



WHITE HOUSE STAFF WAVES FAREWELL TO THE NIXONS AS THEIR HELICOPTER LIFTS OFF ON FIRST LEG OF HOMEWARD TRIP TO CALIFORNIA

BURNETT—GAMMA

THE LAST WEEK

THE UNMAKING OF THE PRESIDENT

When the nation's worst political scandal finally rendered the presidency of Richard Nixon inoperative, it did so with savage swiftness. Hopelessly entrapped in the two-year tangle of his own deceit, forced into a confession of past lies, he watched the support of his most loyal defenders collapse in a political maelstrom, driven by their bitterness over the realization that he had betrayed their trust. Yet, as throughout his self-inflicted Watergate ordeal, Nixon remained unwilling to admit, perhaps even to himself, the weight of his transgressions against truth and the Constitution. He was among the last to appreciate the futility of his lonely struggle to escape removal from office.

Fittingly, the prelude to collapse began on July 24, when three "strict constructionist" Supreme Court Justices appointed by Nixon searchingly scoured the Constitution and joined in a unanimous finding that it contained no legal basis for his withholding 64 White House tape recordings from Special Prosecutor Leon Jaworski. The President on May 6 and 7 had listened to some of those tapes and abandoned a proposed compromise under which he would turn twelve of them over to Jaworski. He did not tell his chief Watergate lawyer James St. Clair that those tapes would destroy his professions of innocence in the cover-up conspiracy. In-

stead, Nixon allowed St. Clair to carry a claim of absolute Executive privilege to the Supreme Court and to argue before the House Judiciary Committee that the President was unaware of that cover-up until informed of it on March 21, 1973, by John Dean.

An Inquisitive Federal Judge

Incredibly, St. Clair had taken on the job of defending the President without any assurance that he would have access to all of the evidence.* But just two days after the Supreme Court decision, St. Clair was jolted into a full awareness of his responsibilities by Federal Judge John J. Sirica, whose judicial inquisitiveness has played a pivotal role in unraveling the Watergate deceptions. "Have you personally listened to the tapes?" Sirica asked St. Clair in court, well aware from news reports that St. Clair had not. "You mean to say the President wouldn't approve of your listening to the tapes? You mean to say you could argue this case without knowing all the background of these matters?" Visibly flustered for the first time in his presidential-defense role, St. Clair promised to

*Robert Bork, U.S. Solicitor General, had turned down an offer to become Nixon's chief defense lawyer precisely because he was not assured such access.

analyze each tape submitted to the court.

That promise set the trap. Nixon insisted upon listening to each tape once more before transmitting it to the court. Even if he had wanted to, there was no way he could now alter the evidence. The erase mechanism on the President's Sony recorder had been disconnected by the Secret Service. Even more important, Nixon Aide Stephen Bull delivered duplicate tapes rather than the originals to the President. After Nixon listened to the tapes, trusted secretaries prepared verbatim transcripts, and, in accordance with Sirica's wishes, copies went to St. Clair.

For the President's lawyer, the awful moment of truth came on Wednesday, July 31. On that day, he received and read the transcripts of three conversations held on June 23, 1972, between Nixon and his top aide, Chief of Staff H.R. Haldeman. Instantly, the stunned St. Clair knew that the contents were devastating to Nixon's defense. The transcripts showed that just six days after the Watergate wiretap-burglary, Nixon was fully aware that Re-Election Campaign Director John Mitchell and two former White House consultants, E. Howard Hunt and G. Gordon Liddy, had been involved—even though Hunt and Liddy had not then been arrested (see box page 18). He was told by Haldeman that "the FBI is not under control," and that agents were tracing money found on the burglars to Nixon's re-election committee.

Nixon immediately proposed cover-up actions. His first suggestion to Haldeman, according to the transcripts, was

that each campaign contributor whose check was traced to the burglary by the FBI should claim that the burglars had approached him independently for the money. Haldeman objected that this would involve "relying on more and more people all the time." Haldeman relayed a suggestion from Mitchell and Dean that the CIA should be asked to tell the FBI to "stay to hell out of this" because the FBI probe would expose unnamed—and actually nonexistent—secret CIA operations. Asked Haldeman about the FBI, "You seem to think the thing to do is get them to stop?" Replied Nixon. "Right, fine." Added Nixon later: "All right, fine, I understand it all. We won't second-guess Mitchell and the rest."

With those words, Nixon authorized the cover-up, a criminal obstruction of justice that was eventually to destroy his

with Nixon that day, indicating a prior discussion. One such occasion almost certainly was on June 20, the day on which the two held an 18½-minute Watergate discussion—the tape of which was later manually erased by someone with access to the White House-held recordings.

Reading the transcripts, St. Clair had no doubt about what should be done: they must be released promptly and publicly. He knew that once Jaworski got them under the Supreme Court order, they would eventually become public, if only at the cover-up conspiracy trial of six Nixon aides. He knew that the Senate could acquire them for its probable trial of the President, and he feared that their contents might leak out earlier. Release in any of those forms would look involuntary. That would not only destroy Nixon but it could ruin St. Clair

would have to resign from the Nixon defense if his advice was not taken. Fatalistically, Nixon finally concurred. "What's done is done," he said. "Let it go."

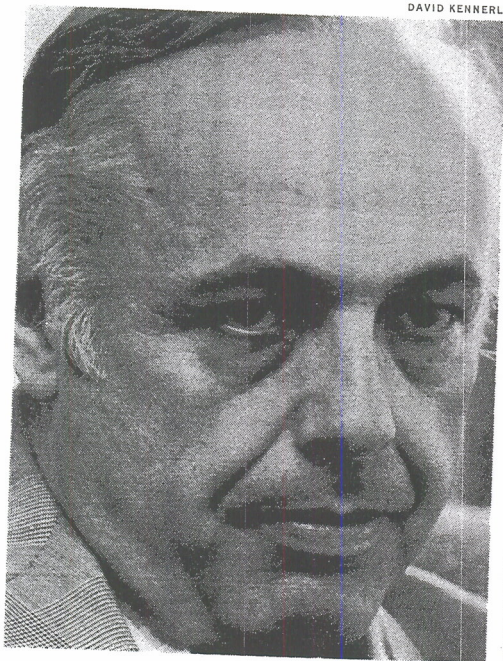
Just how to explain the transcripts publicly was a dilemma. Before the details were worked out, Nixon could conceivably change his mind. In a move that seemed designed to block any such possibility and to assess Congressional reaction, Haig and St. Clair on Friday, Aug. 2, asked the President's ablest defender on the House Judiciary Committee, California's Charles Wiggins, to come to the White House. He had never been in Haig's office before.

