

The Last 17 Days of the Nixon Reign

Richard Milhous Nixon's final presidential crisis was thrust upon him by the Supreme Court's ruling that he could no longer lawfully withhold 64 disputed White House tapes from the Watergate prosecutors. Here, reconstructed from the accounts of those who saw him at close range, is the story of those last 17 days.

By Lou Cannon
Washington Post Staff Writer

Richard M. Nixon was alone in his office across the parking lot from his San Clemente villa at 8:45 a.m. July 24 when Alexander M. Haig Jr. brought him the telescoped message from Washington informing him that the Supreme Court had ruled against him. It would

be a warm day, although it was not yet, and an aide who saw Mr. Nixon soon afterward remembers that he was perspiring.

What he said to Haig is not recorded. But those who were around the Western White House in the tense, fretful hours after the decision which ordered Mr. Nixon to turn over the tapes to Watergate prosecutors, have a memory of numbing depression, of a dawning realization that the President who had survived so much in two years of Watergate would no longer be able to survive at all.

"It was a hell of a jolt for all of us," recalled Haig, who a few days later

would become the architect of the transition to Gerald R. Ford

No one knew better than Mr. Nixon that the die had been cast against him by the court's decision. Though he would become vague and unapproachable on several instances in the few days still left to him in the presidency, he functioned with his self-celebrated coolness in the immediate aftermath of the ruling.

"There may be some problem with the June 23 tape, Fred," Mr. Nixon reportedly told White House special counsel J. Fred Buzhardt in a telephone call soon after the court's ruling.

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NIXON, From A1

It was a considerable understatement. Buzhardt, who already had been reviewing the tape for possible problems, quickly located the damaging passages in which Mr. Nixon and former White House chief of staff H. R. (Bob) Haldeman discussed their plans for diverting the FBI from its Watergate investigation. Buzhardt concluded, as would others in the White House after him, that the conversation was too damaging for Mr. Nixon to survive.

Back in San Clemente, Mr. Nixon secluded himself as he always had done in hours of crisis. He talked with Haig and with Watergate defense attorney James D. St. Clair as reporters waited and waited for some statement from the White House. As five, six, eight hours went by, the belief grew that Mr. Nixon was considering defiance of the Supreme Court.

Though the White House always had denied that Mr. Nixon did in fact advocate defiance of the Supreme Court, an associate who saw the President shortly before the court ruling formed the impression that he was seriously considering this course. This associate recalled that Mr. Nixon expressed the opinion that the decision might not be unanimous. He left the conversation in the President's sunlit San Clemente office believing that Mr. Nixon might choose to ignore the decision of a narrowly divided court.

It is now known that Mr. Nixon was urged that day by one of his own high-ranking aides to consider resignation as an alternative to bowing to the court's decision.

This suggestion came from William Timmons, the chief White House congressional liaison, in a telephone call to Haig the same day as the court's decision.

Timmons, who had kept closer watch than anyone else in the White House on the steady deterioration in Republican ranks within the House Judiciary Committee, suggested that Mr. Nixon

resign rather than comply. In quitting, Timmons suggested, Mr. Nixon could say he didn't want to take any action that would set a precedent for weakening the independence and authority of the President's office.

Haig relayed the suggestion without endorsing it, but found it difficult to get the President to lay out any overall strategic course of action.

Once deciding that he would comply with the high court's ruling, Mr. Nixon lapsed into an emotional denunciation of his "enemies" in the Congress and the media. He also reportedly used expletive-deleted language to describe Chief Justice Warren E. Burger, his once-supportive appointee and now the author of the crushing decision against him. He just could not believe, an associate recalled, that the court's ruling had been unanimous.

During the four hot, cloudless days remaining to him at San Clemente, Mr. Nixon alternately was depressed by the consequences of that court ruling and hopeful that he could somehow survive. On two occasions Haig found it difficult to talk to Mr. Nixon about the subject at all. On another, Mr. Nixon brought up the issue to a visitor, then changed the subject before his listener could respond.

These were the days when the tide was turning against Mr. Nixon in the House Judiciary Committee. Almost daily denunciations of this committee came from the White House including press secretary Ronald L. Ziegler's description of the committee as "a kangaroo court." But it was evident to Republicans outside the inner circle that several GOP congressmen were prepared to break ranks and vote for impeachment.

Across the country the televised public hearings were creating a deep impression. On July 27, the day before Mr. Nixon left San Clemente to return to Washington, the committee voted 27-to-11 to impeach the President on the first count of impeachment — that he had unlawfully obstructed the investigation of the Watergate breakin. Ziegler greeted the news of the committee's impeachment vote in these presidentially approved words:

"The President remains confident that the full House will recognize that there simply is not the evidence to support this or any other article of impeachment and will not vote to impeach. He is confident because he

knows he has committed no impeachable offense.

