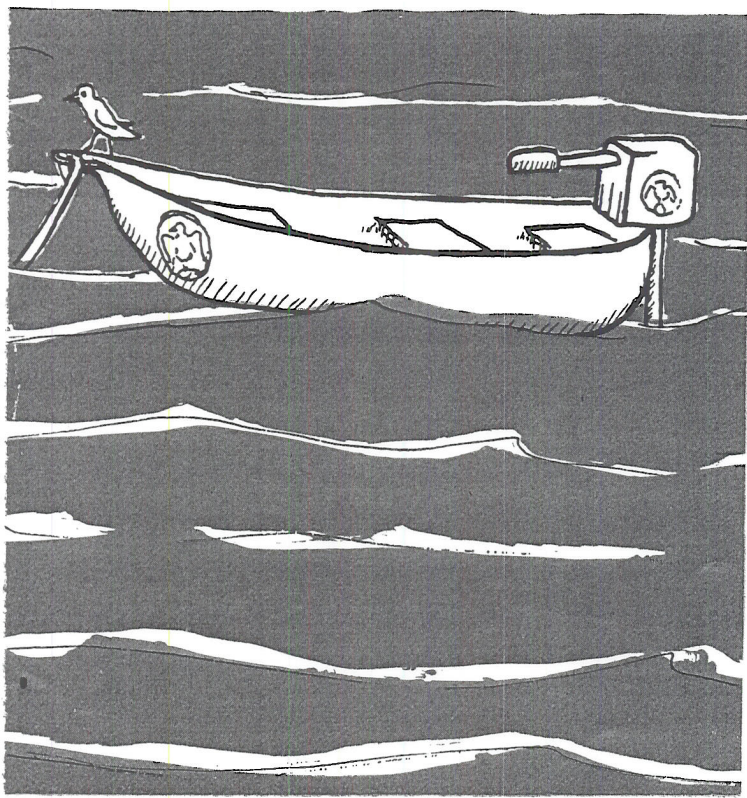




# HOW NIXON GETS NO NEWS



By FRED W. FRIENDLY

THE LESSON of Watergate, of the plot to nullify the First Amendment, is not just a chronicle of bugging with honor and sabotage with “lofty motives,” it is the anatomy of willful national deception and *self*-deception.

It is not just the public’s right to know that has been obstructed — it is the President’s *need* to know that has been sacrificed and squandered.

Like Harding before him, Mr. Nixon has permitted himself to be isolated and perhaps overwhelmed by scandal. As President Harding put it in a plaintive wail to William Allen White, editor of the *Emporia Gazette*: “In this job

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“. . . If President Nixon is accurate in his report that he knew nothing about White House involvement until March 21, then many Americans had better intelligence on the crime than did their chief executive. . .”

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I am not worried about my enemies. I can take care of them. It is my friends who are giving me trouble.” And when the final chapter of Richard Nixon’s “seven crises” is written, it will not be his foes or the devils in the media, but his friends and surrogates and their bizarre schemes, played out under the guise of zealous devotion and patriotism, which killed what he once called his driving dream.

“It is clear that unethical as well as illegal activities took place . . . I should have been more vigilant,” the President now admits.

A generation from now when another President permits his hired hands to attempt to intimidate some future journalists, there must be a documented record of the battle that raged between journalists and the White House since that Des Moines speech of November 13, 1969. That record will indicate when and how even the “silent majority” finally learned who was really trying to fool them; who was peddling all that “elitist gossip and plugola”; who lied — Daniel Schorr or the President who accused him of telling “a small lie”; who told the truth — the *Washington Post* or the attorney general of the United States; who performed the public service — the news media or the agents of the Committee to Reelect the President.

In this documentary history, “Nixon’s Seventh Crisis,” a vital exhibit will certainly be that remarkable interview that the President gave to Saul Pett of the Associated Press last January, just a few days before his second inaugural. Twice he made it “perfectly clear” that, unlike his predecessors, he insulates himself from television news and newspapers, lest he, to quote the President’s own words, “. . . go up the wall.” Time and time again in the interview he proclaimed his lack of emotion. In his words, “I have a reputation for being the cool-

est person in the room. . .” Four times he insisted that he never reads columnists or watches commentators because “I get my news from the news summary the staff prepares every day, and it’s great; it gives all sides . . . I never watch TV commentators or the news shows when they are about me. That’s because I don’t want my decisions influenced by personal emotional reactions.” In a specific put-down of James Reston, he says: “. . . All that matters is that it comes out all right. Six months from now nobody will remember what the columnists wrote.”

Mr. Nixon might just be wrong about that prophecy. In fact, a couple of weeks before Nixon’s landslide victory last fall, James Reston speculated on the price he might have to pay for his Watergate silence:

“. . . the Congressmen . . . will be back in January, and then the President will have to persuade them that he didn’t really know about those dirty tricks in the campaign, and wants and needs their cooperation for the good of the country . . . but after Vietnam and Watergate, and the election, the going is likely to be very rough.”

Reston’s prophetic warning will seem like the recitation of the obvious to future historians when they search for clues as to why President Nixon could not have understood that his overwhelming mandate would be replaced by a national mood of shrinking confidence.

Was it possible that the President wasn’t aware of what his closest aides most surely knew? For now we have his promise that he didn’t. We also have his word through that remarkable Pett interview that he didn’t know what the columnists and commentators were saying about Watergate and all those other V.D.T.s (very dirty tricks). That high-spiked wall Richard Nixon erected between himself and the news media worked both ways.

Even on his own terms it denied him an honest picture of what major newspapers, magazines and broadcast organizations were telling his public. Incredible as it sounds, if President Nixon is accurate in his report that he knew nothing about White House staff involvement until March 21, then many Americans had better intelligence on the crime than did their chief executive. If he was shielded as much on other crucial matters as he was on this sordid affair, then the most powerful executive on earth was the victim of an intelligence gap to rival that of those broadcasting presidents during the quiz scandals of 1959. They, too, took the responsibility but not the blame.

IF PRESIDENT Nixon denied himself periodic access to serious disclosures on Watergate and all its ramifications, was he also ignorant of all those raids on the media committed by his most trusted aides? The President’s public utterances would indicate that he disapproved of any such attempts at intimidation. In 1971, in an interview with Allen Drury, he said what presidents from George Washington to Lyndon B. Johnson believed: “. . . I have one of the most hostile and unfair presses that any President has ever had.”

But then Mr. Nixon went further: “. . . I have never called a publisher, never called an editor, never called a reporter on the carpet. . . That’s what makes ’em mad. That’s what infuriates ’em. I just don’t care. . .”

Some may doubt the credibility of that seemingly self-disciplined credo, but taking the President at his own word again that he “doesn’t read the columnists” and never called a publisher, editor or reporter, then there is a frightening gap between the course of action set by the President and what is carried out by the deputies who write on presidential stationery.

