

Mary McGrory

Jerry Voorhis Looks Back

Washington

RICHARD NIXON'S First political victim, former Congressman Jerry Voorhis, happened to be in Washington during the worst week of the President's long political career.

Voorhis is 72 now, gray-haired and somewhat frail. He is not surprised by the revelations that poured out of the mouth of John Dean at the Ervin Committee hearings. "It's the unnecessary ferocity," says Voorhis mildly. "He did not have to use those tactics against me, just as he didn't need to use them in 1972. He was going to win in 1946. It was a Republican year."



But Nixon, a tense young Navy veteran, chose to go for Voorhis's throat. Murray Chotiner was Nixon's campaign manager, and the effort was lavishly funded by wealthy California businessmen.

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VORRHIS WAS thrown off balance by the virulence of the attack, his campaign fell apart, and Nixon defeated him by over 15,000 votes and a liberal, benevolent political career was ended.

"He didn't ruin my life," explains Voorhis. "I would have liked to try again for the House, but I had no money and needed a job."

In 1947, he published a book called "Confessions of a Congressman," in which he sorted out what had hit him. Last fall, he published another book called "The Strange Case of Richard Nixon." Despite its title, it is a thoughtful study of the first Nixon Administration, not the personality of the President. Its conclusion: "It is quite impossible to find in Mr. Nixon's record any principles of government or any policies, social, economic, international or otherwise for which he has clearly stood."

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THE WATERGATE CRISIS moved Voorhis's publishers to request him for an update for a new edition. Voorhis looks at it this way: "How much he knew about Watergate, or when he knew it, is of relatively little importance. He is either the poorest judge of human character, or else, being the resourceful politician which he is acclaimed to be, he decided, with purpose, to surround himself with people who were quite ready to engage in illegal and reprehensible political tactics calculated to suborn the entire democratic political process of the country."

And what to do? Like many Democrats, Voorhis believes that impeachment "would tear the country apart." The best course, he thinks, would be for the President to resign — "as Lyndon Johnson did in effect, for the good of the country."

The third possibility he sees is that the Republican party, which Nixon deserted, which owes him nothing, and which stands to lose everything, would tell him that they are prepared to join with the Democrats in over-riding vetoes unless he stops "trying to run the world and commences to be a constitutional President."

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