These concluding words would become Mr. Nixon's persistent refrain and his swan song. Even after he resigned, even after he accepted a pardon for any offenses he committed or may have committed against the United States, Mr. Nixon continued to insist that the crimes which led to his impeachment and to his being named an unindicted co-conspirator by the Watergate grand jury were not impeachable offenses and would not have resulted in the impeachment of any other President.

Aides who were able to talk to him about it in the final weeks of his presidency became convinced that Mr. Nixon, even while admitting his offenses, had completely persuaded himself that they were not legitimate grounds for impeachment.

This refusal to face reality cost Mr. Nixon dearly in the weeks ahead. He was up one day, hopeful that he could defeat impeachment, and down the next. One aide says that he failed to "function coherently," to see what was happening to him. His unreality was fueled by optimistic reports from Ziegler, who publicly and privately insisted that impeachment would be beaten. Some aides saw Ziegler as the victim of his own propaganda.

President Nixon "has the confidence that in the long run the matter will resolve itself," Ziegler told reporters on the plane back to Washington from San Clemente. "He has the tremendous capacity to control his emotions and to sustain himself under two years of attack."

Other, more knowledgeable, White House aides already had concluded that Mr. Nixon could not survive. Buzhardt had passed on the information about the June 23 tape to Haig, St. Clair and counselor Dean Burch, the men who were to have the most to do with Mr. Nixon's ultimate decision to step down.

The Washington to which Mr. Nixon returned on July 28 was anticipating his impeachment and trial in the Senate, if not his resignation. This also was the expectation among the White House staff, where Timmons had devised a last-ditch strategy which reflected both cleverness and desperation.



United Press International

With Henry Kissinger, left, and James R. Schlesinger, Aug. 6.

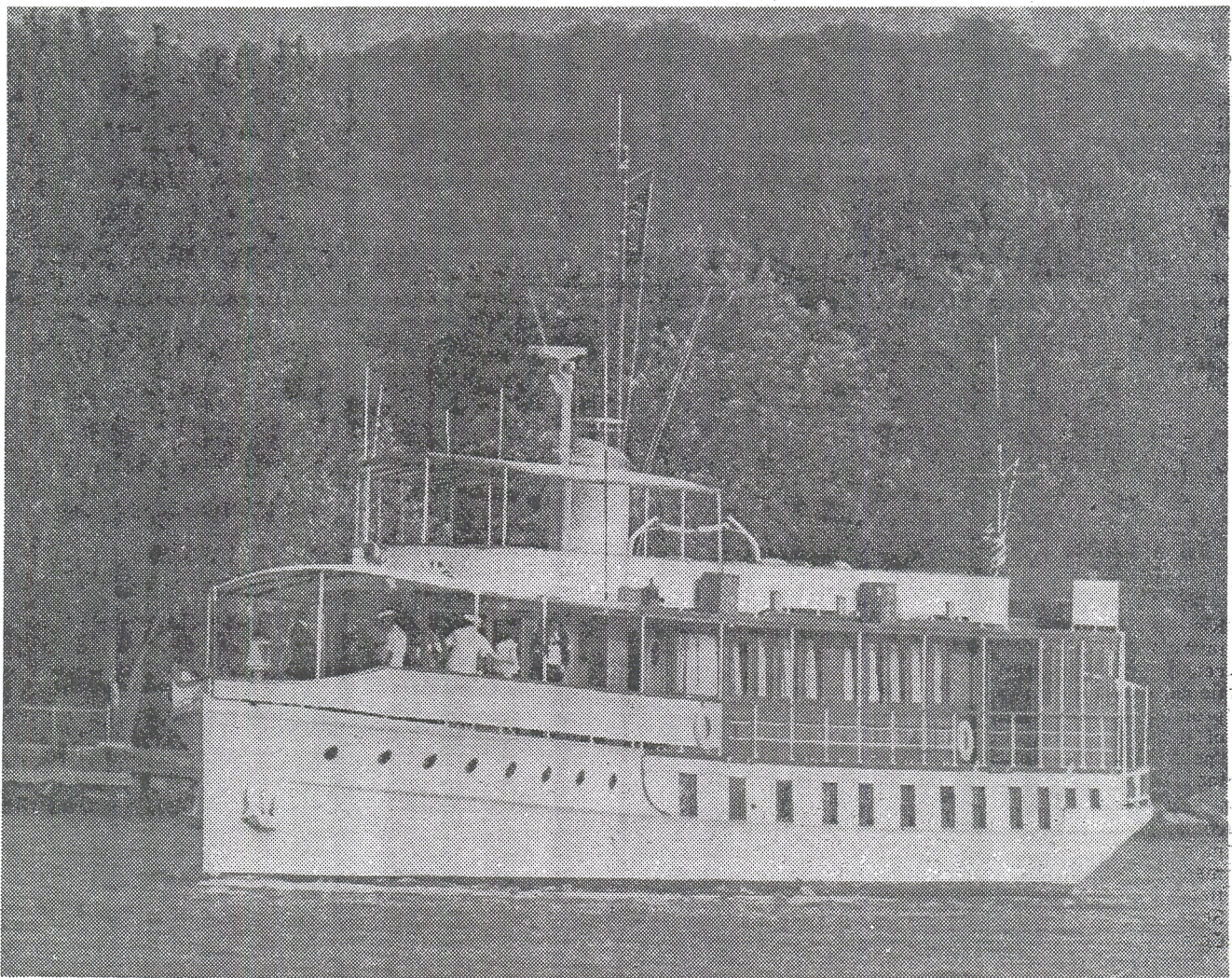
Timmons believed that it would be possible on the House floor to reduce the second article of impeachment, charging Mr. Nixon with abuses of power, to a censure motion. In return for this favor, the White House would signal Republican House members that they would be free to vote for the first article of impeachment, which Timmons believed the President could win on the merits in the Senate trial. But Timmons' anti-impeachment strategy was stalled by his inability to get what he called a "damage assessment" on the contents of the June 23 tape.