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“. . . If President Nixon denied himself periodic access to serious disclosures on Watergate and all its ramifications, was he also ignorant of all those raids on the media committed by his trusted aides? . . .”

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President Nixon may have never called a reporter, but Vice President Agnew, John Mitchell, H. R. Haldeman, John Ehrlichman, Patrick Buchanan, Herbert Klein, Clay Whitehead, Charles Colson, Kenneth Clawson have jointly or severally attacked Daniel Schorr, Dan Rather, David Brinkley, Mike Wallace, Walter Cronkite, Sander Vanocur, Anthony Lewis, Katharine Graham, Jack Anderson, Tom Wicker, Bill Moyers, John Hart, Frank Reynolds, Marvin Kalb, Stuart Loory, and a seemingly endless list of other newsmen. Was the President not aware of these attacks?

Mr. Nixon insists he never called a publisher, but can it be news to him that John Ehrlichman, at a breakfast meeting with the head of CBS News, tried to destroy Richard Salant's faith in Daniel Schorr and Dan Rather, and suggested with a smile that Rather be transferred to an assignment in Texas? Did the President not know of the luncheon where Haldeman complained to editors of the Los Angeles *Times* about their coverage of the President? Or how the Washington *Star* was constantly favored and given exclusives at the expense of the Washington *Post*? It is strictly hearsay, but I am told from usually reliable sources that the *Star's* editors were told by the White House, "Bring your food basket around every day and we'll fill it." When the *Star* didn't quite believe it, they came back and said, "Look, we weren't kidding . . . How would you like an interview with the President?" They got one. And was the President unaware that when *Newsday* ran a probing series on presidential intimate, Bebe Rebozo, press secretary Ron Ziegler took retribution by not only dropping that newspaper's White House correspondent from the China trip, but also denying him access to routine information that all White House correspondents normally get?

Could the President, who never tried to intimidate a reporter, have been ignorant of the FBI investigation of Daniel Schorr for a job that never existed on the Council on Environmental Quality? In the summer of 1971 I was one of those contacted by the FBI then investigating Schorr. I refused to be interviewed and used the opportunity to write J. Edgar Hoover in order to open the entire issue of FBI clearance and investigations. I asked him what job, if any, Schorr was being considered for. Hoover's swift response was, "(I can) not furnish the information you are seeking. I can only suggest," he wrote, "that you may wish to direct your inquiry to the White House regarding the investigation of Mr. Schorr." I remarked at the time that this was the first instance in which a query to a government official had been bucked upwards. Perhaps Mr. Hoover was trying to tell me something.

If the job offer, never discussed with Schorr, was legitimate, how could a reporter whom the President and four of his closest aides derided and called dishonest be considered for it? What may be a revealing clue came from Patrick Buchanan, the conduit through whom Mr. Nixon views the press. Buchanan appeared on the Dick Cavett Show March 22, and the record of that evening is probably the most disturbing piece of videotape since his boss's tantrum at the Los Angeles Hilton in November of 1962. If you missed it, beg, borrow or purloin a tape of it.

After calling the Washington *Post's* coverage of Watergate "shoddy journalism . . ." Buchanan gave what he considered a "not unreasonable . . . explanation" of why "they were going to offer Mr. Schorr a job."

"If you've got a guy that's hatching you night after night," Buchanan said, "maybe you come and say to yourself, 'Why don't we offer that clown a job, and give him a big,

fat paycheck, and get him off so we can get someone else.' That's the only explanation I can give."

That's not hearsay or something Buchanan mumbled to friends late at night in a bar. This was spoken in full view of an audience of millions. Buchanan did add, however, that it was not his decision and, to quote him again, "given Schorr's bigotry and bias against the [Nixon] administration, the individual that was going to offer Schorr a job made a bonehead play. . ."

Were those remarkable statements reported to the President in Buchanan's own daily news briefing? How much does Mr. Nixon know about what his in-house tipster is doing and saying on the outside?

Aside from the arrogance of Buchanan's theory, the chill factor comes from his conception of what is reasonable. The President views the performance of the news media through the distortion of this convex lens, this narrow band pass filter which distorts, oversimplifies and views everything in polarized extremes.

Buchanan says, in effect, if you're not for us, you're against us — or as he said in a New York *Times* interview, ". . . the idea of the press playing the role of the loyal opposition is a lot of malarkey."

THE TRAGEDY of the President's dependence on this flawed filter is not only its prejudice against all critics and its sychophantal vision of the administration's performance but, worst of all, the blurred, deformed image the President gets of the way the nation perceives him — not just on Watergate, but on Vesco, ITT, the teamsters and all the rest.

The faulty lens transmits images for which the President and the people pay a heavy price. A classic example involves a minor speech Dan Rather delivered to a junior college in his native state of Texas. The

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“ . . . Oversimplification and rumor or out-of-context excerpting can be just as dangerous in the hands of a crusading editor or producer as it is in the hands of a Buchanan or a Colson. . . ”

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CBS News correspondent referred to President Nixon as “the greatest *loner* ever to occupy the White House.” In the weeks that followed, Rather noticed that his most reliable contacts in the administration began to dry up on him — repeated phone calls to White House staffers went unanswered. His competition began to receive routine announcements before he did, causing his editors to ask why he was losing out on stories. Finally, in frustration, Rather sought out a friend on the President’s staff who showed him a recent copy of Buchanan’s dope sheet and asked, “what kind of treatment do you expect after that Houston speech?” A shocked Dan Rather read Buchanan’s version: “Rather called President Nixon the greatest *loser* ever to occupy the White House.” When Rather finally caught up with Buchanan, the latter said he’d put out a correction.

Buchanan’s digest is often more of a press agent’s score card of air time, front page space, favorable mentions and bad ones than a serious review of what the news media are saying. It is written in a special jargon that neatly separates foes from friends. Some random samples:

“Brinkley really zapped us on that one.”

“We thought that outfit was with us on this issue.”

“Some lovely howls of outrage from the left.”

“Reston, too, acknowledges RN is moving on many programs which needed to be cut — but then he says RN is moving ‘too fast’ when if it were a liberal, we’d hear about ‘bold leadership.’”

“Mudd gave a typically rhapsodic intro to acknowledged Senate leader in battle with WH . . . cited Sam [Ervin] as living proof seniority sometimes work (sic) — the right

man in right place at right time.”

“LA *Times* piece on presidential humor gives RN positive treatment . . . says RN’s humor seems to be surfacing more . . . notes various RN quips such as ‘outhouse’ question at news conference. . . ”

The Buchanan report, which is really a kind of Gallagher Report for the President, would be a joke if it weren’t so tragic. Capsulating and predigesting the news budget of the world in this way is like putting the President on a diet of “uppers and downers” — it robs him and the nation of a sense of proportion and reality.

