, part of an organization lands.

But it was in 1972 that most a Goodyear Tire and Rubber and Gulf Oil were persuaded to make illegal campaign contributions.

A political espionage and dirty tricks operation was set in motion under a young California lawyer named Donald H. Segretti. And, on June 17, a team of burglars led by James W. McCord Jr., also a veteran

onto the defensive. And in 1974, he fell from power, humiliated as no predecessor has ever been.

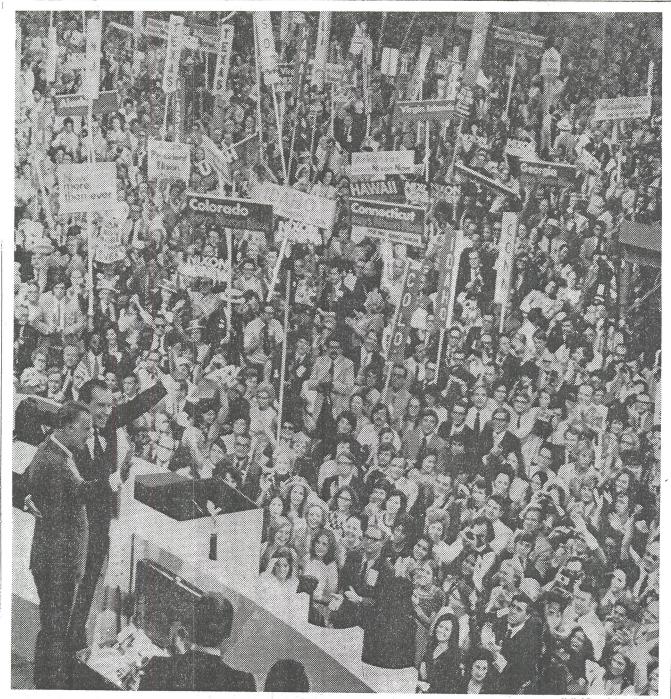
Almost forgotten, by the time Mr. Nixon tendered his resignation, were his days of glory only two years ago, when he began dismantling the cold war that had dominated American politics for a quarter-century, with his dramatic journeys to Peking and Moscow and the signing of the first limitation on the deadly nuclear arms race. Almost forgotten were his successes in ending American involvement in the bitterly divisive Vietnam war and in halting the draft.

Gone was the sweeping mandate Mr. Nixon had won from the American electorate in November, 1972, when he carried 49 states (all but Massachusetts plus the District of Columbia with the help of what he liked to call the "silent majority"—the middle-class Americans of the suburbs and farms. Gone were the dreams of an historic realignment that would make the Republicans the majority party by stripping blue-collar workers and Southerners from Franklin D. Roosevelt's coalition.

Felled by Watergate Scandal By the end, Mr. Nixon had lost the confidence of the populace that had voted overwhelmingly to give him a second term, his "approval rating" in the polls plunging from well over 65 per cent in 1972 to 25 per cent recently. He had lost even some of his old friends.

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Scandal Brought Down President Who



Mr. Nixon and Mr. Agnew after being nominated at Republican National Convention, Oct. 22, 1972, in Miami Beach.

clandestine agent, broke into apart early in 1973 was due to the Democratic National Compinion of the National Compinion Compinion of the National Compinion Compinion of the National Compinion of the National Compinion Compinion of the National Compinion of the National Compinion of the National Compinion of the National Compinion of the

Had Wide Mandate

tions at the White House and at sure on Mr. Nixon to release the Executive Office Building-more tapes became almost inincluding most of the discus-tolerable. Finally, on April 30,

including most of the discussions about Watergate. The disclosure hurt Mr. Nixon first because the taping operation seemed shifty and unfair to many Americans, and second because it set off a protracted struggle for the tapes themselves between the White House and investigative agencies.

The President ultimately lost the fight over these tapes, and the result proved fatal for his Administration. A huge batch of edited tape transcripts made public last spring did his cause more harm than good, and the release of three more transcripts on Aug. 5—tapes that confirmed his own participation in the cover-up—provided the remaining doubters with the word "unintelligible," and memories of an unexplained 18½-minute gap in an earlier tape raised suspicions. Mr. Nixon refused to supply additional tapes sought by the committee and the prosecutor. And what was on the tapes was more damaging than helpful.

If they presented no unambiguous evidence of criminal acts, as the White House main-tained, they showed a Presi-

the result proved fatal for his administration. A huge batch of celleted dape transcripts made proved fatal proved fatal for his definition of the fatal proved fatal for his condition of the cover-up—provided the remaining doubters with the conclusiveness they had sought what had come to be known as the "smoking gun" in the President's hand.

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