The Nixon White House always had operated in watertight compartments in which the President's strategy was revealed even to high-ranking aides only on a "need-to-know" basis. Now, suddenly, that need seemed universal within the White House.

Haig, under pressure from the legislative unit for the "damage assessment," and St. Clair, uncertain about his next legal steps in a defense that was rapidly becoming discredited, both asked to see transcripts of the June 23, 1972, tape. The transcripts immediately were prepared on their orders and reviewed by both men on Wednesday, July 31.

The resignation of the President now appeared inevitable to both men. St. Clair, a lawyer, tried to limit himself narrowly to impeachment issues. He proceeded on the premise that the new information would be made available and that the only question was of how to do it. Haig, a military man, was carried along by the flow of events and became an architect of resignation without making a specific conscious decision that Mr. Nixon must quit.

What Haig did, rather than counsel resignation, was to act as the midwife for an action that came to be both natural and inevitable. Using the considerable resources of his gatekeeper office in the White House, Haig embarked on a series of actions that ultimately would demonstrate to Mr.



The presidential yacht, Sequoia, returns to port after a family outing after a Watergate disclosure Aug. 5.

Associated Press

Nixon that he had no choice but to yield up the presidency.

One of the first of these actions was to solicit the views on Thursday, Aug. 1, of Sen. James O. Eastland of Mississippi, one of the Democrats presumed most favorable to Mr. Nixon's cause. Eastland told him bluntly that he thought that Mr. Nixon would be convicted in the Senate.

Armed with this information, Haig then set up a meeting for himself and St. Clair with Republican Rep. Charles E. Wiggins of California for Friday. Both Haig and St. Clair had been impressed by Wiggins, who had proven to be Mr. Nixon's most articulate defender on the House Judiciary Committee. The meeting in Haig's office was the first time the two men had ever met.

Wiggins, who had based his defense of Mr. Nixon on precisely the absence of the specific evidence that the June 23 tape provided, could scarcely believe the transcript that Haig and St. Clair put before him.

In mounting agitation but with a lawyer's thoroughness he read the June 23 transcript a second time and then a third. He told Haig and St. Clair that the Republicans who had stuck with Mr. Nixon had "really been led down the garden path." Then he informed the two men that Mr. Nixon had the alternative of either withholding the information and pleading the Fifth Amendment against self-incrimination or of turning over the incriminating material to the House Judiciary Committee.

Wiggins' response armed Haig and St. Clair with all the ammunition they needed. For all practical purposes, the offending material was now out, although Wiggins agreed not to say anything until the following Monday. He returned to his office in anger and frustration and began discarding the report he had been preparing in the President's defense.

Haig moved quickly. Soon after the Wiggins meeting he phoned Sen. Robert P. Griffin of Michigan, the minority whip in the Senate and one of Vice President Ford's closest friends. He told Griffin about the tape and about what Wiggins had said.