While Haldeman kept senators, congressmen and even cabinet members away from that Oval Office, while Ziegler kept newsmen at arms length, while the number of presidential press conferences reached an all-time low and the use of prime-time television exceeded the total of the last three presidents, the narrow flow of news that was allowed to pass through Buchanan’s filter was a key factor in the final isolation of the President. Woodrow Wilson was in the end prisoner of his illness; Warren Harding of his ignorance; Richard Nixon of a self-induced paralysis that damaged his administration’s central nervous system. The original plot was to sabotage the nation’s sensing system, but in the end it was the President’s own communications which were jammed.

Speaking of jammed communications, we must not allow ourselves to be naive about how much the President really knew about Watergate and its cover-up, and how much of it was simply jammed communications from within the White House. In one of Richard Nixon’s rare news conferences on Oct. 5, 1972, he said:

“One thing that has always puzzled me about it is why anybody

would have tried to get anything out of Watergate. But . . . when we talk about a clean breast, let’s look at what has happened. The FBI assigned 133 agents to this investigation. It followed out 1,800 leads. It conducted 1,500 interviews. Incidentally, I conducted the investigation of the Hiss case. I know that is a very unpopular subject to raise in some quarters, but I conducted it. It was successful. The FBI did a magnificent job, but that investigation, involving the security of this country, was basically a Sunday school exercise compared to the amount of effort that was put into this.”

The Ervin Committee and Prosecutor Cox will want to examine the records of those 1,500 interviews conducted by those 133 FBI agents. Perhaps the President will, too. Whether those 1,800 leads were legitimate or contrived to fool the President, it is true that all presidents suffer from various forms of information gaps. Although they have access to all kinds of “for the President’s eyes alone” material, they miss much of what reasonably informed citizens see and hear every day. There is something about the rarefied ecology of the White House that limits all presidents’ field of vision: Dwight Eisenhower once stunned me by indicating he had no knowledge of the Edward R. Murrow broadcast about Sen. Joseph McCarthy. Reflecting afterward on what he said, I convinced myself that I had misunderstood the general, until 1967 when, after he read a book I had written, President Eisenhower sent me a long letter in which he said it again:

“Regarding McCarthy, I must remind you that in those days I rarely had time to turn on television. Consequently, I did not know very much of what was going on between the television companies and McCarthy. . . . I did not know some of the Murrow broadcasts that were

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“. . . It will be a time for relentless digging, but it will also be a time for reason and perspective. It will be a time for journalism to reaffirm its rights not by preaching but by demonstrating its need to be. . .”

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critical of the Wisconsin senator and was not even aware that I had allies in my determination to defeat a man whom I thought was doing a great disservice to America, by lies, innuendo and false accusations.”

In that same letter, April 7, 1967, President Eisenhower, who appointed 10 members of the Federal Communications Commission, also observed “the first item in my information vacuum was the extent of the struggle that apparently goes on between the business and public service sections of a broadcasting company.”

This presidential “information vacuum” and resultant isolation is part of Mr. Nixon’s problem. The President’s closest aides and their “band of faceless ghosts,” as one Republican senator called them, attempted to breach the constitutional process by which we elect our leaders. In this subversive act they robbed the presidency of its honor. But Buchanan’s betrayal of his profession was almost more of a conspiracy, for in trying to shield Mr. Nixon from that multitude of tongues, from all those “irresponsible” newspapers, magazines, books and broadcasts, he, Buchanan, deceived the President and, in the process, may have helped rob him of his ability to govern.

James Madison, in the creation of the Constitution, declared, “In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men . . . you must first enable the government to control the governed, and in the next place, oblige it to control itself.” Buchanan attempted to tamper with the delicate circuitry to and from those who govern. The Des Moines speech Buchanan wrote for Vice President Agnew survives as a document in default. All those shrill warnings of media manipulation survive as benchmarks in reverse for the profession they were calculated to discredit and frighten.

The Des Moines lesson endures,

for as Eric Sevareid said of Agnew’s accusations, “What better way to forestall your own credibility gap than to assign it elsewhere in advance. . . . But it will not work.” It didn’t.

What safeguards exist should a beleaguered President be tempted to escalate an international incident in a rash attempt to divert public attention from the muck at home? What happens to all our thorny domestic problems — inflation and the rising cost of living, the impoundment of appropriated funds, the energy crisis, labor disputes — when the President and his new surrogates are preoccupied with their own survival? Who executes the anticipated Supreme Court decision on busing? Who recruits worthy candidates for the hundreds of unoccupied positions in Washington? Who fills vacancies in the regulatory agencies and the federal courts? Who acts in the event of civil disorders in our cities when the line of authority is weakened between city, state and the Commander-in-Chief? And who adjudicates in the power struggle that may develop between the White House staff, and Vice President Agnew, who may find his constitutional authority and his political future caught in the same twilight zone Richard Nixon found so untenable 18 years ago? Should that happen Spiro Agnew may wish to rethink that Des Moines speech about the value of news analysis.

So far much of the case against the President is hearsay, but the web of involvement seems to draw steadily closer. “The scary present” is now, and should the worst occur, the nation must be forewarned — must not be unprepared.

The kind of journalism that will be needed, the explanation of complex, unpleasant options, requires much more painstaking analysis than does classic muckraking. Long after the headlines of Watergate and the pyrotechnics of the hearings

have faded, the consequences will demand patient unraveling and interpretation.

