

# THE DECLINE AND FALL

*The inadequate term Watergate has come to encompass all the wrongdoing of which Richard Nixon and other members of his Administration stand accused—and in many cases convicted—including the politicization of federal agencies, misuse of federal funds for private purposes, attempted bribery by milk producers, misprision of felony, subornation of perjury, obstruction of justice. This catalogue of crimes and misdeeds did not begin with the break-in at the Democratic National Committee headquarters, but were it not for that bungled burglary and the subsequent cover-up, most or all of the offenses might have gone unnoticed and unpunished. Why the President allowed himself to become entrapped in the web of events that followed the crime is a puzzle. Indeed, there is a great deal about Watergate that will only be sorted out after much time has passed. But much is already known. Here is a recapitulation of the critical events that destroyed Nixon's presidency.*

## I The Break-In

Planning for the Watergate operation begins in January 1972. In his office, Attorney General John Mitchell, along with Presidential Counsel John Dean and Acting Director of the Committee for the Re-Election of the President (C.R.P.) Jeb Stuart Magruder, listens as G. Gordon Liddy, general counsel to C.R.P., spells out a \$1 million intelligence plan: electronic surveillance, abduction of radical leaders, muggings, the use of call girls to obtain information from leading Democrats. According to Magruder, Mitchell tells Liddy to come up with something more "realistic." On March 30, Mitchell, now director of C.R.P., meets with Magruder to discuss a \$250,000 proposal. Magruder later says that Mitchell approved the plan; Fred LaRue, a special assistant to Mitchell who was present at the meeting, says it was tabled for future discussion; Mitchell denies ever giving his approval. Two crucial questions remain: Who gave final O.K. for the burglary? What were they seeking that would justify so bizarre a crime?

An intelligence-gathering operation is set into motion. Checks worth \$89,000, illegal corporate contributions, are laundered through a Mexican bank and transmitted to Bernard Barker, who deposits them in his Miami bank. He also

deposits a \$25,000 check given to C.R.P. by Kenneth Dahlberg, Republican finance chairman in the Midwest. This money will help uncover the C.R.P. involvement in Watergate.

Liddy takes charge of the operation, aided by former CIA Agent E. Howard Hunt and C.R.P. Security Coordinator James McCord. Several Cuban refugees are recruited: Barker, Eugenio Martinez, Virgilio Gonzalez and Frank Sturgis. The stage is set.

After two botched attempts, the burglars on May 27 get into the D.N.C. offices. McCord places wiretaps on the phones of Democratic National Chairman Lawrence O'Brien and Executive Director of Democratic State Chairmen R. Spencer Oliver Jr. Soon transcripts of Oliver's conversations are being passed to Magruder and through him to Mitchell. As Magruder later testifies, Mitchell orders Liddy to get better information.

Another break-in is arranged for June 17. But shortly after 1 a.m., Private Security Guard Frank Wills spots a door in the Watergate with its lock taped open. He summons the police, who catch McCord, Barker, Sturgis, Gonzalez and Martinez in the D.N.C. The police confiscate surveillance equipment and find 32 sequentially numbered \$100 bills, which Barker has withdrawn from the \$89,000 in Miami.