Griffin mulled over the new development on a late flight home that day to Traverse City, Mich. He recalls that he spent a sleepless night. The next morning he telephoned and dictated a letter to his Washington office for immediate delivery to the White House.

The Griffin letter was a master stroke. It was also illustrative of the way in which both Haig and St. Clair maneuvered in the final days to produce a result that no one overtly advocated. Written in terse, commanding language, the Griffin letter informed Mr. Nixon that he had barely enough votes to survive in the Senate. Griffin told the President that the Senate would subpoena the tapes which the court had ordered him to turn over to the prosecutors and that he would be in contempt if he refused.

"If you should defy such a subpoena, I shall regard that as an impeachable offense and shall vote accordingly," Griffin wrote.

The letter was particularly compelling because Griffin wrote it as if he knew nothing of the contents of the June 23 tape. Mr. Nixon had not been told that Griffin knew. And he now was being informed by one of the best vote counters in Congress that he had scant chance to survive even without any more damaging evidence coming to light.

Resignation already was very much on the President's mind—and on Haig's. On Aug. 1, the day before he broke the bad news to Wiggins, Haig asked top speechwriter Ray Price to begin work "on a contingency basis"



Associated Press

After a speech before businessmen in Los Angeles July 25.

on a speech that could be used for a presidential resignation. Unlike the Griffin call, this notification was given with the President's permission, although some aides believe that Haig stressed the "contingency" aspect in his talk with Mr. Nixon.

Mr. Nixon was now disconsolate, distraught and under pressure from all sides. His family and long-time secretary, Rose Mary Woods, wanted him to stay on and fight. So did Ziegler, communications director Ken W. Clawson and Bruce Herschensohn, his coordinator with anti-impeachment groups around the country.

The President responded to the conflicting pressures. His talk ranged from a quiet and almost fateful acceptance of what was happening to long discourses on what he regarded as the trivial nature of the case against him. "I'm not a quitter," he would say emotionally in the midst of otherwise dispassionate discussion of the evidence.

Instead, he focused discussions on how the new evidence against the President was to be released.

This discussion began in the White House on Saturday afternoon and moved, like a sort of floating dice game, to Camp David on Sunday. Assembled there with the President were Haig, St. Clair, Ziegler, Price and speechwriter Patrick J. Buchanan.

Mr. Nixon holed up in Aspen Cabin while his aides assembled in nearby Laurel Cabin to draft the statement that would accompany the release of the June 23 tape the following day. Buchanan said it was hopeless, and coun-

seled resignation. He was supported by St. Clair. Haig and Ziegler alternated in taking drafts of the statement and other memos to Mr. Nixon. Once, when Haig relayed the view that some of his aides thought he should resign, Mr. Nixon replied, "I wish you hadn't said that."

Mr. Nixon, his family and his aides, returned to Washington Sunday night by helicopter without agreeing on a final text.

The statement, as completed Monday and approved by the President, accurately reflected the dualism of Mr. Nixon's own frame of mind. On the one hand the statement admitted—far more candidly than Mr. Nixon would when he accepted a pardon five weeks later—that he had kept information from those who were arguing his case.

In language drafted by Price the President conceded that "portions of the tapes of those June 23 conversations are at variance with my previous statements." It was as close to an admission of guilt in the Watergate cover-up as Mr. Nixon would come.

Haig had been busy in the meantime. He had followed up his call to Griffin by telephoning House Minority Leader John J. Rhodes of Arizona and advising him not to hold a scheduled press conference on Monday at which Rhodes was supposed to an-



By Douglas Chevallier—The Washington Post

With Mrs. Nixon and Edward Cox returning from San Clemente, July 29.

nounce his position on impeachment. Rhodes, already at home with a bad cold, developed a convenient case of laryngitis.

Vice President Ford also was informed at Haig's instructions, at first through a White House aide who called Walter F. Mote on the Ford staff and told him that "things have completely unraveled." The aide said that Mr. Nixon would have something definite to say early in the week.

The same man called Mote on Monday to tell him that the President would make a statement that evening that would be a bombshell.

"What do you mean?" Mote asked.

"I mean boom-boom, a bombshell," the aide replied.

By now, the pressures that had pushed Mr. Nixon to the brink of resignation were carrying him over the cliff. Attempts to orchestrate, to plan, to formulate and control events had lost their meaning.

Timmons, Clawson and Buchanan read the offending transcript for the first time in Haig's office on Monday morning, and all of them realized that the President was finished. On Capitol Hill, Griffin called for resignation. Burch and Timmons arranged a meeting through House Whip Leslie Arends

(R-III.) with the 10 Judiciary Committee members who had gone down the line with the President.