Only Two Options for Nixon

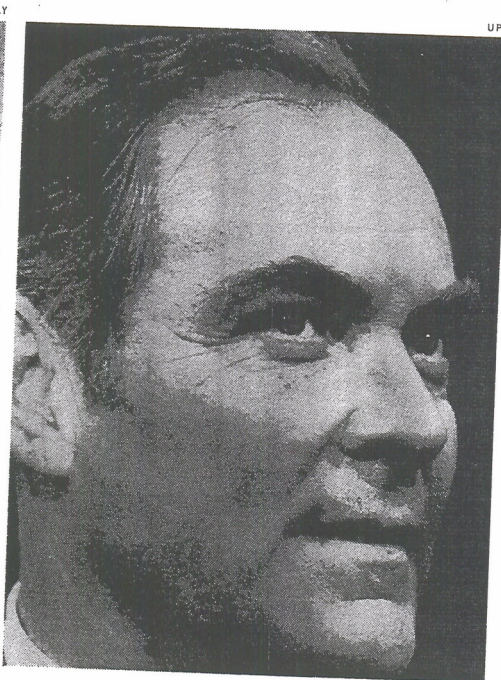
Haig, St. Clair and Wiggins gathered round the coffee table in Haig's office. Haig thanked Wiggins for his efforts on Nixon's behalf during the televised impeachment deliberations of the Judiciary Committee. Wiggins was preparing to carry that fight to the floor of the House and had already scheduled briefings on the evidence for Republican Congressmen whom he hoped to persuade to join the battle to save Nixon. Then St. Clair handed Wiggins the June 23 transcripts. Wiggins read them. "The significance was immediately apparent," he explained later. Wiggins reread the documents, looked up, and asked St. Clair what he intended to do with the adverse information. Before St. Clair could answer, the alarmed Wiggins gave his own advice: "The President really has only two options: 1) claim the Fifth Amendment and not disclose, or 2) disclose."

St. Clair assured Wiggins that Nixon had agreed to give the transcripts to the Judiciary Committee. Wiggins asked how long St. Clair had known of this evidence. Only since the tapes had been transcribed for delivery to Judge Sirica 2 days before, St. Clair replied. "Haig said that was true for him too, and I believed them," Wiggins recalled. "St. Clair was very apologetic that the case had proceeded on an incomplete-fact basis."

Heartsick, Wiggins studied the document for a third time. He told the Nixon aides that "the case in the House will be hopelessly lost because of this," and that "you have to face the prospect of conviction in the Senate as well." Moreover, he advised, "somebody has to raise with the President the question of his resigning. The country's interest, the Republican Party's interest and Richard Nixon's interest would be served by resignation." St. Clair and Haig acknowledged as much, but observed that it was very difficult for them to broach the subject to Nixon. Returning to Capitol Hill, Wiggins instructed an assistant to cancel his briefings for the Republican defenders of the President. The aide looked puzzled.



PRESIDENTIAL LAWYER ST. CLAIR



WHITE HOUSE CHIEF OF STAFF HAIG

The awesome import of the transcripts was immediately apparent.

presidency. The transcripts show that Nixon ordered Haldeman to call in CIA Director Richard Helms and Deputy CIA Director Vernon Walters and get them to tell Acting FBI Director L. Patrick Gray "to lay off" his investigation of the Watergate burglary money. Nixon suggested that Haldeman could claim that "the President believes" that such an investigation would "open the whole Bay of Pigs thing up again" (as a CIA agent, Hunt had helped organize the disastrous 1961 invasion of Cuba), and that the CIA officials "should call the FBI in" and tell Gray, "Don't go any further into this case, period!"

The June 23 conversations hinted, moreover, that Nixon had been concerned even earlier about the FBI investigation touching the White House. "We're back in the problem area," Haldeman said early in the first meeting

professionally, since he could be accused of having withheld evidence and argued falsely in Nixon's behalf.

The President's lawyer showed the transcript to White House Chief of Staff Alexander Haig, who also realized at once their awesome potential. At that point, both men knew that Nixon was finished. Their delicate problem was gently to persuade the President that he must resign. Haig, in turn, went immediately to Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. He too saw no way out for Nixon and joined in the careful diplomatic exercise of convincing a proud Chief of State that he must step down.

With Haig's backing, St. Clair braced Nixon. Stressing the dire dangers, legal and political, in withholding the damaging information any longer, the lawyer urged its release. Implicit in St. Clair's appeal was the threat that he

3 AUG

Next day President Nixon helicoptered to Camp David, joined by his family and his friend Bebe Rebozo. Richard Nixon was there as the last week of his presidency began, and the events he had set in motion swept him through four fateful days of irresistible outside pressure, internal anguish and ultimate decision.

4 AUG

SUNDAY: INDECISION

Nixon secluded himself in Aspen Cabin, his favorite, rustic four-bedroom retreat, and summoned five aides: St. Clair, Haig, Press Secretary Ronald Ziegler and Speechwriters Raymond Price and Patrick Buchanan. Arriving in the afternoon, they worked on the release of the confessional transcripts. Assembled in Laurel, the camp's main dining lodge, the distraught aides were diverted by larger worries. St. Clair and Buchanan saw the President's position as doomed and suggested that he must consider resigning. Haig and Ziegler shuttled between the two buildings, expressing these concerns. "I wish you hadn't said that," Nixon told the pair when resignation was proposed.

Although giving it some consideration, Nixon stiffly resisted that choice. "He kept mentioning the importance of not short-circuiting the constitutional process and of avoiding the setting of a dangerous precedent," said one Nixon aide. Nixon proposed that he take his case once more to the people in a last-ditch television appeal, thought about it, then rejected his own idea. As so often in the Watergate saga, his perception was poor, almost disconnected from reality: he was not at all certain that the effect of the newest tape disclosure would be that fatal. He ordered his aides to draft a statement to accompany the release of the transcripts. He would take his chances with the result. Price moved into an unoccupied cabin and began drafting the President's explanation. St. Clair insisted on a paragraph making it clear that he had been unaware of this damaging evidence. With the statement still unfinished, the aides returned to the capital.

Word of the unusual activity at Camp David had rapidly spread through Washington. Speculation grew that some major new Nixon move was imminent. Ominously, House Republican Leader John Rhodes postponed a press conference scheduled for Monday, at which he had been expected to say how he would vote on impeachment. He pleaded the discomfort of a sore throat, which was true. But at home in suburban Maryland, he had received a call from Haig. The chief of staff asked him to delay his news conference. Why? There was "new information," said Haig. "Can you tell me any more about it?" the Congressman inquired. "No," replied the general. "You will be briefed tomorrow about it. Believe me, you will

be happy if you don't go before the cameras tomorrow."