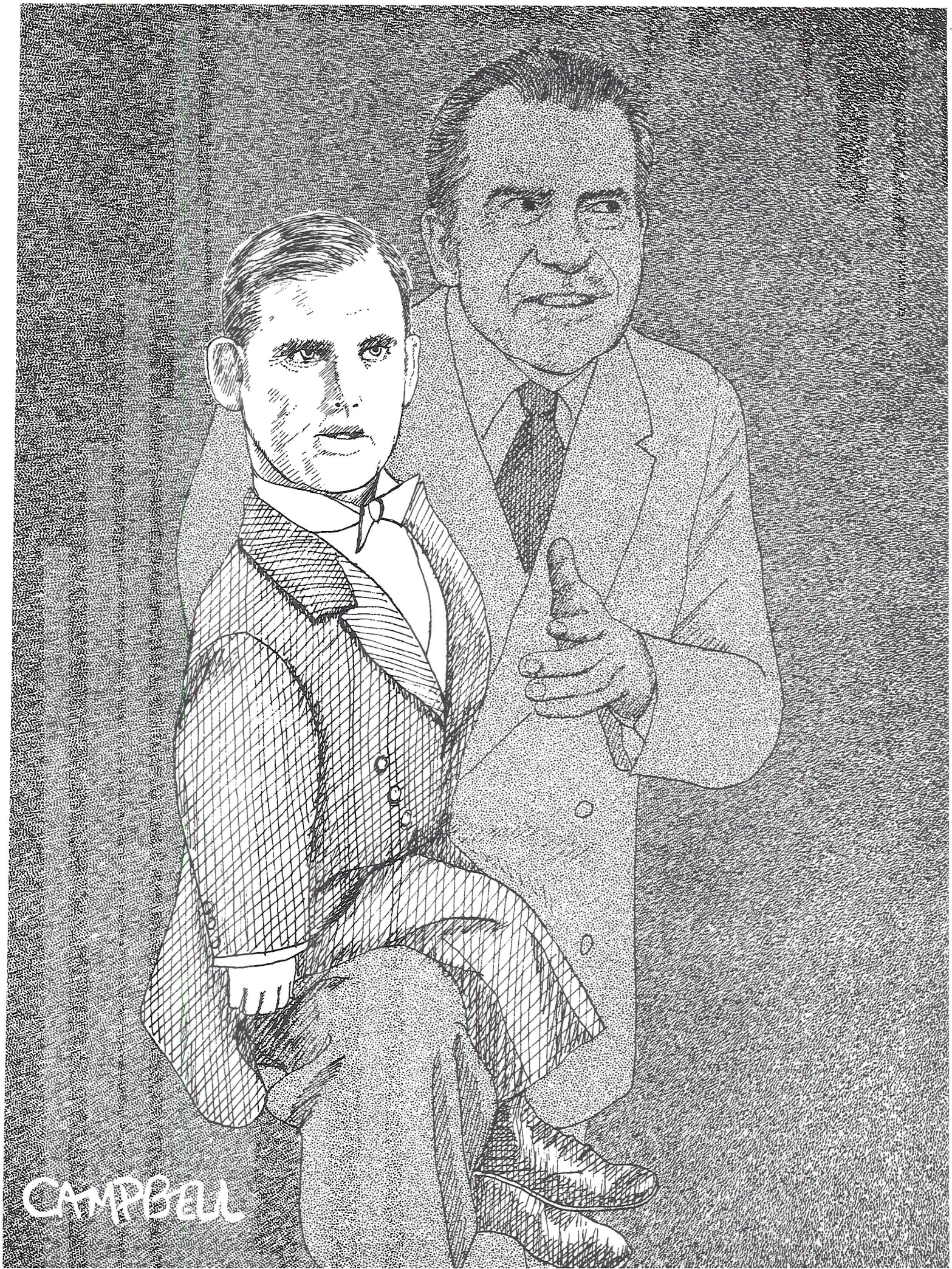
It will be a time for relentless digging, but it will also be a time for reason and perspective. It will be a time for journalism to reaffirm its rights not by preaching but by demonstrating its need to be; not by shouting “I told you so,” but demonstrating its reason for being. Occasionally there is a news story of such consequences that it serves as a watershed for an entire generation as it discovers for itself what Editor White told his anxious Kansas reader that “repression [not violence] has made wrecks of the world.”

Untangling this current wreck will require all the safeguards and restraints which, in their breach, created Watergate. Grand juries don’t determine guilt; hearsay isn’t convincing evidence and eight-column headlines and cover story caricatures can scream the very kind of editorial conclusion that the prudent news story tries to avoid. Guilt by innuendo, by unevaluated leaks, by contrived editing, can be just as reckless as McCarthyism or bugging, or falsification of documents. Oversimplification and rumor, or out-of-context excerpting can be just as dangerous in the hands of a crusading editor or producer as it is in the hands of a Buchanan or a Colson.

Indeed, this *is* a time of rights — theirs as much as *ours*, of reporter’s obligation as much as reporter’s privilege. A recent conversation between two young prosecutors in the United States attorney’s office, each anxious to write the indictment of former Atty. Gen. John Mitchell, says it all:

“I’d work two years for nothing if I could take Mitchell before the grand jury,” says one.

The other answers, “I’d give two years’ pay just to warn the so-and-so of his rights.” ■



CAMPBELL

# HIS MASTER'S VOICE

## Ron Ziegler's Problem with the Press by Charles Long

In simpler times Ronald Louis Ziegler could operate as President Nixon's standoffish press secretary with a certain degree of self-assurance. He had survived more than four years of grumblings from the White House press corps, their constant pecking away for information, their offhanded jibes likening him to a finely tuned recorded announcement or the wooden half of a ventriloquist's act. The boyishly handsome and amiable Ziegler appeared confident in his ability to emit little or no information of substance, masterfully evading or ignoring dozens of questions each day with computerese answers stocked with "inputs" and "outputs" and "time frames" — doing his boss's bidding, in other words, by maintaining a relationship of mutual toleration with the press.

But that was before Watergate and its resultant fallout of deception and misrepresentation. Today, Ron Ziegler stands as a victim of historical circumstances, the bearer of "inoperative" tidings, a man whose believability is now highly questionable, one who can no longer face his adversaries in the press and get by, as it were, without first facing their wrath.

A few months ago Ziegler, one-time jungle cruise guide at Disneyland, was boldly attacking the *Washington Post's* Watergate coverage as "stories based on hearsay, character assassination, innuendo, guilt by association." Those remarks were made to look foolish as more and more corroborations of the *Post* stories surfaced until, finally, a reporter inquired of Ziegler if he cared to apologize for what he had said. The press secretary consented, but even then demonstrating a well-worn knack

for evasiveness: "I think we would all have to say, and I would be, I think, remiss if I did not say, that mistakes were made during this period in terms of comments that were made, perhaps."

The obscure phrasings, the modifying clauses, the indirect remarks that make up much of Ziegler's official vocabulary became abhorrent to reporters with the attempts to explain away espionage and sabotage plans emanating from the White House.

One newsman refused to hold back his anger during a recent press briefing. Clark Mollenhoff, himself a former Nixon staff member and currently (as he was before joining the White House team) a tough investigative reporter for the *Des Moines Register and Tribune*, shouted at Ziegler: "Do you feel free to stand up there and lie, and then come around later and just say it's all 'inoperative'? You're not entitled to any credibility." Ziegler was described as being close to tears in defending the President at that press conference.

What the Watergate revelations have done is to arouse what in retrospect may have seemed like a rather dormant White House press corps into sharper, more persistent questioning. They won't let the press secretary off the hook any more, driving hard at practically every word he utters, demanding a clearer explanation on what he means by this or that presidential dictum.

"This does not mean we are more insulting or hostile," Helen Thomas, United Press International's veteran White House correspondent, explained to *The Quill*. "It does mean we are looking at briefings with a little



more jaundiced eye than before and pressing more for the people's right to know.