## II The Cover-Up Begins

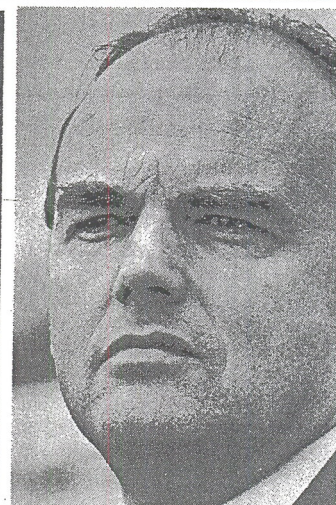
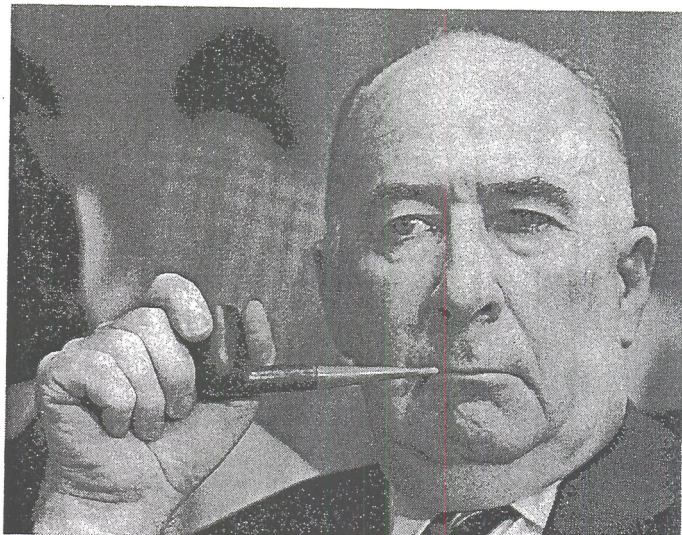
Two days after the arrest, White House Press Secretary Ronald Ziegler dismisses the affair as "a third-rate burglary attempt," adding that "certain elements may try to stretch this beyond what it is." But others are less blasé. Within hours of the break-in, FBI agents find Hunt's name in the address books of Barker and Martinez. Administration officials are also worried because Hunt and Liddy were involved in another secret operation, the White House plumbers, set up in mid-1971 to stop security leaks and investigate other sensitive security matters.

The cover-up begins. On June 20, Dean cleans out Hunt's safe, discovering files on the Pentagon papers case and a forged diplomatic ca-

ble that implicates the Kennedy Administration in the assassination in 1963 of South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem. Dean later testifies that Nixon's chief domestic adviser John Ehrlichman subsequently tells him to "deep six" a briefcase full of surveillance equipment and other evidence.

On June 23, Nixon orders Haldeman to have the CIA block the FBI's investigation into the source of Watergate funding. That day Haldeman and Ehrlichman meet with CIA Director Richard Helms and Deputy Director Vernon Walters. Helms says that no CIA operations will be endangered by the FBI probe. Haldeman insists that it is the "President's wish" that Walters ask the FBI not to pursue the investigation into Mexico. A tape transcript of a conversation with Haldeman (released last week in the move that finally forces Nixon's resignation) shows that Nixon hopes to hide White House and C.R.P. involvement in the break-in by getting the CIA to limit the FBI's activities. Nixon's personal attorney Herbert Kalmbach gets \$75,000 from Maurice Stans, chairman of the Finance Committee to Re-Elect the President—the first of more than \$400,000 distributed to the Watergate defendants and their lawyers.

JOHN MITCHELL (TOP), H.R. HALDEMAN (BOTTOM LEFT) & JOHN EHRLICHMAN





THE NATION

The cover-up holds through the summer. On Aug. 29, Nixon tells a news conference that Dean has conducted a thorough investigation and "I can say categorically that . . . no one in the White House staff, no one in this Administration, presently employed, was involved in this very bizarre incident." Dean never made such an investigation, according to his testimony months later. On Sept. 15, in a recorded Oval Office conversation, Nixon congratulates Dean: "The way you, you've handled it, it seems to me, has been very skillful, because you—putting your fingers in the dikes every time that leaks have sprung here and sprung there."

On Nov. 7, Nixon and Vice President Spiro Agnew are re-elected by a landslide. Watergate is all but forgotten. Early the next year, as the Watergate trial of the five burglars plus Liddy and Hunt gets under way with Judge John

J. Sirica presiding, there is no hint that anybody else will be implicated. On Jan. 11, Hunt pleads guilty to all counts against him, and four days later the four Cuban Americans follow suit. Despite pressure from Sirica to get the burglars to tell the whole story, Hunt tells reporters that no "higher-ups" are involved.

III Cracks in the Stonewall

Still, there have already been some damaging disclosures. The Washington Post, relying partly on a still secret source known to outsiders as "Deep Throat," reports that Dahlberg's \$25,000 check found its way into Barker's bank account, and that Watergate was part of a massive program of political sabotage. TIME discloses that Donald Segretti had been hired by White House Aides Dwight Chapin and Gordon Strachan and paid out of C.R.P. funds by Kalmbach to sabotage the Democratic presidential campaign.

Sirica, meanwhile, continues to push aggressively for the truth. On Feb. 2 he says he is "not satisfied" that the trial disclosed the full story. On Feb. 7, the Senate votes 77-0 to establish a select committee to investigate Watergate. Sam Ervin is named its chairman the next day.