The Senate's second-ranking Republican, Michigan's Robert Griffin, announced that he had sent a letter to the President warning that he would vote for conviction if Nixon defied any subpoenas for tapes and documents issued by the Senate. Already, Nixon's congressional support appeared to be shaky and shrinking.

5 AUG

MONDAY: CONFESSION

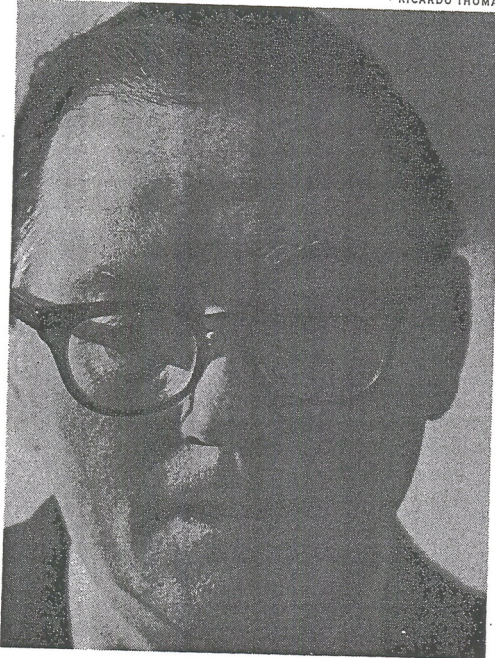
Flying back to the capital from a weekend in Michigan, Senator Griffin worked on a statement that went beyond his previous warning. He too had learned that adverse evidence was about to be revealed. Stepping before television cameras outside the House Rules Committee room, he urged Nixon to re-

we must all keep going for the good of the nation. And I also hope you would do it for the President too." Haig was warmly applauded. Explained one staff member: "The applause was not for what he said. It was for Haig himself. Everybody knows he's been under the gun for a year."

A similar but more difficult notification chore was undertaken by Lawyer St. Clair. He headed for the Capitol in a black limousine to brief the men who had stuck their political necks out for the President in the House Judiciary Committee meetings: the ten Republicans who had opposed every article of impeachment. All but Mississippi's Trent Lott and Iowa's Wiley Mayne were able to attend the meeting in the office of Republican House Whip Leslie Arends.

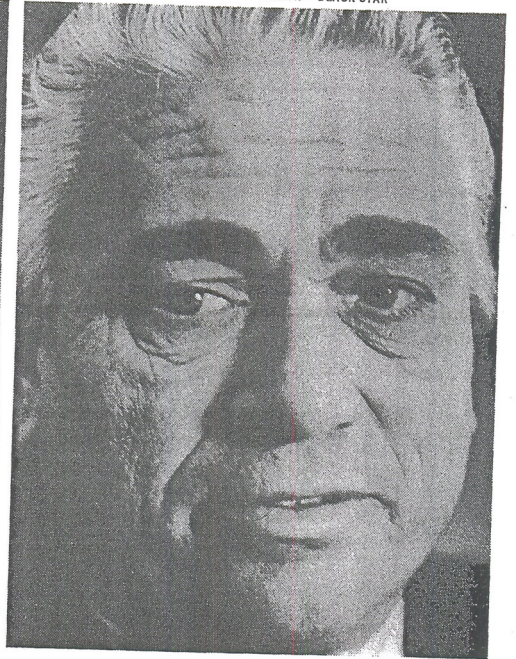
"Gentlemen, I'm sorry to say it, but

RICARDO THOMAS



REPUBLICAN SENATOR GRIFFIN
Not just enemies; his friends felt the same way.

BRACK—BLACK STAR



REPUBLICAN CONGRESSMAN WIGGINS

sign "in both the national interest and his own interest." Added Griffin in a quavering voice: "It's not just his enemies who feel that way. Many of his best friends—and I regard myself as one of those—believe now that this would be the most appropriate course." Griffin said later that he considered the suggestion to resign as the earnest advice of one friend to another.

At the White House, General Haig began telephoning Cabinet members to prepare them for the shock of the coming revelations. After informing the Cabinet, Haig asked some 150 members of the White House staff to assemble in a large conference room in the Executive Office Building. "I hate to be the harbinger of bad news," he said, before reading the President's incriminating statement. "You may feel depressed or outraged by this," he concluded, "but

I'm not the bearer of good tidings," St. Clair began. Then he explained the nature of the new evidence, which was soon to be described as more than the long-sought "smoking pistol" and actually, in the apt phrase of Columnist George F. Will, akin to a "smoking howitzer." St. Clair said flatly that he had been ready to resign if Nixon had opposed release of the material. "I have my professional reputation to think about," he explained, adding that any other action would have been to withhold evidence of a possible criminal conspiracy.

The Republicans' reaction was a mixture of anger and dismay. "We were just dumbfounded," said Ohio's Delbert Latta. "We'd put our trust in the President. We felt he was telling us the truth. I think every American has that right—to put his trust in the President. It was a terrible, let-down feeling." Indi-



REPUBLICAN CONGRESSMEN SANDMAN, LATTA & MAYNE
 "Devastating . . . dumbfounded . . . direct evidence."

ana's David Dennis said that he was "shocked and disappointed." He had planned to fight for Nixon on the House floor. "We'd have got some votes too. The President would have gone to the Senate not in all that bad shape." But now Dennis was convinced that Nixon's "lack of frankness" had undercut

his case and that he was impeachable under Article I as a member of the cover-up conspiracy. Angry at having been "led down the primrose path" by Nixon, Dennis said that he and his colleagues were not mad at St. Clair since, "we knew he'd been led down the primrose path too."

Within hours of the publication of the transcripts, all ten Republicans on the Judiciary Committee announced that they would vote for the impeachment of the President. On Article I, at least, that would make the committee unanimously in favor of sending Nixon to trial in the Senate. Barely controlling his emotions, Wiggins read a statement saying that the new facts were "legally sufficient in my opinion to sustain at least one count against the President of conspiracy to obstruct justice." It was time, he added, for "the President, the Vice President, the Chief Justice and the leaders of the House and Senate to gather in the White House to discuss the orderly transition of power from Richard Nixon to Gerald Ford."

