It seems incredible today that when Martha Mitchell first telephoned UPI reporter Helen Thomas, almost exactly a year ago, to say that she was leaving her husband until he quit as chairman of the Nixon reelection campaign, no one took her seriously. One scans the newspaper clippings in disbelief. The wife of the former Attorney General says, five days after the Watergate break-in, that she has given her husband an ultimatum. Asked how she felt about the ransacking and bugging of the Democratic National Headquarters, she replies, “I’m sick and tired of the whole operation.” The New York Times buries this story on the bottom of page 12. After all, why make too much of anything Martha Mitchell says? Don’t we know her to be official court jester, always good for an amusing little story with her late-night telephone calls, always good for a laugh?

The charge in the banner headline of the New York Daily News, ‘I’M A PRISONER OF GOP: MARTHA,’ that appeared four days later would have been considered of utmost gravity had it been made, say, by Mrs. Melvin Laird or Mrs. Spiro Agnew. But the News illustrates the headline with a half-page picture of Martha, taken three months earlier, her blond head held high, her mouth wide open, the caption reading, “‘Well, Shut My Mouth....’” It recalls that her “hubby” was then restraining her from talking about the ITT affair. Ha-ha. Very funny, that Martha Mitchell.

The New York Times relegates this same story, in which Martha speaks of the “dirty things that go on,” to page 25, and neither the Times nor the Washington Post nor the News has any mention of Watergate in it.

Actually, the Watergate scandal might have been exposed much earlier had it not been for two swift and deliberate moves designed to keep Martha Mitchell from giving away what we now know to be the Watergate cover-up. The first step was to keep her from learning for as long as possible that the man in charge of her security, James McCord, was one of those caught at the break-in. It was this that led to her virtual imprisonment for a week in a California motel. The second step was to establish a new image for Martha that would insure that anything she said would be discounted immediately. Martha Mitchell had to be transformed from an outspokenly amusing Cabinet wife to a “sick woman” whose outbursts would not be taken seriously.

Both of those maneuvers worked extremely well. We can now, for the first time, reconstruct the events following the arrests at the Watergate that led to Martha Mitchell’s insistence on her husband’s resignation from the campaign committee and to the headlines, MITCHELL GIVES UP POLITICS FOR LOVE.

A week before Watergate the Mitchells flew out to California for a series of celebrity engagements tied to Republican fund raising. Martha was much in demand for such occasions. On the weekend that the scandal broke, she and her husband, along with First Lady Pat Nixon, were guests of honor at a lavish, Hollywood-style party in Beverly Hills, with Governor and Mrs. Reagan and such stars as John Wayne. The rest of the weekend was filled with similar political-social-financial festivities. John Mitchell and his close aide, Fred LaRue, heard of the Watergate incident by phone on Saturday shortly after it happened. The next day, Mitchell, still in California, issued a statement denying any campaign-committee complicity in or knowledge of the bugging; the statement addressed itself particularly to one of those arrested, who had been identified as an employee of the President’s reelection committee and the / turn to page 14
the next day, Mitchell and LaRue had promise you, I will take you back to... to make a speech, to dedicate any-

Vice-President didn't want to do any-

somehow Mitchell and LaRue managed

They kept me going all that day.

something they called on Martha Mitchell

It was at this point that the laughing

Accordingly, she simply suggested that

as comic

When the statement did not say was that

MCCALL'S. JULY 1973

to keep the news from his wife as long as possible. There is no evidence that at this stage

handled that as soon as she heard McCord's name her suspicions

According to Winzola McLendon, a

Week of the Watergate mess, and there

What the statement did not say was that

Mitchell and, after which

Eight days later Mitchell, relaxed,
nearly as simple as that, still it must be noted that John Mitchell never did seek to attribute

Both John and Martha dote on their daughter, Marty, who is 12, with an affection that is, according to an old family friend, "more like that of loving grandparents than parents." Marty constitutes a second family for them both—John has a grown son and daughter from his first marriage, Martha a son now in law school. As to how aware Marty might be of the Watergate scan-

But once they had left, Martha asked

One had either to take

He had X-rayed the furniture in it after

Continued

Republic National Committee. Mitchell referred to McCord vaguely and impersonally as "this man" and "the person involved" and explained that he was "the proprietor of a private security firm, which was employed by our committee months ago to assist with the installation of our security sys-

Preparing to return to Washington the next day, Mitchell and LaRue had

the morning papers thrown away lest

Martha to see them.

