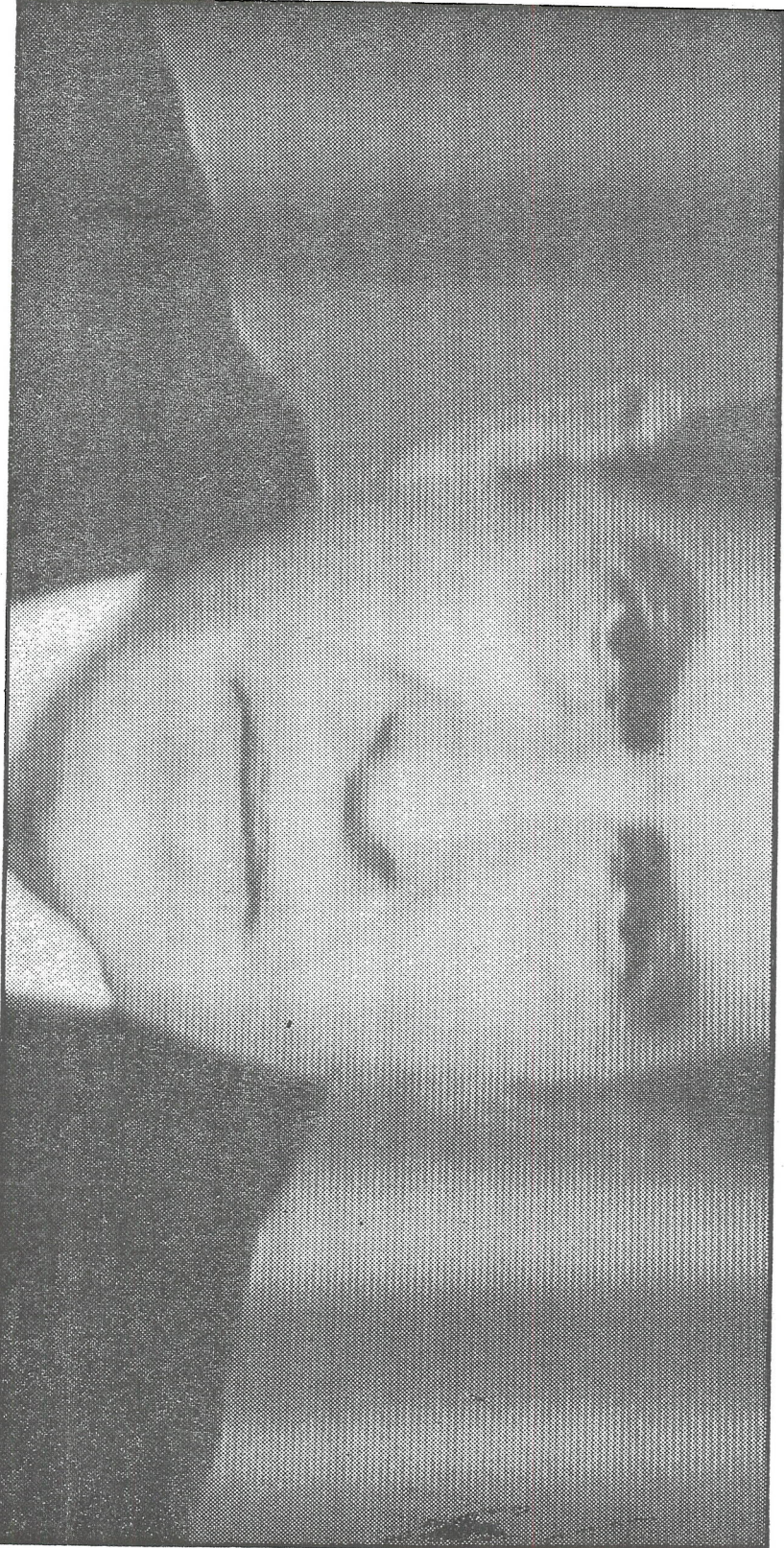


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# Watergate as Part of the Purchase Price



Allen Green



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By Robert L. King

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SAN MATEO, Calif.—Since most of the Watergate testimony is now in, and the President has again stated his case, perhaps it is time for an additional perspective. My own frame of reference is built on long friendship with Mr. Nixon and whatever insight and understanding of his character I have gained from my association with him.

Perhaps I can offer at least a partial answer to the question: "How could Mr. Nixon not have known?" In his instructions to me when I first went to work for him 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 concentrate on the problems with which he was dealing. His overseas missions for President Eisenhower, even then, gave him his first and abiding interest in foreign policy and world politics. Much time was taken up in preparation for these trips and much time was absorbed in meetings of the Cabinet, National Security Council, Government Contracts Committee and other duties. 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. Otherwise, I couldn't do the necessary job for him.

However, too literal an interpretation on the part of top staff people in a highly political situation can lead to blindness and insensitivity on the part of both master and servant. Such phrases as "the Berlin Wall," and rumors that the top staffers were harder to see than the President, could have arisen only because of too strict a conformance with the admonition of "protect yourself." The result was to almost form 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 such power reposes in individuals whose experience, capacity and political instincts are limited. Such a *modus operandi* might well have worked in other circumstances. 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 inexperience—particularly political inexperience.

These thoughts are offered by way of explanation, not absolution, as both

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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. A reporter recently wrote that Mr. Nixon, in 27 years of political life, has never been caught in a lie. 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.

In addition, he is simply too intelligent to even consider the risk of a "second-story job" on Democratic headquarters. It is completely out of character for a man who voluntarily denied himself the Presidency when it was probably within his grasp. 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. 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.

Watergate happened because Mr. Nixon's remoteness and that of his

top staff people made the latter vulnerable to an excess of power. The 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 judgment of otherwise good men.

I have no doubt over the 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 policy toward Russia and China, has been a key ingredient in 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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