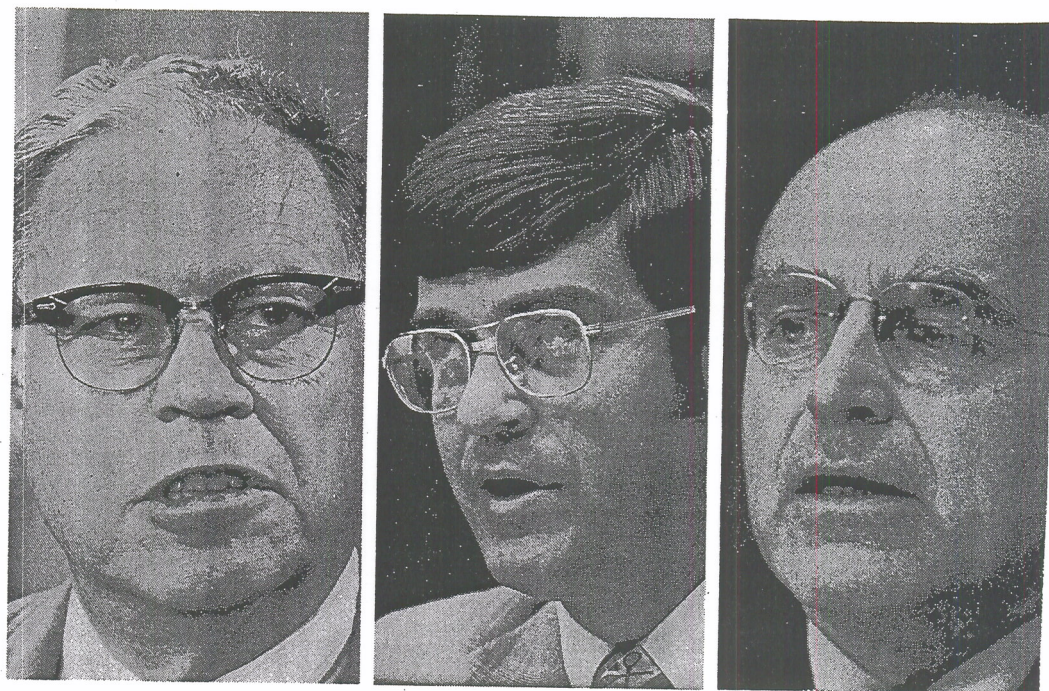
Specificity Had Been Found

"Devastating—impeachable," rumbled New Jersey's Charles Sandman, who had been the President's most vocal champion on the committee; now he finally found the "specificity" he had declared lacking in the evidence. When he learned of the news, Iowa's mild-mannered Mayne declared that "the President has today admitted deceiving the American people, the Judiciary

Committee and his own lawyer. This is direct evidence."

The burdened St. Clair pushed on to give the same shocking message to Senate leaders, assembled in Republican Leader Hugh Scott's office. "I have some very bad news," he repeated. After relating it, he added: "I was tempted to resign. I framed the issue that the President would either have to make this disclosure or he'd lose a lawyer." Perhaps wishfully, St. Clair insisted: "I think I can honorably continue to defend him. There are elements here on which I can continue to make a case." He could no longer argue that there was no evidence against the President, he seemed to say, but he could still claim that the President should not be convicted since the investigation had been only briefly delayed.

Then St. Clair revealed some of the same lack of political awareness that has marked the President's own flawed self-defense. "Before this," he told the Senate leaders, "we had the case won." "Where?" asked the incredulous Scott. "I mean as a lawyer," St. Clair replied. To a man, the Senate leaders—Scott, Griffin, Texas' John Tower, Utah's Wallace Bennett and New Hampshire's Norris Cotton—were stunned by the evidence of Nixon's deception. "We were



REPUBLICAN CONGRESSMEN EDWARD HUTCHINSON, TRENT LOTT & DAVID DENNIS
 "Deceived . . . shocked and disappointed . . . led down the primrose path."

shaken," said one of them. "It's the worst thing we've had."

When the Nixon statement and the transcripts were finally released late in the afternoon in a mobbed White House pressroom, the words of the conversations were indeed damning. But the Nixon explanation glossed over the im-

port with patronizingly mild language. Nixon implied that he had forgotten all about those June 23 conversations with Haldeman until he had reviewed his tapes in May. Only then, he suggested, had he "recognized that these presented potential problems." But he did not tell his counsel or the Judiciary Committee

THE NATION

because, "I did not realize the extent of the implications which these conversations might now appear to have."

Both his forgetfulness and lack of appreciation of the implications were incredible. Nixon did admit, however, that "those arguing my case, as well as those passing judgment on the case, did so with information that was incomplete and in some respects erroneous. This was a serious act of omission for which I take full responsibility and which I deeply regret." The tapes, he also conceded, "are at variance with certain of my previous statements"—a euphemism for the fact that he had lied repeatedly.

Somewhat reluctantly, Nixon observed that "this additional material I am now furnishing may further damage my case"—clearly one of the gross-

and removal of a President." At a Washington press conference last March 6, Nixon had agreed that "the crime of obstruction of justice is a serious crime and would be an impeachable offense."

As his precarious support on Capitol Hill now crumbled under the revelations, Nixon remained unconvinced that his survival prospects had vanished. He set sail on the Potomac with his family and Rose Mary Woods. At dinner on a refreshingly breezy night, Pat and his daughters argued that there still was no reason for the President to consider resignation.

Julie Eisenhower, in particular, had not lost her expressed conviction that he would fight to stay in office even "if there were one Senator that believes in him."

first 24 hours would be crucial and that this period would be tough. After the cruise, Nixon sent word for the Cabinet to assemble next morning. He wanted to rally their continued support.

TUESDAY: DECISION

The Cabinet meeting was bizarre. For 40 minutes, the remarkably composed President engaged in a monologue about the new tapes disclosures. Recounting the Viet Nam War, his diplomatic breakthroughs with China and the Soviet Union, Nixon sought to show how preoccupied he had been as his reelection campaign of 1972 approached. "One thing I have learned," he said, re-running an old refrain, "is never to allow anybody else to run your campaign." That was meant to explain how he could have forgotten those telltale cover-up talks with Haldeman in June of that seemingly distant year. "In my opinion and in the opinion of my counsel, I have not committed any impeachable offense," he said. Therefore, he insisted, "the constitutional process should be followed out to the end—wherever the end may be."

The Cabinet members said nothing. Nixon neither sought their advice nor paused for comment. Neither did any agree with his apparent decision to cling to office. Only Vice President Ford finally offered an observation, explaining that he felt that "the public interest is no longer served" by his making statements in defense of the President. "I understand," said Nixon. Then he abruptly shifted into a discussion of the economy. Vaguely, he suggested setting up a domestic "summit meeting" to grapple with inflation. He wanted it to be held immediately.