Courtney R. Sheldon, national chairman of Sigma Delta Chi's Freedom of Information Committee and Washington bureau chief of the *Christian Science Monitor*, testified last month before a Senate subcommittee on reform of the Freedom of Information Act. One of the questions he raised was how to cut through the "stonewalling" that prevails at a White House press briefing.

"Asking White House press secretary Ziegler questions about what the President thinks or knows is one of the most frustrating exercises in Washington. He does what he is asked to do — not just by the Ehrlichmans and the Haldemans, but by the President himself. He very seldom says I don't know, but I will find out. He just stonewalls," Sheldon explained to the subcommittee.

Ziegler was denounced in a recent report prepared by the National Press Club in Washington as worse than useless: "The White House press secretary has been reduced to a totally programmed spokesman without independent authority or comprehensive background knowledge of administration policies. Rather than opening a window into the White House, the press secretary closes doors." The report added that Ziegler has "misled the public and affronted the professional standards of the Washington press corps."

On June 6, James Reston of the *New York Times* observed: "The problem of the White House and the newspaper and television reporters . . . is still unresolved. Ron Ziegler, the President's press secretary, who is under attack for misleading the press on Watergate, is apparently going to resign or be transferred to another job. He is a symbol of past troubles, not necessarily of his own making, but anyway he is too vulnerable and too visible, so the indications here are that he will have to go — either home or somewhere else."

Reston, who's good at prophecy, appeared to be on the mark again. The White House announced thereabouts that Ziegler had been appointed assistant to the President and would assume the duties formerly performed by Herbert G. Klein as director of the Office of Communications (See "Record", page 8). Also, he would continue to serve as press secretary, the announcement said. As a "broadening of his responsibilities," Ziegler emerged as a new component to the U.S. delegation to the renewed Paris peace talks. He accompanied Henry Kissinger and members of the National Security Council to France to, according to what the Associated Press had been told, "increase his understanding of this particular series of negotiations."

The more skeptical reporters in Washington, however, saw this journey as a convenient means to get the battered Ziegler away from an ever hardening press corps. They guessed that Ziegler was being promoted up — and out, and that deputy press secretary Gerald Warren or someone else would be eased into the spotlight. Warren, in fact, was meeting with the press daily in Ziegler's absence, and some of the regular corps members were wondering if they would see Ziegler again.

But just as abruptly as he had left his tormentors of the

press to be with Kissinger in Paris, he returned to face them once more.

"My hunch a week ago was that Ziegler was on his way out," Donald Irwin, Los Angeles *Times* White House correspondent, told *The QUILL* on June 11. "But today he did the briefing.

"He took an awful pounding today, by the way, one of the worst I've seen. He was being shellacked for almost half an hour with questions of the nature of 'Why didn't you tell us the truth then?' or 'If it was a misinterpretation on your part, why didn't you tell us so?' . . .

"If he is to be phased out, they aren't doing it in a hurry. It could be that the reason he gave the briefing today was that the White House was upset with the rash of stories coming out about Ziegler's loss of credibility. His appearance may have been planned to dispel all the speculation that he is being phased out."

Whatever the reason, Ziegler could have done without that "awful pounding" of June 11. It was actually touched off by something the press secretary had said two and a half months before at Key Biscayne, Fla.

"I should tell you," Ziegler told the press on March 26, "that the President talked to John Dean this morning and discussed the story with him, and following that conversation, and based on that conversation, I will again flatly deny any prior knowledge on the part of Mr. Dean regarding the Watergate matter."

The next day, back in Washington, Ziegler said: "I will say, however, without hesitation, as I did yesterday, I have talked to Mr. Dean, and the President, as I reported to you yesterday, talked to Mr. Dean . . ."

Which brings us again to June 11 and the following direct remarks from Ziegler's briefing:

**Q:** Ron, on March 26, you told us in Florida that the President had telephoned John Dean and expressed on that day his confidence in him. Mr. Dean, in an interview with *Newsweek*, denies that he talked to the President on that day.

Two questions: Did he, in fact, talk to him; and who told you that he talked to him?

**A:** I think the first answer I should give to you to that question is one that Jerry (Warren) gave last night in response to some of these stories, such as the *Newsweek* story, and that is that we are not going to have further White House comment on this type of John Dean source story, which, as Jerry pointed out last night, uses the national media to create misleading impressions for what quite clearly are self-serving purposes.

However, in this one particular aspect of the story which you have raised here, Adam, I think I can clear that up or respond to it at least in a limited way. As you recall, the particular story broke the night before, and the White House press office denied any prior knowledge, which was what the charge was, on the part of Mr. Dean in relation to the Watergate break-in and bugging.

We issued that denial based upon the repeated reassurances — and indeed that night of the 25th — reassurances from Mr. Dean that he had not been involved in the Watergate matter, and I believe, without attempt-

ing to state his position, that still remains his position.

That morning, we had a discussion. I met with the President, and Bob Haldeman was present, as you recall, and we announced that day and were involved in the entire POW — final release of the prisoners of war and the President's up-coming speech, which was scheduled for the 29th, and following my conversation and the reassurances that the press office had had the night before, I mentioned this, as I recall, toward the end of the meeting, and it was pointed out that we had — and this was in reference to Bob and the President, who were there together that morning — again that day received personal assurances from John Dean that he was not involved in the Watergate bugging matter.

My impression from that conversation was that the President had talked directly to John Dean again on that occasion, but in fact, after the story broke, in checking, it appears that the assurances received that day were communicated to the President by way of Bob Haldeman, who was with the President at the time he talked.

I go on at length to give you the setting that existed, and I suppose the essential aspect of that particular story is the fact that we had received the repeated assurances and, therefore, the statements that we made the night before and also in the context of the briefing that day were really the essential relevant facts in response to the questions that were being put to us, whereas in all the central respects, the source story which runs in *Newsweek* is fundamentally misleading.

**Q:** To follow that up, if I may, one of the aspects of the stories that were written in newspapers of the 27th, people led on the fact, as they believed it to be a fact, that the President had telephoned John Dean and expressed his confidence in him.

Now, why isn't there something in the system that says, "No, we have made a mistake," and correct that kind of impression. I don't challenge your honest interpretation of what you were told on the 26th, but it goes for two months with that fact, which apparently isn't a fact, being unchallenged. Why, when you make a mistake, don't you correct it?

**A:** That is a legitimate point, but quite frankly, at that point in time, and in the time that passed, I really didn't even consider this matter until we received an inquiry from *Newsweek* . . . As I say, my impression was that the President had talked directly. It was a wrong impression on my part. But in the discussion with the President that morning, he authorized me to say that he still had confidence in Mr. Dean.

**Q:** You told us specifically, and I asked you why did the President call Mr. Dean, and you said because these are very malicious charges and have to be cleared up. At the time, did you know the President had not talked?

