

A Former Aide Talks About the President

Editor — As one of many Americans who are deeply concerned over Watergate, may I offer some observations that may be helpful to others of like mind.

First, let me admit to a personal friendship with Mr. Nixon, dating back to the pre-political days of 1944 when he was a Navy Lieutenant. Also, to a close association with him during 1955, 1956 and 1957 as his assistant during those particular days of his Vice Presidency. It is, of course, primarily based on this friendship, plus employment, that I hold to my beliefs in the Nixon integrity and ultimate vindication. While some detractors would allege a lack of objectivity because of these facts, I think it likely represents a more valid basis for judgement than many of the present "judges." My own personal frame of reference, built on long friendship and what I feel my association has given me in the way of insight into, and understanding, of Mr. Nixon's basic character and motivations, are therefore, the platform from which I speak.

Perhaps there is at least a partial key to an understanding of the current trauma and to the question, "How could Mr. Nixon not have known?" in his instructions to me when I first entered into an employer-employee relationship in January 1955. Mr. Nixon told me that one of my prime duties would be to "protect" him so that he would have sufficient time to study, read, think and otherwise concentrate on the problems with which he was dealing. You will recall that President Eisenhower, even then, thrust him into the center of his first and abiding interest of foreign policy and world politics. Much time was taken up in preparation for these trips and, in addition, much time was absorbed in meetings of the Cabinet, National Security Council, Government Contracts Committee and other duties. Indeed he needed protection, and I, as the only male member of his immediate staff in those days, was the chief "buffer." But Mr. Nixon's instructions embraced one other point. He said that in addition to protecting him, I had to "protect" myself, as otherwise I couldn't do the necessary job for him. Whether I did my protection job well, or not, I'll have to leave to Mr. Nixon's judgement. My own weariness at the end of three years leads me to

believe that perhaps I tried too hard to have my cake and eat it too.

However, too literal an interpretation on the part of top staff people in a highly political situation (and politics is really people) can lead to a type of blindness and insensitivity on the part of both master and servant which can, in turn, lead to real problems. Such phrases as "the Berlin Wall," and rumors that the top staffers were harder to see than the President himself, could have arisen only because of too strict a conformance with the admonition of "protect yourself," and with the consequent result of almost forming a double moat around the oval office.

Such a system breeds an inordinate delegation of power. This, in turn, carries with it the seeds of its own destruction when it reposes in individuals whose experience, capacity (which is built on experience) and political instincts are limited. Other times, other places and other people, such a modus operandi might well have worked. The tragedy is that in this instance, sincere, hard-working, intelligent, dedicated, and patriotic young men were victims of a power-bred myopia which made them vulnerable to their own experience, particularly political inexperience.

These thoughts are offered by way of explanation, not absolution, as both the delegator and receiver of presidential power share in the responsibility for what happened. But the daily inferences and outright charges that Richard Nixon has lied to the American people is a cruel lie itself. . . . In my own 30 years of friendship and intermittent association I have known a man, who I think is constitutionally unable to lie, particularly about such an overriding question of morality and integrity. Frankly, this characteristic is an indicator of that which has so frustrated and antagonized that part of the media which has been so long critical. Mr. Nixon gives the impression of a straight, Fourth of July, God-fearing, apple-pie patriot. Some areas of the press-TV simply don't believe he is for real. His strength, and their frustrations, lie in the fact that his character is indeed grounded on these "square" principles. His concept of his own mission in life, and of the Presidency itself, would make it impossible for

him to present a false front. The complementary character of Pat Nixon herself would, I think, be a deterrent if he were even tempted.

In addition, the man is simply too intelligent to even consider the risk of a "second-story job" on Democratic headquarters to obtain the knowledge of what went on in Larry O'Brien's office. It is completely out of character for a man who would voluntarily deny himself the Presidency when it was probably within his grasp. Here, of course, I refer to 1960 when it is reported that J. Edgar Hoover and many friends urged him to contest the election because of known and provable vote frauds in Illinois, Missouri and Texas. Incidentally, I can imagine no more venal assault on the American system than that of the actual theft of ballots and perversion of the citizens' basic voting right at the ballot box itself.

Yes, I think I know "how" Watergate happened. Mr. Nixon's remoteness and that of his top staff people made the latter vulnerable to an excess of power. The tragic irony is that equal excesses of zeal and dedication to a great President (which normally are admirable qualities) were short-circuited by this fatal juxtaposition which gradually eroded the judgement of otherwise good men.

I think most Americans will applaud President Nixon for the action he did take in initiating efforts to discover the source of leaks from the innermost proceedings of

the National Security Council and other high policy bodies. The nation's security demanded such action. At what point would continuing leaks undermine the delicate balances even then being achieved between Russia and China by the Nixon-Kissinger plans? Any way you cut the Ellsberg cake, this man violated the law too, and the usual double standard under which the far-left operates is painfully evident. Ellsberg is a hero — but the Nixon staff men are characterized as lawbreakers. However, this final element of a properly motivated inquiry which of necessity employed justifiable and available investigative techniques of microphones and-or telephone taps, even surreptitious entry, made easy the transition to their improper use and the excesses of Watergate and the so-called "plumbers unit."

John Mitchell's testimony

(whatever might be said of his inaction) towers above that of Magruder and Dean. In Magruder we have an already self-confessed perjurer. In Dean we have a man who "couldn't tell enough." He brought in bales of isolated, extraneous matter in an obvious effort to lose his sins in the greater sin of presidential involvement. How much fantasy, misunderstanding or outright distortions were involved in his testimony we, perhaps, will never know. It is known, however, that other Administration officials — Moore, Kleindienst and Peterson (with nothing in the way of a comparable axe to grind) contradicted Dean's testimony at important points. But it is comprehensible, as this sad scenario unwinds, that the actors did everything possible to keep the facts from the President while they indulged themselves in the vain hope that it would all eventually just go away. It is just as comprehensible that the system of "protect me — protect yourself" produced a fertile breeding ground for excessive delegated authority. Overzealousness of an idealistic nature then combined and nourished the misguided concepts and actions which so characterized Watergate.

I have no doubt as to the ultimate outcome. It will be proved to the satisfaction of the American people that President Nixon did not participate in either the planning or cover-up of Watergate. The scars he must inevitably bear for a staff system and personnel selection that made such a thing possible are only a part of the punishment for him. I'm sure he can accept this burden much more easily than the knowledge of what has happened to close personal friends and loyal supporters. Mr. Nixon's "remoteness" is well catalogued. But perhaps this remoteness, with the time it has given him to think and plan the grand strategy of the international chess game, vis-a-vis Russia and China, has been a key ingredient in the fact of today's peace and hope for the future. If so, and I personally believe this, perhaps Watergate, painful though it is, is part of the purchase price . . .

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