Finally, Attorney General William Saxbe broke the air of unreality. "Mr. President, wouldn't it be wise to wait on this until next week anyway—until we see what's going to happen?" Republican National Chairman George Bush joined in. "Shouldn't we wait until the dust settles? Such a meeting ought to wait." Glaring at Saxbe, Nixon replied stonily: "No. This is too important to wait." Without explaining the nature of the proposed anti-inflation conference, he then rose and left the room.

The Cabinet members came away with two strong convictions: Nixon wanted them to carry on with their jobs, and he was not about to quit. But if he seemed politically naive about his desperate situation, Nixon showed no signs of emotional instability. There were no "Captain Queeg" mannerisms, Saxbe recalled later. "We were all looking for something like that. He was calm, in control of himself, and not the least bit tense."

After the meeting, the President called Kissinger into his office. Despite Nixon's resolution against resignation



NIXON AT THE WHITE HOUSE ON LAST FULL DAY AS PRESIDENT

est understatements of his many Watergate pronouncements. Noting more realistically that "a House vote of impeachment is, as a practical matter, virtually a foregone conclusion," he said that he would voluntarily give the Senate every tape transferred to Special Prosecutor Jaworski by Judge Sirica. If he did *not*, of course, the Senate would readily have acquired them during its trial.

Still pursuing the cover-up to the end, Nixon blandly and unpersuasively asserted that "when all the facts were brought to my attention, I insisted on a full investigation and prosecution of those guilty. I am firmly convinced that the record, in its entirety, does not justify the extreme step of impeachment

Earlier in the day, Mrs. Nixon's press secretary, Helen Smith, vacationing in London, had telephoned Julie Eisenhower in the White House, asking whether she should return to Washington to assist the First Lady. "Do you know something I don't know?" asked Julie. No, she had only been reading newspaper reports. "Everything is going to be all right," Julie assured her—indicating how persuasively the President had convinced his family that he would ride out the crisis.

At this point Nixon was ready to concede the House, but he thought he could hold on to such Senators as John Stennis, James Eastland, Cotton and Nebraska's Carl Curtis to stem any tide of defection. He knew, however, that the

only moments before, the President's doubts began to surface. Kissinger did not reinforce Nixon's determination to stay on; it is not certain but he may have actually suggested that the President should resign. After the conversation, Kissinger told newsmen that despite the crisis, U.S. foreign policy remained stable.

The political realities were very much on the minds of the participants of another Washington meeting. The 15 members of the Senate Republican policy committee, joined by other Republican Senators, held their regular weekly luncheon on Capitol Hill. As they met on a day in which rumors of possible resignation were running wild, initially sending the Dow Jones industrial average up a startling 25 points by midday, the Senators were grim. Explained Tower later: "There was considerable concern that the President did not really understand the mood of the Senate, that he did not fully comprehend the peril he faced if he came to trial here."

One Too Many Lies

Vice President Ford, arriving for the luncheon, did not dispel that atmosphere. Ford reported on the Cabinet meeting and left the impression that Nixon was far more concerned about the economy than about his Watergate weakness and would not resign. As the angry Senators plunged into a free-wheeling discussion of Nixon's plight, Ford felt it was inappropriate to stay. Once Ford was gone, the talk turned tough. "There are only so many lies you can take, and now there has been one too many," complained Arizona's Conservative Barry Goldwater. "Nixon should get his ass out of the White House—today!"

During the G.O.P. meeting, Goldwater was called away to accept a telephone call from Haig. How many Senators would stand by the President? Haig wondered. No more than twelve or 15, Goldwater estimated. Returning to the meeting, the former presidential candidate was even more pessimistic. He said he doubted that Nixon could get more than nine votes, and if pressed, he could only name offhand two certainties: Curtis and South Carolina's Strom Thurmond. It became obvious at the meeting that Nixon had hopelessly lost the Republican leaders he needed for survival, including Goldwater and Tower. General agreement was reached that Nixon should be informed of his grave predicament in the Senate and that a majority of the Senators at the luncheon thought that the President must resign. But no decision was made on who should do it or just how it should be done.

That came in a smaller meeting later in the day of the official Republican Senate leadership—Scott, Tower and Griffin—and two invited Senators rep-

resenting opposite wings of the party: Goldwater and New York's Liberal Jacob Javits. The group selected Goldwater as the man who ought to seek a meeting with the President to warn him of the tremendous odds against his acquittal. Said Scott: "We agreed that Barry should be our emissary to the President." It was a role long ago foreseen for Goldwater in any ultimate resignation scenario.

A flurry of phone calls between Scott, Goldwater and three White House aides, Haig, Dean Burch and William Timmons, quickly followed. Goldwater's intention was unmistakably clear to Nixon's men: he wanted to let the President know that his Senate support had collapsed and that many Republican Senators favored his immediate

and declared that "cover-up of criminal activity and misuse of federal agencies can neither be condoned nor tolerated." "Was there anything Nixon could do to salvage his situation?" a reporter asked Rhodes. He replied: "I suppose there might be, but I couldn't tell you what it is."

Even the Judiciary Committee's Edward Hutchinson made his turnabout official. "I feel that I have been deceived," he said, declaring that he would vote for impeachment "with a heavy heart." Arriving in Washington from Mississippi, Lott also confirmed his reversal on impeachment. He had reacted to the new evidence, he said, with "disbelief at first, then extreme disappointment and a letdown feeling." He was "dumbfounded, and then it turned



SCOTT, GOLDWATER & RHODES LEAVING CONFERENCE WITH NIXON

resignation. The aides carried the grim news to Nixon. Finally aware of the depth of his troubles, Nixon deferred such a meeting, but his last option, resignation, loomed larger.