**A:** No, it was my impression he had.

**Q:** Bob Haldeman's deposition was made public last week and he said on the 20th or 21st of March Dean had gone to the President and told him that he had discussed with John Mitchell this possible bugging thing a

year before. In light of that, how can we accept now that the night of the 26th Bob Haldeman and/or you did not know that he had some prior knowledge?

**A:** Here, again, I cannot get into testimony or depositions which you refer to, but I can only tell you that the basis of the information that we had at the time led —

**Q:** You had or Haldeman had?

**A:** We had at the time, which led me to the conclusion, based upon direct conversation . . . led us to the statement that we made the evening of the 25th and on the 26th . . . that he (Dean) did not have prior knowledge of the Watergate bugging . . .

**Q:** In the light of the Haldeman deposition, after the fact, is the President satisfied as of this day that the information he received from Mr. Haldeman was accurate?

**A:** The information that he received on that date was reassurance that Mr. Dean had no prior knowledge of the Watergate bugging . . . In terms of what the fact is on that matter, I at this time cannot draw a conclusion.

**Q:** That is what I am asking. Now, in light of the events, in light of the Haldeman deposition and other events, is the President presently satisfied that the information he received from Mr. Haldeman was accurate?

**A:** He is satisfied, certainly, as I am from any inquiry and from the press office inquiry into that particular charge, satisfied completely that the information we received at that time was the personal reassurance of Mr. Dean that he did not have prior knowledge of the Watergate bugging . . .

**Q:** What I am saying is, the information you are talking about, his personal assurances that you now acknowledge were relayed to the President not by John Dean but by H. R. Haldeman — I am asking whether, in the light of events, the President is satisfied that that version, if you will, of what Dean is supposed to have told Haldeman was the correct version?

**A:** That is why I referred to the inquiries that the press office had made on the 25th. I don't think there is any question about the fact that the personal assurances the President received on the 26th . . . was as stated, and as I stated it then.

**Q:** Three times I have asked the question, and three times you have answered in the past. I am asking about today.

**A:** In terms of whether or not the President is satisfied that he received those assurances on that date, the answer to that is yes, he did receive those assurances and reassurances on that date.

**Q:** Ron, that is not the question.

**A:** If the question is —

**Q:** Did Haldeman tell the President at that time what is now in his deposition?

A: That is something I cannot answer and would not answer.

Q: Did you at any time ever ask the President simply if he had talked to John Dean on the telephone?

A: In the course of the discussion on the other things, as I said, this came up and it was my impression from that conversation that he had talked to him . . .

Q: Do you think Haldeman tried to mislead you?

A: Absolutely not.

. . .

Q: Ron, the stories that moved as a result of your briefing, I think, almost universally led with the fact of a presidential phone call to Dean, not the substance of the denial. Did those stories get into the President's news summary, and when he saw them did he tell you you were mistaken about the fact that he called him?

A: I do not know if the elements of the phone call did get into it. It was something we did not discuss after that time. . .

. . .

Q: Ron, is it that you are accusing *Newsweek* magazine of giving misleading impressions when you are now acknowledging that it was you on the 27th who gave the misleading impression?

A: I am not accusing *Newsweek* of anything.

. . .

Q: Ron, could you ask the people with whom you talk in the White House, when you convey a misleading impression of things they have told you, if they would let you know about it in something less than two months?

A: Adam, you know the reality is that, first of all, in 1,800 briefings, this hasn't happened that often. Secondly —

Q: How do we know?

A: Well, at least I know. You can be skeptical and I recognize that. Also, as I said, the key element is that in the charges being made at that time, the information we had we felt was factual and correct.

IF ANYONE can sympathize with a White House press secretary, it's a former White House press secretary or practically anyone, for that matter, who works in government as a liaison man with the press. Every press secretary, from the President's office on down, has a hard time when things get rough. The press secretary is a personal appointment with no additional confirmation required. In the case of Ziegler, he serves strictly at the President's pleasure and doesn't say any more than he is told to say.

Part of Ron Ziegler's problem may lie in his policy of keeping the press always at arm's length. Not that he should necessarily befriend them, but perhaps he has carried the adversary relationship too far. For example, James Hagerty, who was President Eisenhower's press secretary, would field tough questions and take his lumps as Ziegler has, but Hagerty could remain personable to the extent of carrying on dialog with newsmen long after working hours. But Ziegler most likely has been operat-

ing at another disadvantage (or advantage, depending on the point of view): Unlike Hagerty and others, he did not come into the job with former news experience.

During his undergraduate days at the University of Southern California Ziegler participated in campus politics and worked at Disneyland. After a start at Procter and Gamble, H. R. (Bob) Haldeman hired him for his advertising agency staff in Los Angeles where both were active in the 1962 Nixon campaign for governor of California. When Nixon made the race for President in 1968, Haldeman persuaded him to try Ziegler at the job of press relations director instead of Nixon's close friend for more than 20 years, Herb Klein, an experienced newsmen who served as press aide in Nixon's losing race for governor.

Following Nixon's election as President, Klein, former editor of the *San Diego Union*, was given a relatively meaningless title of White House communications director. "His sole purpose," as described to *The QUILL* by Donald Irwin of the *Los Angeles Times*, "was to act as a missionary for the President to newspapers in what Nixon called 'America's heartland,' and he did a good job at that."

Ziegler, in the meantime, was becoming ensconced in the White House power structure, reaching a personal peak in 1972 when he was given the opportunity to select the media representatives who would accompany President Nixon on his visit to China.

With the deepening Watergate dilemma, however, he has become less visible in his role as press secretary. And, again, the explanation is a logical one.

"Whether he serves justly or poorly, it is a matter between him and the President, reminds George Reedy, a press secretary to President Johnson and currently dean of the Marquette University College of Journalism.

"It's the President who's supposed to serve the public, not his press secretary. It's a disservice to the public to focus attacks on the press secretary. It's not his doing, after all. I would guess that Presidents prefer the attention of bad publicity on their press secretaries.

"I wouldn't have used the term 'inoperative,' Reedy told *The QUILL*. "It was a poor choice of words, but really a minor thing in terms of Ziegler's over-all role."

But Peter Kumpa, Washington bureau chief for the *Baltimore Sun*, takes a different view. "Any press secretary, any spokesman, should not tell lies. It's that simple. When he gets up and says that what he said last year or last month is now inoperative, then his credibility isn't worth a damn. It's not the use of the word 'inoperative' that hurt Ziegler's credibility, but the fact that he said things that were inoperative."

Helen Thomas adds that the climate prior to Watergate was not necessarily one of a press corps that wasn't tough enough. It was more, she said, of the nature of a "modus operandi of a brick wall that couldn't be scaled.

