

# Author Says Nixon Was 'Time Bomb'

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Presidential chronicler Theodore H. White says Richard M. Nixon was "an unstable personality" during his last days in office—"a time bomb which, if not defused in just the right way, might blow the course of all American history apart."

In the May issue of Reader's Digest, White gives a day-by-day account of how Alexander M. Haig, then White House chief of staff, and other insiders slowly and carefully persuaded Nixon he had no course but to resign.

"What the men in the White House were involved in, without ever admitting it to themselves, was the management of an unstable personality," writes White, author of four "Making of the President" books.

Starting his narrative on

July 31, 1974—eight days before Nixon announced his resignation—White describes Nixon's behavior as "increasingly erratic," with Haig acting as substitute President in many matters of day-to-day business.

White says Haig realized Nixon had to leave office as soon as he read, on July 31, the transcripts of a then-secret White House tape recording in which Nixon ordered aides to stop an FBI Watergate investigation. The tape dated from June 23, 1972, six days after the Watergate burglary.

The House Judiciary Committee had already recommended three articles of impeachment against Nixon without knowledge of this tape, which was made public a few days later along with Nixon's admission he had misled

the public in previous Watergate statements.

Haig's problem, White says, was to make Nixon realize he had to resign without triggering a determination to stay.

"If Haig could get the facts before the President clearly, he was certain that the President would act beyond himself in the national interest and resign," White says.

"Yet, with too much press-something might trigger the combat instinct in Richard Nixon... Haig was dealing with a time bomb which, if not defused in just the right way, might blow the course of all American history apart."

White says Nixon finally reached his resignation decision about 7:30 p.m. Aug. 7, after a meeting with Sen. Barry M. Goldwater (R-Ariz.), Senate

Republican leader Hugh Scott of Pennsylvania and House Republican leader John Rhodes of Arizona. White reports they said the Senate would surely convict him if he insisted on an impeachment trial.

The account is the first of a two-part series in which White analyzes Nixon's politics for the Reader's Digest. The series in turn is a condensation of White's new book, "Breach of Faith: The Fall of Richard Nixon," to be published in May.