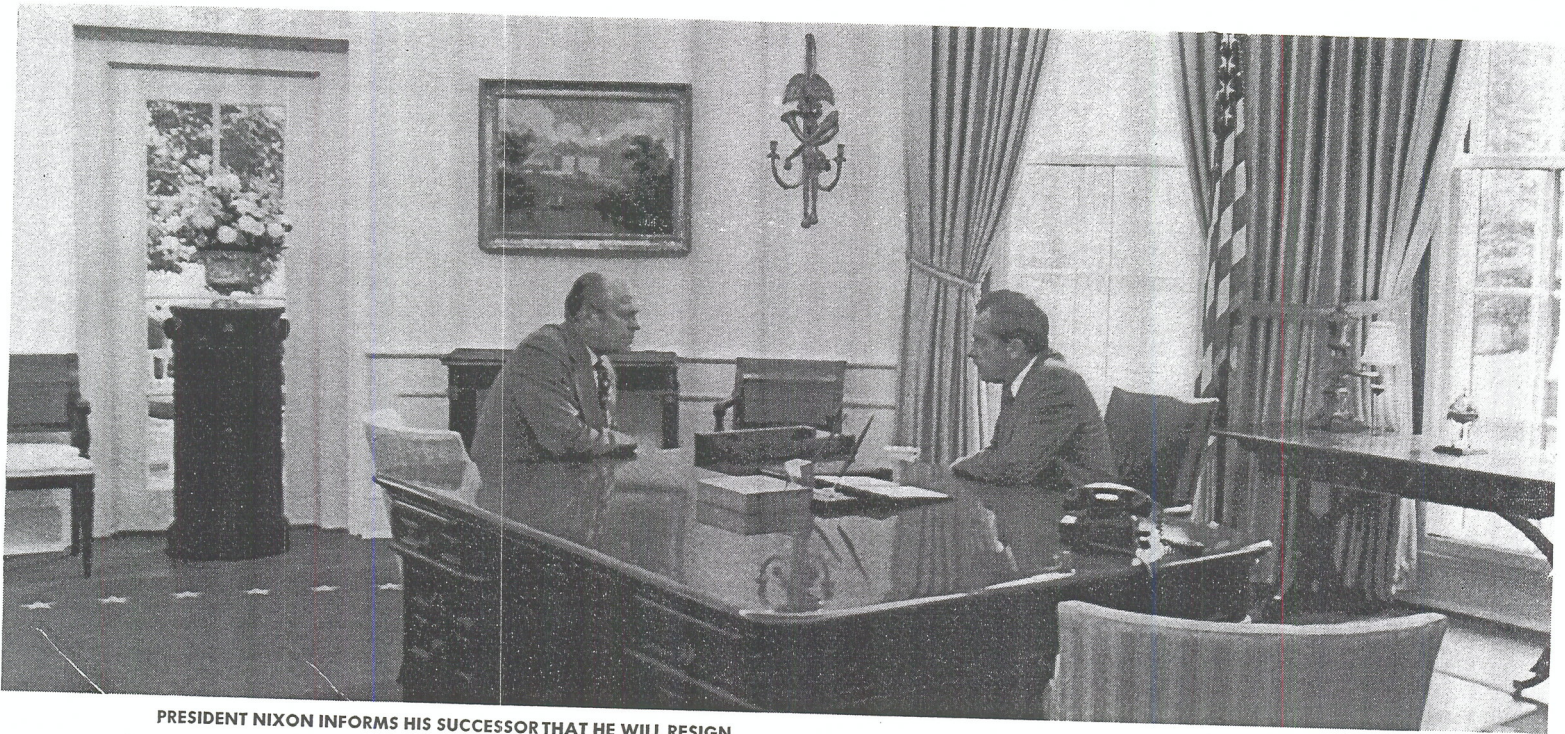
Repeatedly throughout the afternoon, Timmons was asked by the President for soundings on the sentiment in the Senate. Each time, Timmons' telephoned report was distressing. At most, Timmons could count only 20 of the vital 34 votes Nixon would need to survive, and even that insufficient band kept dwindling.

Nixon was now under a continuous barrage of public declarations by other influential members of Congress. Rhodes, long a Nixon loyalist, described the new tapes as "a cataclysmic affair"

to anger." House leaders, including the Judiciary Committee's Democratic Chairman Peter Rodino, laid plans to cut the House debate on impeachment from two weeks to one week. The third-ranking Republican in the House, Illinois' John Anderson, asked: "Why should we need more than a day?"

Richard Nixon had received the message. When he held a private talk with one of his last-ditch supporters, Rabbi Baruch Korff, in the President's Executive Office Building hideaway at 3:30 p.m., he told Korff that he was seriously considering resignation.

In the evening, the troubled President telephoned Kissinger five times for wide-ranging talks about his predicament and how it might affect foreign



PRESIDENT NIXON INFORMS HIS SUCCESSOR THAT HE WILL RESIGN

OLLIE ATKINS

policy. As the conversation turned to what kind of legacy in that field Nixon would leave, his decision to resign seemed certain. Already, Speechwriter Price was working on a draft of the President's resignation address.

7 A U S
WEDNESDAY: RUMORS

By Wednesday morning, the decision was irrevocable. On instructions from Nixon, Gerald Ford was called to the White House to meet with General Haig. Ford got the summons in his limousine as he was heading for a meeting of the Chowder and Marching Society, a House Republican social club. Deputy Press Secretary Gerald Warren announced only that Ford had been invited to discuss "the current situation." In fact, Haig told Ford to prepare to assume the presidency.

Unaware of this development, Republican leaders in the Senate still were worried: Would Nixon really heed their advice and succumb to the mounting pressures? Maybe he is not entirely rational about this situation, one such leader observed. And if pressed too hard, there was no way of knowing what the President's reaction might be. One concerned Senator telephoned Haig. "If we tell him it is hopeless," this Republican stressed to Haig, "that might be a factor in making up his mind." The fears of these Senators were never stated publicly—and in retrospect they seemed unfounded. Yet one of them declared: "Well, I read this morning about the North Vietnamese getting close to Da-nang and I was concerned about what he might do."

Tricia's husband Edward Cox arrived at the White House from New York to join his wife, Mrs. Nixon, Julie and David Eisenhower in the family quarters. That gathering, too, signaled the fast-approaching end of the Nixon presidency. Rumors of resignation

caused banner headlines and dominated news broadcasts. The stock market rallied again, with the Dow Jones industrials rising almost 24 points. Crowds gathered along the fences surrounding the White House; mostly somber and curious, they had the quiet air of a death watch. In the House of Representatives, the gravelly voice of William ("Fish Bait") Miller startled the occupants of that chamber. "Mr. Speaker, a message from the President of the United States," he announced. In the stillness, a clerk read the anticlimactic title: a presidential report on "Government Services to Rural America."

In the Senate, the Republican Conference, chaired by Cotton, held its regular meeting. Massachusetts Republican Ed Brooke proposed that a delegation be sent to the White House. He was told that a meeting had already been arranged. In fact, Nixon had told Timmons that he would now see Goldwater, but wanted the regular Republican leaders, Rhodes and Scott, to attend as well. The time was set for late morning, then 12:30, then 2 p.m., 4 p.m. and finally 5 p.m. Rhodes was chauffeured to the White House in his limousine; Scott picked up Goldwater in his.

The President greeted the delegation cordially in the Oval Office, then sat at his large desk, with his visitors ranged in front of it. "He was anxious to put us at ease," said Scott later, "because I'm sure he knew we weren't." Nixon reminisced about the Eisenhower years, and all chatted as the trio waited for him to broach the momentous topic. "What I need to do," Nixon finally began, "is to get your appraisal of the floor. I have a decision to make. I've got maybe 15 in the Senate and ten in the House."