"But the administration, I think, now realizes that it has to be more forthcoming. Taxpayers are paying the salaries of these spokesmen. They're just like any other public servant in that respect. True, they have a master to serve, but they must go beyond that. Not only can a press secretary serve two masters, he *must*." ■

# Thoughts on Watergate

by James R. Dickenson

I had spent a few pleasant moments swapping war stories with my neighbor, a retired Army paratroop colonel, and then he fixed me with that locked-on-target glare that must have spelled bad trouble for yardbirds back in his active duty days. "Watergate, Watergate, Watergate," he exploded. "Why don't you people move on to something else? Goddammit, how I'm sick of that subject!"

This didn't come as any particular shock. With network television's airing of the Senate hearings conducted by Sam Ervin, angry viewers across the country immediately reacted, demanding that they not be robbed of their daily fare of soap operas. And a recent Gallup Poll shows that 44 per cent of its respondents thought there has been too much Watergate coverage, compared to 11 per cent who think there's been too little, and 38 per cent who think it's been about right. So, I responded to my neighbor to the effect that in a way it was like fighting a war. You get tired of the war, but if you're a warrior you want to be where the action is. He liked that; that he understood.

But I was cheating a little for the sake of neighborliness. All papers, including my own, constantly question the scope and balance of their Watergate coverage. There are arguments that we should be paying more attention to the economy and to the fuel shortage and other matters of substance and quit fooling around with this gumshoe business.

But I believe that there is no such thing as too much coverage of Wa-

tergate. It is a political scandal of such profound consequences and deep-seated causes that to ignore any facet of it could be disastrous. In the long run it is a bigger story than, say, the current state of the economy.

It dwarfs the Teapot Dome scandal of the Harding administration and the Credit Mobilier and other corruptions of the Grant era (newspapers contributed to the exposure of these scandals, including the *St. Louis Post Dispatch* and *Albuquerque State Journal* in the case of Teapot Dome and the *New York Sun* and *New York Herald* in Grant's day).

People who are impatient with the seemingly endless coverage of Watergate or are embarrassed for partisan or ideological reasons argue that, after all, no one was physically hurt and nobody's money was stolen.

This was also true of Teapot Dome and Credit Mobilier, which involved kickbacks and payoffs to public officials for, respectively, the leasing of the U.S. Navy oil reserves and the spectacular looting of the Union Pacific Railroad construction contracts. These scandals were products of their historic times, specifically the settling of the continent and the exploitation of its natural wealth. They were also simple, garden variety, run-of-the-mill theft.

WATERGATE is a product of its historic time, too. It is also a more profound scandal than its predecessors because of its nature. Money was not the end, it was a means to the

end, which was political power, the enormous concentrated power of the modern U.S. presidency. This power is a legitimate goal, but not if its pursuit involves corruption of the political system and the use of totalitarian methods on a democratic people.

Watergate sprouted in the soil of 25 years of Cold War diplomacy, the strains of nuclear survival, and the social divisions of the 1960s, which were induced to a great extent by the Vietnam war. They often resulted in mass violence, sometimes in death, as at Kent State.

The use of electronic snooping and the ridiculous plots and code names concocted by the former CIA operatives who executed it ("Gemstone," "Ruby I," "Ruby II," etc.) have the nightmare quality of a nation's Cold War spying turned against its own people. It smells of 20th century totalitarianism and so does, I submit, the seemingly mindless loyalty to the President professed by the bright, handsome young men who have come before the Ervin special Senate investigating committee. This apparently blinded them to traditional ethical behavior. I don't mean to impugn President Nixon with this particular observation, but it's necessary to remember that there can be no dictatorship without loyalty to the individual taking precedence over loyalty to principle, society and institutions.

This is a climate a free press cannot tolerate if it is responsible in the sense Jefferson had in mind when he called it the "watchdog of democracy." Vietnam and Watergate

have been traumatic events for the American people, leading to the much-remarked "crisis of confidence," as we have learned over the past 10 years that our politicians and public officials have lied to us, often systematically.

But since it has happened, it's vital that the situation be exposed and probed and that the American people truly realize what was done and what was attempted. There has been too much nonsense perpetrated in this country under the cover of "national security." A common metaphor is that Watergate is a boil that has come to a head, which is painful but healthy; I'd carry the medical metaphor a step further and say that what we also need is a good purge, which can't be accomplished without the press.

Historians I've talked to note that the major scandals of Credit Mobilier, Teapot Dome and Watergate have come exactly 50 years apart. Some assume that the fearsome publicity that has accompanied them appears to have discouraged wrong-doing on such a scale for a time, anyway. Some are optimistic enough to hope that we may be buying a generation of freedom from the 1984 sort of bugging and wire-tapping that is a part of Watergate.

This is also a good time to recall Mark Sullivan's old dictum that "the only way for a newspaperman to look at a politician is down." Forty years of activist, increasingly powerful, and sometimes charismatic presidents have blinded many to the fact that a democracy's leaders are supposed to earn respect. It doesn't accrue to them in a sort of Divine Right of Kings on the assumption of office.

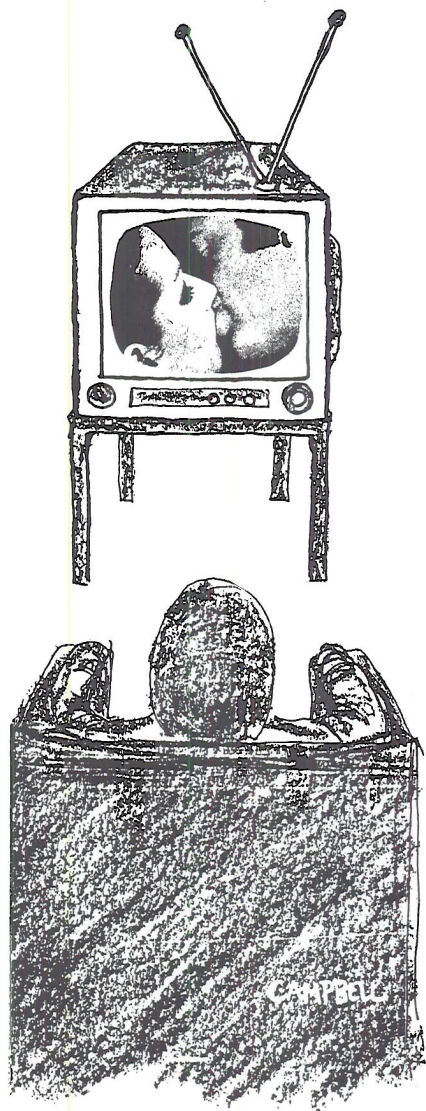
The stakes, as always, are high. And there are obvious problems. Lawyers are concerned that too much publicity may jeopardize fair trial. Common sense and decency are the newspaperman's best guide on this, and we should not forget that our function is fullness and freedom of information. The lawyers are plentiful enough and well enough organized and, God knows, articulate enough to argue their case. They don't need our help, and we need to defend our own interest and function.