Within a few weeks, the engineers of the cover-up begin to lose control. On Feb. 28, the Senate Judiciary Committee begins hearings on L. Patrick Gray's confirmation as FBI director. Gray discloses that he gave Dean FBI reports on the Watergate and that Chapin and Kalmbach have been involved in Republican espionage activities. These revelations precipitate a frantic scramble in the White House.

March 13: Nixon learns that Gordon Strachan has reportedly lied to federal investigators. The President explicitly rejects "the hang-out road," the White House term for full disclosure. March 17: Nixon later tells Ziegler that on this day, he has ordered Dean "to cut off any disclosures that might implicate him in Watergate." Worried that Magruder could implicate Haldeman in the affair, Nixon says: "We've got to cut that back. That ought to be cut out." March 21: Talking about Hunt's demands for money, the President says: "For Christ's sake, get it!"

At this point, Sirica's efforts pay off. On March 23 he reads the court a letter

from McCord charging that perjury has been committed in the Watergate trial and that defendants have been pressured to remain silent. Pouring on the pressure, Sirica gives Hunt and the Cubans harsh provisional sentences of up to 40 years in an effort to make them talk.

IV The Gathering Storm

Maintaining a "stonewall" policy on Nixon's instructions, Ehrlichman on March 28 informs Attorney General Richard Kleindienst that nobody in the White House had prior knowledge of the burglary. Two days later he has Ziegler tell the press that "no one in the White House had any involvement or prior knowledge of the Watergate event."

But on April 13, Magruder tells U.S. attorneys that he perjured himself during the burglars' trial. He implicates Dean and Mitchell in Watergate crimes. On April 15, according to his testimony, Dean tells Nixon that he has been cooperating with the U.S. attorneys.

On April 15, prosecutors tell Nixon that Haldeman, Ehrlichman, Dean and other White House officials are implicated in the cover-up. Faced with the evidence against his top aides, knowing that Dean and Magruder are talking and concerned that the upcoming Senate hearings will cast even more suspicion on the White House, Nixon makes the first of a series of strategic retreats.

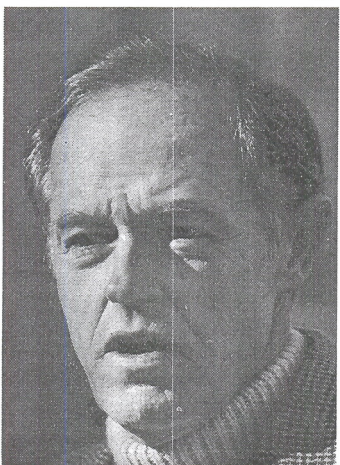
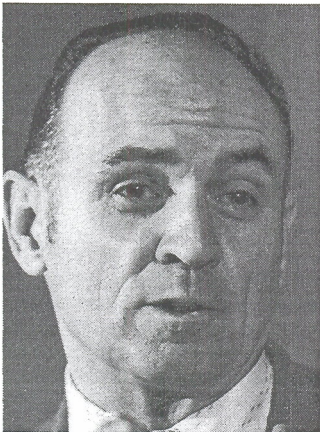
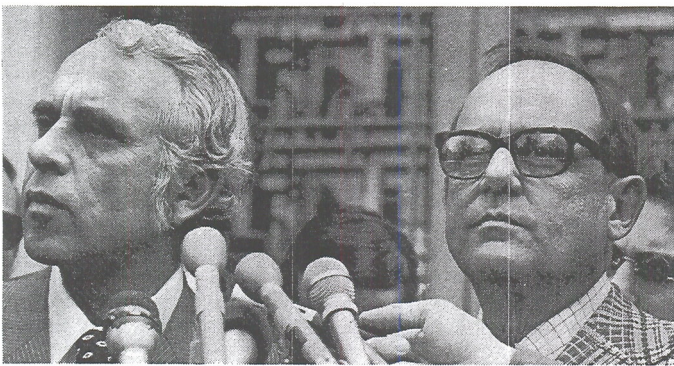
April 30: He announces the resignations of Haldeman and Ehrlichman, calling them "two of the finest public servants it has been my privilege to know," and of Dean and Kleindienst. Nixon grants the new Attorney General the authority to appoint a special prosecutor.