"There's not more than 15 Senators for you," Goldwater agreed. Nixon turned to Scott. "I think twelve to 15," declared Scott, who once had proclaimed Nixon's Watergate innocence

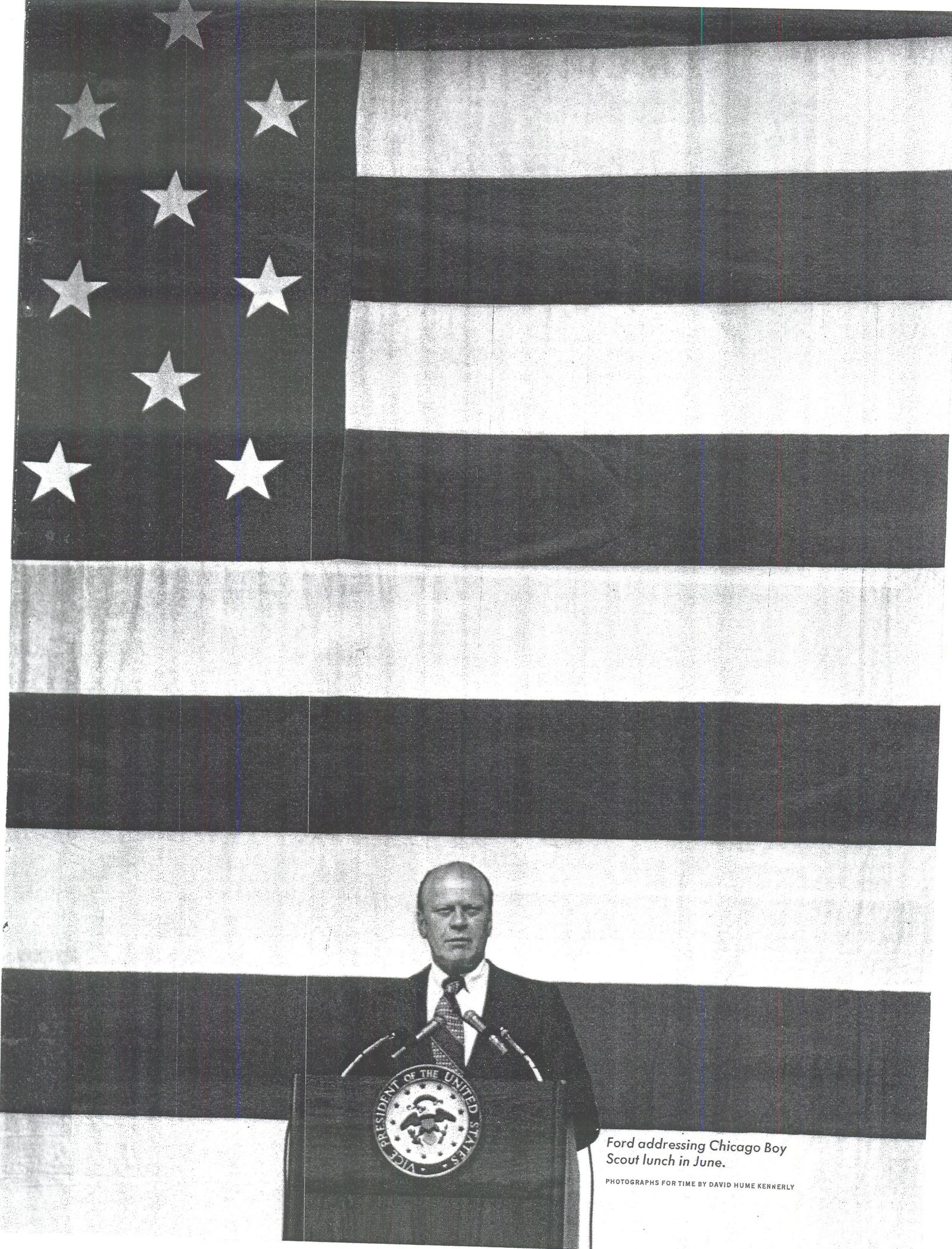
on the basis of an edited White House transcript privately shown him. Nixon next asked Rhodes about the House count. The reply: "I think the substance is about as you have portrayed it."

His feet propped on the desk, Nixon was surprisingly amiable. Could the severe assessment change? he wondered. "It's pretty gloomy," said Scott. "It's damn gloomy," agreed the President. "In the decision I've got to make," he added, "I have very few options." But he did not want to talk, he said, "about emoluments or benefits or anything that people think that I'd be concerned about. I'm only thinking about the national interest. Whatever decision I make, I'll make in the national interest. The decision has to be made in the best interest of the people."

The expression of public concern slipped only fleetingly. Near the end of the half-hour talk, Nixon said: "I campaigned for a lot of people. Some were turkeys, but I campaigned for all of them." Where were they now? he mused. Most of them were voting to impeach him. But he abruptly broke that bitter mood. "Thank you, gentlemen," he said in dismissal.