There's another serious problem in covering a story like Watergate, which depends so much on "sources." That's the danger of smearing an innocent — or at least less guilty — reputation under the competitive urge to get there first. It is a tribute to the Washington *Post's* superb work in digging this story out that in all the muck it's raked and revelations it's brought to light it's only made one serious error — accusing H. R. (Bob) Haldeman, Nixon's former White House chief of staff, of being accused in grand jury testimony of being authorized to make secret payments out of the political espionage fund. The *Post* stands behind this authorization of Haldeman's but concedes that there was no such testimony at the grand jury.

The protection against this, as the *Post* demonstrated, is plain hard work and meticulous care. Reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, who have been on the story since the Watergate burglars were apprehended, have broken most of the *Post's* leads. Their schedule was one that could have been followed only by a bachelor (Woodward) or a man who describes himself as "seven-eighths divorced" (Bernstein).

They interviewed sources in deserted parking lots at midnight. They got hold of a Government Accounting Office listing of all the employees of the Committee for the Re-election of the President (or CRP, better known to newsmen as CREEP). They went out evenings and knocked on these people's doors at home. Occasionally someone would invite them in for a few minutes, which would stretch into the entire evening. They interviewed people who resigned from CRP. The sources began to fall into line and piece by piece the story developed.

Woodward and Bernstein share a number of attributes, youth (Woodward is 30, Bernstein 29) and tenacity between them. But in many respects their styles are dissimilar. Woodward is a Yale graduate, the son of a WASP Republican judge in Wheaton, Ill., with the smooth, button-down good looks of the Ivy Leaguer he is (he was also



*... angry viewers across the country immediately reacted, demanding that they not be robbed of their daily fare of soap operas.*

accepted to Harvard Law School, but chose journalism instead).

Bernstein is a shaggy-haired extrovert who dropped out of the University of Maryland and spent most of his six years on the *Post* on routine coverage of the suburbs. His prospects had dimmed somewhat for a while when an editor caught him fast asleep one afternoon on the couch of the city hall press room. Woodward covered the Montgomery County (Md.) suburbs of Washington for a local weekly and over the period of a year hounded the *Post* into hiring him. As members of the metropolitan staff, they were assigned to Watergate because it started out as a police story.

Their working techniques are different. Woodward is a smoothie: "You're off the record? What is that? Are you telling me the truth? Are you worried that your facts aren't right?" Bernstein is more direct; chasing a source one time he jumped into the laps of people sharing the man's cab.

As members of the metropolitan rather than the national staff, neither had made it big on the Washington cocktail circuit. Frequently, as at the recent White House press corps dinner, they find themselves being introduced to high government officials who are their secret sources and all go through the charade of pretending not to know each other.

At the *Post* these days the mood is the equivalent of winning the Superbowl. The *Post*, in fact, won the Watergate competition the way Secretariat won the Belmont. But they played a risky game.

"The stakes were very high," says Ben Bradlee, the executive editor, who keeps a "Nixon Bugs Me" sign on his desk. "The reputation of the Washington Post Co. and indeed the institution of journalism was on the line."

It was rocky going at first. Mrs. Katharine Graham, the *Post's* owner, had experienced presidential anger before when the *Post* turned against Lyndon Johnson's Vietnam policy, but nothing to match "this kind of fury and heat." This was "really for keeps, the toughest thing (we) had ever faced, by far tougher than publishing the Pentagon pa-

pers." Until the story blew open there was a fear that the *Post* was being led down the primrose path, into an ambush.

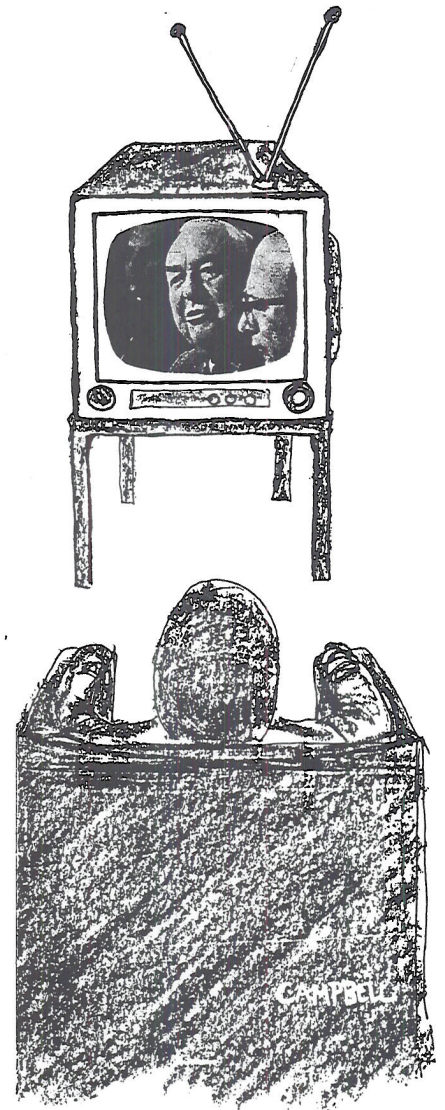
Post Co. stock dropped from an all-time high of \$38 last December to a low of less than \$25. Part of the reason probably are the challenges to the licenses of the Post Co.'s two Florida television stations led by a former officer of CRP and a Nixon fund-raiser.

The *Post* deserves the credit it gets for Watergate; its task was much more difficult than that of the *New York Times*, which broke the Pentagon papers, because Daniel Ellsberg dumped the papers into the *Times'* lap. "No one wheeled up to us with a grocery cart full of government documents," Carl Bernstein notes.

Broadcasting also deserves credit for its work early in the game, particularly the CBS Evening News with Walter Cronkite. Gavel-to-gavel Senate Watergate hearings are being conducted live on television, and for public television stations, this has been a blessing in disguise. The *Wall Street Journal* noted that fan letters are pouring in by the thousands, containing tens of thousands of dollars in contributions. This is an ironic twist in circumstances. Just prior to the Senate hearings, the administration was taking control of the selection and scheduling of public-TV programs.

I for one am willing to bask vicariously in the reflected glory of the Watergate story and I'm sure I share this feeling with most newspapermen. Watergate was a battle with authority that it was crucial to win. But we can't afford to sit and congratulate ourselves for very long. For one thing, as press critic Ben Bagdikian has pointed out, there was only a handful of newsmen really poking hard into the Watergate back when it was still a tough game.

For another, the credibility of the press, never very high with a lot of people, has suffered along with that of other institutions. That Gallup Poll reminds us that in addition to our usual sins of omission, excess, and error, we have a problem even when we're right. People do nurture the urge to kill the messenger who bears bad tidings. ■



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