

Memories of a Prosecutor

Leon Jaworski knew Presidents. He was in a White House bedroom one day when Lyndon Johnson disrobed, and the Texas lawyer beheld the Emperor without a stitch on. Later, as president-elect of the American Bar Association in 1971, he met with Nixon for an hour. "Nixon was eager to discuss matters and be of help," recalls Jaworski. "I can see Ehrlichman yet, sitting right next to him taking notes on a yellow pad." It was a good meeting.

At John Connally's ranch the next year, Jaworski was one of the Texas dignitaries asked over to meet Nixon. By then Jaworski was president of the A.B.A. "When are you going to stop putting all those liberals on the court?" asked Nixon. Jaworski pondered the remark, decided it did not make sense and pushed it to the back of his mind. Then came the day last year when Nixon's chief of staff Alexander Haig called and asked him to be the special Watergate prosecutor. Jaworski hesitated. Haig sent a plane for him. The next morning Jaworski was again in the White House. Haig agreed to his conditions: total freedom of action and safeguards against dismissal. Jaworski accepted. "Don't you want to go in and talk to the President?" asked Haig. Jaworski's instincts recoiled. He was in a new world. He told Haig no. This temperate man, son of a Polish immigrant, had been given the job that would ultimately lead to deposing the President. There has been no confrontation of its kind in history.

Jaworski came to Washington alone and took a double suite at the Jefferson Hotel. His office, four blocks away, was a cramped, bare-walled cubicle with the curtains pulled to thwart snoopers. He walked unrecognized from hotel to office, a single figure among Washington's masses. Across McPherson Square and down two blocks was the White House, floodlighted, guarded, crawling with people and heavy with the trappings of power.

Jaworski never saw Nixon again in the flesh. He went to the White House many times to see Haig and Nixon Attorney James St. Clair. The visits were brief, cloaked missions. Haig would politely lead Jaworski into the Map Room, a dim, mellow place on the ground floor so named because Franklin Roosevelt charted the progress of World War II there.

These were meetings of protest against Jaworski's demands for tapes and documents. "We thought you had all you needed," Haig would say. "But you want more, more. When does it end?" There was never anger. But there were

the hard edges of power in collision: Haig for the presidency, Jaworski for the rule of law. "You know there is no such thing as enough," Jaworski would reply. "I am not going to make agreements, I do not know what all we will need." Three times Haig "wondered" if Jaworski should meet with Nixon. Each time the lawyer stopped it with polite language. "I would prefer not to. I would have to disclose such a meeting. Then there would be speculation."

Once Jaworski saw Haig visibly shaken. It was just before last Christmas when he told Haig he thought that the March 21st tape showed criminal conduct by the President. Haig said that he had been assured by White House lawyers that there was nothing like that on record. "If I were you, I

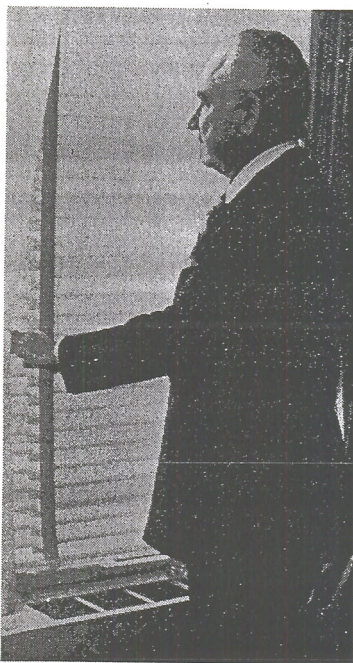
would get the best criminal lawyer in the country and go over that tape," advised Jaworski. He never felt compelled to back off. "I gave no quarter," he says. "But I never tried to embarrass the President." When the grand jury wanted to question Nixon and he refused to go to the courtroom, Jaworski secretly offered to load the grand jury into a bus and sneak them into the White House. Still the answer was no.

Jaworski would watch Nixon on television explaining Watergate to the American people, and he marveled how a President could say such things when the evidence of the opposite was even then in Jaworski's hands. He bit his tongue, pushed back the frustrations. He never sensed any personal threats from the White House. He felt he had a nation on his side.

Once after Jaworski had sent the FBI into the White House to try to find out why one of the tapes had an 18½-minute gap on it, the White House apparently got angry at this intrusion. Soon after, on a visit to see St. Clair, the guards refused to let Jaworski enter the grounds until an escort could be found. He stood in the cold and rain waiting for them to make up their minds. Jaworski called Haig afterward.

"You are going to fix this up to the point where you are going to have to come to my office, instead of my going to yours," he said. He had no more troubles.

Not long ago, Jaworski got one more invitation to go to the White House—this time when it was occupied by Nixon's successor, Gerald Ford. It was for dinner with Poland's Communist Party Chief Edward Gierek. Jaworski and his wife went through the diplomatic entrance just like the other guests. The military aides greeted him with smiles and directed him down the hall that he knew better than they did. He passed by the Map Room, inwardly smiled remembering the history made there, then went on upstairs where he had not been for years. There was music and champagne. The old mansion was warmly glowing. It was, Jaworski thought to himself, a good time to go back to Texas.



LEON JAWORSKI