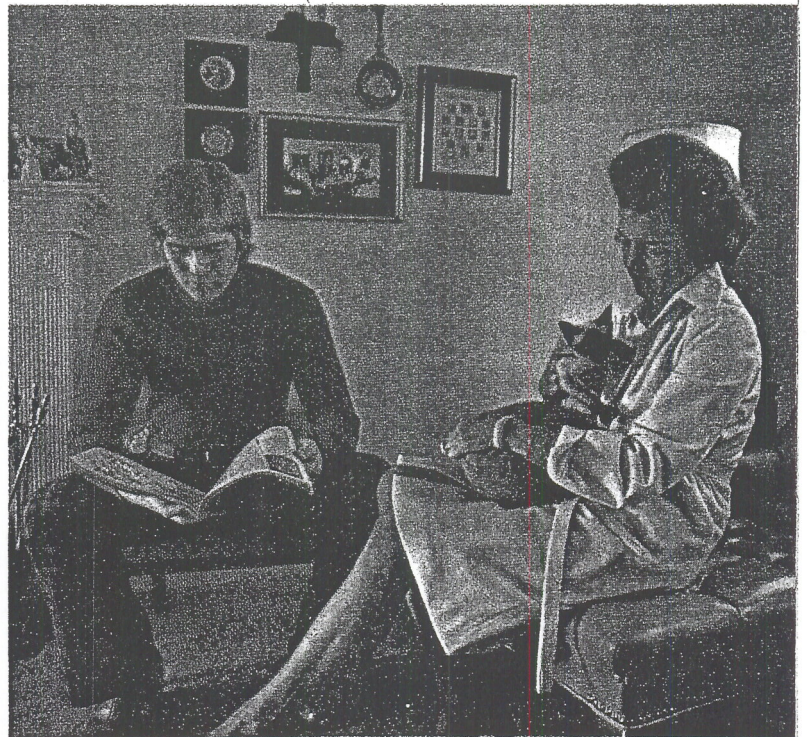
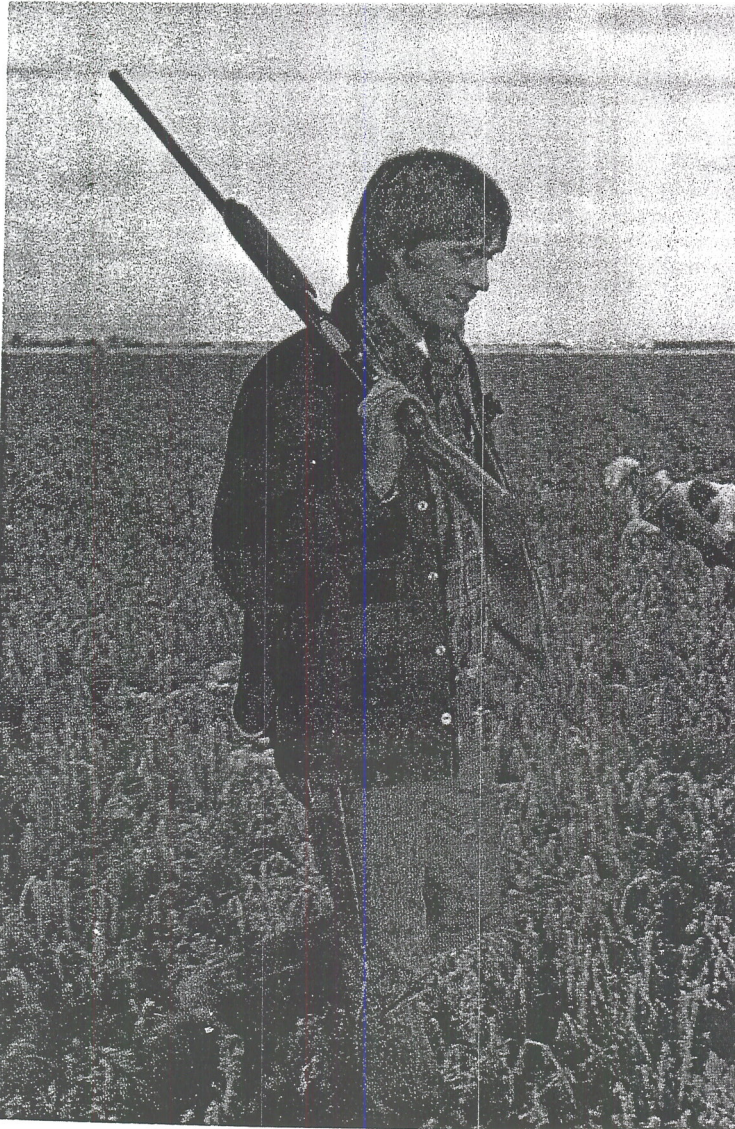
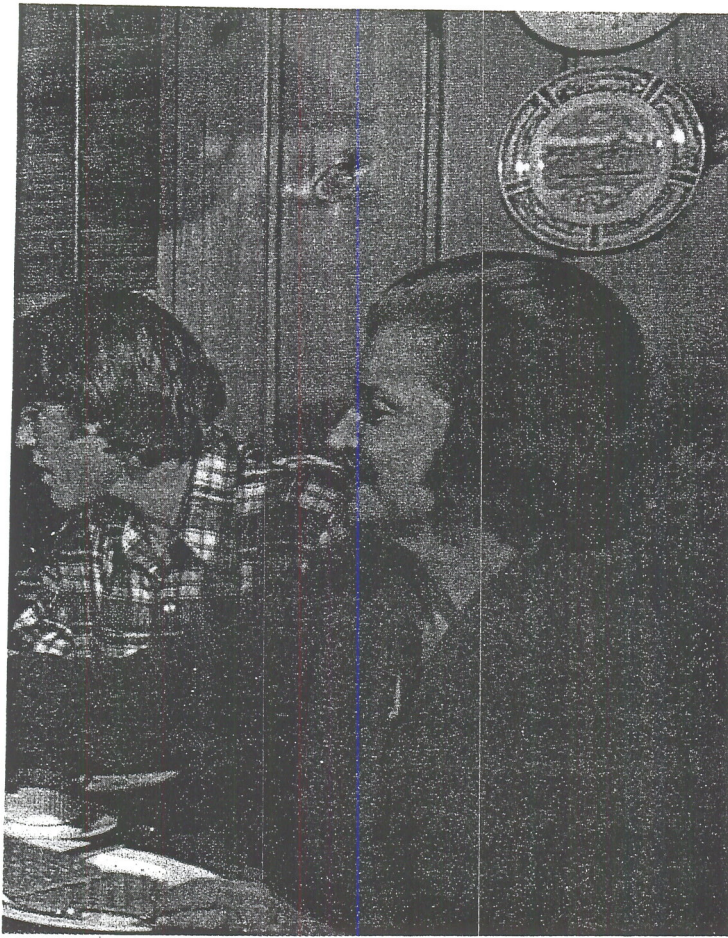
Nixon had not asked for advice on whether he should resign. His visitors did not offer it. But they knew that his mind was made up. The meeting was merely a formality, a final confirmation of Richard Nixon's worst fears. The three emerged to tell the waiting press and nation only that the President would put the national interest first.

Next morning the President summoned Gerald Ford to notify him, officially and privately, that he was about to succeed to the national summit. For the country, the worst of Watergate was finally over. There would be more trials, perhaps even startling revelations, but they would no longer taint the Oval Office. The renewal had begun.



Ford addressing Chicago Boy Scout lunch in June.

PHOTOGRAPHS FOR TIME BY DAVID HUME KENNERLY



At home or away, the Ford family seems relaxed, busy, congenial. Clockwise from top left: the Fords at breakfast in their Alexandria, Va., home (Jerry, Susan, Steven, John, Betty); Betty posing affectionately with her husband; Betty and Son Steven in Alexandria living room; Son John hunting in Idaho; Ford displaying barbecue apron—a Christmas gift—in Vail, Colo.; Son Michael's July wedding in Maryland (bride's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Edward W. Brumbaugh, Bride Gayle Ann, Michael and his parents); Susan with Roommate Lark Ledbetter in Holton-Arms School in Bethesda, Md.