But once they had left, Martha asked

in charge. He had personally checked on

Mitchell's reaction upon hearing of

McCord's arrest was to keep the

threat" over her unlisted phone.

He had X-rayed the furniture in it after

In his sworn deposition in connec-

The love in that home is just

fantastic.

family friend, "more like that of loving

grandparents than parents." Marty con-

continues to protect his wife. Even people

who have met the former Attorney Gener-

ally caused report that his references to Martha are always laced with tenderness and affection. One of her oldest and closest friends, who

stayed with the Mitchells recently when the Watergate conspiracy blew wide open, says, "The love in that home is just

fantastic."

The love in that home is just

fantastic."

Several days later she arrived at her

old haven, the Westchester Country

Club, to issue her famous second blast,

"I am a prisoner.... I won't stand for

information" and "they were afraid of

Accordingly, he simply suggested that

instead of returning to Washington as

planned, Martha stay on in Califor-

nia to get some rest and sunshine. All
day Sunday the radio and TV carried

the news of the Watergate arrests, but

somehow Mitchell and LaRue managed
to keep it from Martha. As she puts it,

They had me at a brunch, they had me

as a cocktail party, they had me at a

reception and a dinner all day Sunday.

They kept me going all that day.

In her sworn deposition in connec-
tion with the Watergate case, Mitchell

against the Committee for the Relec-
tion of the President, she says that de-
spite McCord, she did find time to have "a long discussion with John on Sunday afternoon.

You can't please to let's get out of Washington. I was exhausted.

I just had to go out on the road doing everybody should have been doing... when the

Vice-President didn't want to do any-

thing they called on Martha Mitchell

... to make a speech, to dedicate any-

thing, any official function.... It was just

too much of a strain on both of us.

"I promised you, I will take you back to

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From Mrs. Nixon's social secretary and that Mrs. Nixon herself had said at a press conference in August that poor John Mitchell has not been a "very, very ill." A thorough check of all the published reports of Mrs. Nike's press conferences fails to reveal any such remark.

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"The White House was then preparing to leave Washington. On the day after her "dirty business" continued from page 19, the attack on Martha's mental stability was at its heaviest. The Washington Post's story, "The White House," said, "The White House is not keeping all of her campaign commitments in recent months. In Cabinet circles the word is out that pressure has taken a toll on Martha's nerves, that she has a severe personal problem."

By early September, when the Mitchell story hit, the attack on Martha's mental stability was at its heaviest. The Washington Post's story, "The White House," said, "The White House is not keeping all of her campaign commitments in recent months. In Cabinet circles the word is out that pressure has taken a toll on Martha's nerves, that she has a severe personal problem."

With the departure of the Mitchells for New York in late September, the rumors of Martha's "breakdown" at least began to abate, if not disappear. Martha herself, emerging from a simmer of silence to say good-bye to some of her favorite Washington correspondents, told them, "I want to be sure that my side is revealed to the least a word about Watergate. The White House, she says, wanted to make Mitchell out "a compassionate man, putting his career on ice to protect the fragile mentality of his wife."

It is evident that there was a concerted effort on the part of Republican party officials to suggest that Martha was indeed ill and that her remarks present or future, were to be considered in the midst of a war-ravaged period. On the day after her "dirty business" statement, even before Mitchell had rejoined the campaign, Bonnie's question got to Martha: "Why don't you tell her the truth?" By October, the lore of Martha's "breakdown" continued from page 19.

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