

The Day Nixon Was Told the Facts



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THE DRAMATIC MOMENTS can now be recounted when President Nixon was confronted with the whole truth about Watergate. He was told the stark facts by former Attorney General Richard Kleindienst after White House church services on Sunday, April 15.

At one point, Assistant Attorney General Henry Petersen was hastily summoned to the meeting.

The showdown with the President followed an all-night session at Kleindienst's home where Petersen laid out the grim details. He had just learned from the Watergate prosecutors the extent of the conspiracy.

It was persistent and painstaking legal work by the three original prosecutors that broke open the Watergate case.

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THE PROSECUTORS — Earl Silbert, Seymour Glazer and Donald Campbell — felt certain that the case involved far more important personalities than the seven men they prosecuted last January. Their belief was finally confirmed in late March, when they amassed enough details of high-level skulduggery to alarm the White House conspirators.

By April 14, the three assistant U.S. attorneys had solid proof of a massive conspiracy to obstruct justice reaching right into the White House.

The evidence was so compelling that they felt duty bound to alert the President, since most witnesses claimed he was unaware of the conspiracy. Going through channels, the prosecutors accompanied by their boss, U.S. Attorney Harold Titus,

called upon Petersen on the night of April 14.

The meeting had just begun when Petersen asked: "Is it true about Mitchell?" He referred to his friend and former superior, ex-Attorney General John Mitchell.

"Yes," Petersen was told.

The prosecutors added that, worse, the case could lead to the impeachment of the President. After the evidence was presented, they agreed that Mr. Nixon should be informed at once.

Petersen put through a call to Kleindienst. He was told it was urgent that they meet immediately. Petersen, Titus and Silbert arrived at 3 a.m. and stayed until 5 a.m.

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KLEINDIENST decided the President should be told all the facts and, after a couple of hours of sleep, he put in a call to the White House. It was 9:30 on Sunday morning when he reached Mr. Nixon, who asked him to come to the White House prayer service. Afterward, Kleindienst told the President all that the prosecutors had uncovered. Petersen was summoned to provide more details.

The President obviously had not realized the scope of the conspiracy, Kleindienst told us. He said he had a policy against quoting the President but could report Mr. Nixon had expressed "surprise" and "concern."

"The President went along with every recommendation we made," added Kleindienst. "At no time did he give us any direction other than to investigate the case fully and let the chips fall where they may."