

## Nixon's erratic behavior

Captain Queeg is in the wheelhouse and the ship yaws crazily in the storm. He calls on the pipe for the ship's officers, but no one answers.

"Mr. Ehrlichman, Mr. Haldeman, come here, I need you. . . . Mr. Agnew, Mr. Mitchell, to the bridge, on the double. . . . Mr. Gray, Mr. Kleindienst, do you hear me? . . . Mr. Richardson, Mr. Ruckelshaus, answer me, dammit. . . . Mr. Hickel, are you there?"

Captain Queeg's voice trails off as he remembers that he fired Wally Hickel early in the cruise. Fired him for . . . what was it? Oh, yes, for wanting him to listen to the grievances of the crew.

Well, the crew is grumbling louder now, and his other officers are gone too.

"Let them go, the disloyal buggers. I can run this ship without them." Captain Queeg realizes he is talking to himself, but he no longer cares.

"Security risks, that's what they were. I could've pinned it on them, too, if everybody had just let me conduct a thorough investigation my way . . ."

A great wave staggers the ship, jarring the captain out of his reverie.

"This storm has got to stop!" he shouts into the howling wind. "Why can't people understand that storms aren't in the national interest?"

But another wave crashes on the deck, drenching the wheelhouse in white water. Captain Queeg slumps into a chair and his thoughts turn inward.

He nervously fingers those precious round objects that everyone has been trying to take away from him.

"But I'll never let anybody see them," he tells himself. "They are mine! Mine!"

The curtain falls.

Forgive me that little excursion into melodrama, but it seems in keeping with the course events have taken.

"Bizarre" is the word Sen. Walter Mondale blurted out to describe the presidential behavior of the past weekend.

Said Congressman Jerome Waldie: "The president is acting most unstably."

Congressman B. F. Sisk suggested it is time to dust off the clause of the 25th Amendment which prescribes what to do when a President is incapacitated.

Whatever else the flurry of firings and resignations signifies, there does seem to be something wild-eyed and erratic about the President's latest game plan.

He may indeed feel that he is cornered, but this wasn't the moment to lash out at the people he regards as his tormentors. He could have played for time.

It's true that he has lost every round so far in the judicial contest over the Watergate tapes. But those defeats were only preliminaries. The decisive battle was yet to be fought in the Supreme Court.

Conceivably he might have won the decision there. Even if he felt he would lose, it takes time to prepare and argue a Supreme Court case, and time might have offered him a way out that isn't presently visible.

A prudent man doesn't burn his bridges unnecessarily. But a highly distraught man does.

His action provoked his fellow politicians to use words they normally avoid.

"Monstrous" was Sen. John Tunney's word, while Sen. Ted Kennedy called it a "reckless act of desperation." They are both Democrats of course, but the most cutting comment came from a Republican. Sen. Bob Packwood of Oregon said of the President: "His deeds are dishonorable."

Now that so much crockery has been broken, it's hard to see how Mr. Nixon could recoup his position even if he released the tapes for national broadcast.

He refuses to tell us where they have been kept during the battle over their release. We do know that some of them were taken out of the White House and remained overnight in the sole custody of Bob Haldeman.

All this raises questions about what lawyers call the perfectibility of the evidence.

Or, to put it bluntly, even if Nixon released the tapes now, would the American public believe they haven't been doctored?