May 18: Attorney General-Designate Elliot Richardson names Archibald Cox to the promised new position. In the days following, McCord tells his story to the nationally televised Senate Watergate committee hearings, which open May 17. Faced with a flood of revelations, Nixon issues a statement admitting that there was a cover-up within the White House, though he denies participating in it. Nixon says that after the break-in he had restricted certain aspects of the investigation on the grounds of "national security."

Nixon's speech is designed to end suspicions of his own involvement, but the televised Senate hearings provide a flood of incriminating new revelations. From June 25 to 29, Dean tells the committee that Nixon knew about aspects of the cover-up as early as Sept. 15, 1972. Equally embarrassing: Dean discloses White House efforts to hound political "enemies."

The White House retaliates on June 27 by calling Dean the "mastermind" of the cover-up and Mitchell his "patron." But the President's position is weakened by the release the same day of the "enemies lists" by the Senate committee.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: MARTINEZ & BARKER, GONZALEZ & STURGIS, HUNT, LIDDY, MCCORD





## V The Telltale Tapes

A far more devastating blow comes on July 16. Former White House Aide Alexander Butterfield tells the Watergate committee that Nixon secretly taped his own conversations.

Why Nixon allowed his participation in the cover-up to be recorded is one of the affair's greatest mysteries. Cox and Ervin request that Nixon turn over key tapes. On July 23, he rejects the requests on the ground of Executive privilege. Ervin and Cox issue subpoenas.

On Aug. 15, the President maintains: "Not only was I unaware of any cover-up. I was unaware there was anything to cover up." Earlier, Ehrlichman and Haldeman tell the Senate committee that Dean was responsible for the cover-up, and that they and the President are innocent. Aug. 22: Nixon terms Watergate "water under the bridge." But on Aug. 29, Sirica orders that he turn over tapes of the nine conversations subpoenaed by Cox.

Meanwhile other developments further tarnish the image of the White House. In early September, a Los Angeles grand jury indicts Ehrlichman, Liddy and Plumbers Co-Directors Egil Krogh and David Young in connection with the break-in at the office of the psychiatrist of Daniel Ellsberg, the man who claimed to have given the Pentagon papers to the press. Oct. 12: Nixon nominates Gerald Ford as the new Vice President. On the same day, the U.S. court of appeals rules that Nixon must turn the subpoenaed tapes over to Judge Sirica. A week later the President publicly offers a compromise: he will issue summaries of the tapes that will be checked by Senator John Stennis for accuracy. Cox rejects this. Cox is already probing other embarrassing situations, including the mysterious disposition of a \$100,000 contribution from Howard Hughes to Nixon Pal Charles ("Bebe") Rebozo. The following evening, in the "Saturday Night Massacre," Nixon fires Cox; Richardson and his deputy, William Ruckelshaus, resign. There follows what White House Chief of Staff Alexander Haig calls "a fire storm" of protest, leading to calls from TIME (in its first editorial in 50 years), the New York Times, the Detroit News and National Review for the President's resignation.

Angered by Cox's dismissal, Democratic House leaders agree to have the Judiciary Committee begin an investigation into impeaching the President. On Oct. 23, Nixon agrees to hand over the subpoenaed tapes. Three days later he promises that there will be a new special prosecutor with "total cooperation from the Executive Branch."

Texas Lawyer Leon Jaworski is appointed to the post on Nov. 1, in the midst of new disclosures. The day before, Presidential Lawyer J. Fred Buzhardt revealed that two of the subpoenaed conversations did not exist on tape. Three weeks later, the White House discloses

that there is an 18½-minute buzz obliterating a crucial taped discussion between Haldeman and the President on June 20, 1972. Jan. 15: electronics experts report that the gap was the result of at least five separate erasures.

March 1: the Watergate grand jury indicts seven former Nixon aides or re-election officials—Mitchell, Haldeman, Ehrlichman, Strachan, former Special Counsel to the President Charles Colson, former Political Coordinator for Nixon's Re-Election Committee Robert C. Mardian, Washington Attorney Kenneth W. Parkinson—for conspiring to obstruct justice. In a secret report to Sirica, Nixon is named an unindicted co-conspirator in the case. Jaworski on April 18 subpoenas 64 more taped conversations for use in the Watergate prosecution. April 11: the Judiciary Committee subpoenas 42 conversations.

