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Fascinating Watergate

From a psychological, rather than a political, point of view, the fascinating part of the whole Watergate episode was the motive that prompted it. It really had little to do with politics as such.

The President and his senior officials were apparently so insulated and isolated from reality — a condition they both inherited and increased — that they found it impossible to believe that all the anti-war demonstrations were not founded and infiltrated by subversive organizations.

The White House commissioned both the FBI and the Internal Security Division of the Justice Department to investigate this possibility — and both turned up negative. Nixon, Haldeman, Ehrlichman and Co. quite simply

refused to accept these findings, and determined to initiate their own "intelligence."

For one thing, these men were intoxicated with the specious "mandate" of the 1972 election, in which Nixon whipped McGovern by a whopping number. But this so-called "mandate" was more fiction than fact.

In the first place, Nixon was elected by a minority of citizens eligible to vote. Stay-at-homes outnumbered both Nixon and McGovern voters. Secondly, the vote was far more anti-McGovern than it was pro-Nixon.

But these unpalatable truths — knowable to any schoolboy who took the trouble to look the facts in the face — did not fit into the paranoid frame of mind that permeated the

higher levels of the White House. The potent public-relations smokescreen put up by CREEP so polluted the atmosphere that the White House cadre became its first, and most willing, victim.

Given its unshakable conviction that the great majority of Americans really liked, admired and approved Nixon (rather than resignedly accepting him as a probable lesser evil than McGovern), the White House staff reasoned logically from this false premise to the conclusion that such widespread demonstrations of antagonism must have been directed and activated by "outside agitators" financed by Communist forces.

Once this is believed — or even pretended to be believed — the impressive rubric of "national security" can then be invoked to engage in the most illegal and unconstitutional acts. The "plumbers" probably felt they were performing a patriotic act — and being well paid into the bargain. When profit and patriotism coincide, men will risk anything.

Guy Wright is on vacation