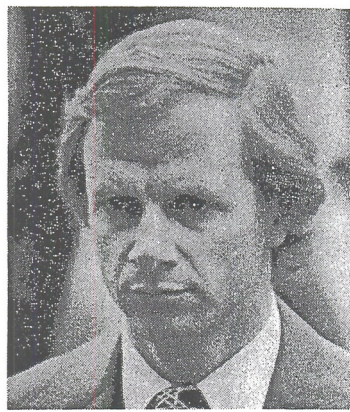
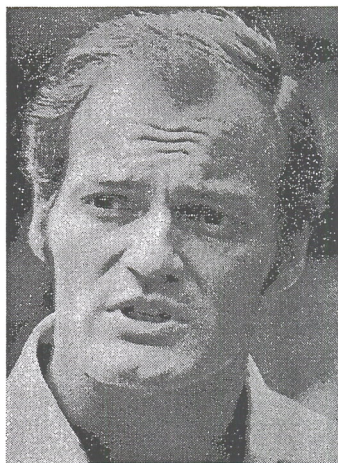
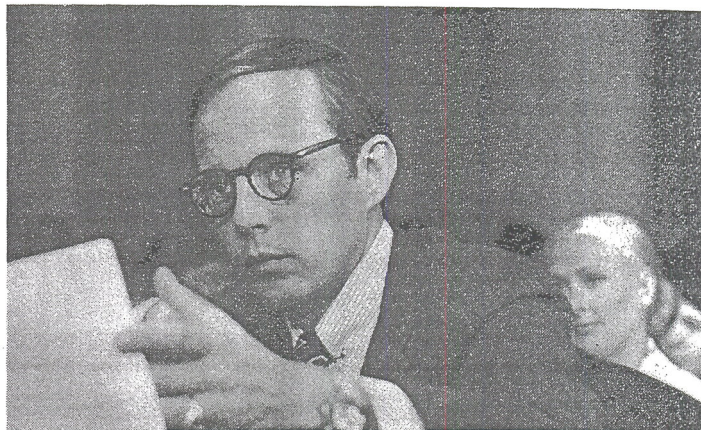
On April 30, one year after the departure of his top aides and his announcement that he would appoint a special Watergate prosecutor, the President says he is making public edited transcripts of certain subpoenaed conversations. Republican Senator Hugh Scott declares that they reveal "deplorable, disgusting, shabby and immoral performances." Worse for the President, the 1,254 pages of conversation seem to corroborate some of Dean's allegations: that Nixon was aware of aspects of the cover-up before March 21; that he seems to have wanted to pay hush money to Hunt.

## VI The Final Debacle

On May 9, the Judiciary Committee begins its inquiry into Nixon's conduct in office. Over the next two months, 19 volumes of evidence are accumulated. During that time, several top Nixon aides either plead guilty or are convicted of crimes: Kleindienst on May 16, Colson June 3, Ehrlichman July 12.

July 24: the Supreme Court rules 8-0 that Nixon must turn over the tapes subpoenaed by Jaworski, rejecting Nixon's claim of absolute Executive privilege. On the 27th, the Judiciary Committee votes 27-11 to recommend the impeachment of Nixon for obstruction of justice. Two more articles are passed in the next three days.

On Aug. 5, in the most sensational revelation of the entire two years of Watergate, Nixon admits that by June 23, 1972, six days after the break-in, he did



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: DEAN, STRACHAN, MAGRUDER, CHAPIN, KROGH

indeed know of the involvement of C.R.P. and White House officials and tried to cover it up. The apparent reason for his admission: pressure from Presidential Counsel James St. Clair, who is stunned by the contents of the July 23 tape and strongly suggests that he will resign unless the President makes his statement. Whether Nixon had prior knowledge of the break-in or the intelligence-gathering plan is still unanswered, but the Aug. 5 revelation gives the lie to all his past assertions that he was not involved in the cover-up. In the wake of Nixon's disclosures, all the Republicans on the Judiciary Committee who voted against impeachment say they will change their votes when the issue comes before the full House. Republican Senators say that Nixon has almost no chance of acquittal.

Faced with impeachment and conviction, Nixon goes before a nationwide TV audience and announces that he is resigning.