Wiggins had kept his secret through the weekend, although he had tried to share it with Vice President Ford. Driving to his second-floor office in the Cannon Building on Sunday, Wiggins heard a radio broadcast in which Mr. Ford was quoted defending Mr. Nixon. He heard a similar newscast on Monday morning and wondered whether Mr. Ford had been informed. He tried to place a call to Robert T. Hartmann, the Vice President's top aide, but received no answer and was unable to persuade White House operators to locate him.

Then Wiggins called Rhodes to tell him what he knew and learned that Haig had already succeeded in getting through to him. But Rhodes still did not know the full story. He learned it at his Northwest Washington home Monday when he was visited by Burch and Buzhardt. With them was Republican National Chairman George Bush, who also was hearing the complete story for the first time.

Meanwhile, Timmons and St. Clair were briefing the Judiciary Committee loyalists in Arends' office. All but two of them were able to attend, and they were outraged by the disclosure. Despite their anger, they did not direct their feelings at St. Clair. He, too, said Rep. David Dennis of Indiana, had "been led down the primrose path."

Wiggins, trying not to cry, went on television and read a statement saying that the evidence was sufficient to justify a single count of impeachment. All the other Republican loyalists on Judiciary followed suit. Rhodes recovered his voice and joined the impeachment chorus. From Republican officeholders and party officials across the nation came calls for resignation.

Within the White House, Haig tried to bolster a now dispirited staff. Realizing the shock impact that the new disclosure would have, he called a meeting in the Conference Room of the Executive Office Building that was attended by 150 staff members.

"You may feel depressed or outraged by this, but we must all keep going for the good of the nation," he concluded. "And I also hope you would do it for the President, too."

Many of the staff members who attended that meeting leaped to their feet and cheered Haig. Others left with tears in their eyes or heads downcast, recognizing as they had never recognized before that the end to the Nixon presidency was in sight.

Only Mr. Nixon wavered in this recognition. Shaken and drawn, he went with his family for a breezy Potomac River cruise aboard the presidential yacht, Sequoia, where only a few weeks before he had entertained congressmen he was trying to influence against impeachment.

Now, Mr. Nixon's family made a last stand, trying to convince him that he must stay in office and fight to the end.

The family effort bore temporary fruit, to the consternation of Nixon aides and Republican congressmen who saw resignation as inevitable and didn't want the agony prolonged. On Tuesday, the President asked for a specific assessment of his Senate chances from Timmons, and told him to check specifically on five senators. Then he met with the Cabinet in an effort to make a final demonstration that he

See NIXON, A11, Col. 1

NIXON, From A10

was still capable of governing the nation.

"It was a most curious meeting," recalled one of the participants. "Nixon assembled the Cabinet not to ask for advice but to announce a decision that he would not resign. He had a sort of eerie calm about him. The mood in the room was one of considerable disbelief. Because if you had any realism about what was happening, you know the place was about to fall down, and he was sitting there calmly and serenely and vowing to stay on. You began to wonder if he knew something you didn't know—if he had some secret weapon that he hadn't disclosed yet."

What surprised the Cabinet members most was not Mr. Nixon's rambling discourse on why he would not quit—the Constitution did not provide for resignation, he said—but his insistence on talking about the "most important problem in the world today." That problem turned out to be inflation.

Vice President Ford took up the economic theme, speaking in favor of the economic summit meeting that had been advocated by Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield (D-Mont.). Mr. Nixon said this summit should go forward right away.

At this point Attorney General William B. Saxbe jumped up and said "Mr. President, can't we wait a week or two to see what happens?" He was supported by George Bush, who also counseled a postponement. Mr. Nixon said the summit couldn't wait.

But it was the resignation that was on everyone's mind, not the high price of groceries. The President said during his 15-minute anti-resignation discourse that he didn't expect Cabinet members to get involved in his problems. This in turn gave Mr. Ford a graceful opportunity to say that it would no longer be "in the public interest" for him to make statements defending the President. Mr. Nixon said he understood.

The most serious point at the meeting was made by Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger, who spoke on the necessity of maintaining unity and continuity.

"The government is going through a very difficult period, and we as a people are going to go through a very difficult period," Kissinger said. "It is crucial that we show confidence that this government and country are a going concern. It is essential that we show it is not safe to take a run at us."

This Cabinet meeting was Mr. Nixon's last attempt to demonstrate that he could still govern a country that less than two years before had re-elected him President by one of the largest margins in its history. It was a failure. When Mr. Ford carried news of the session to a luncheon meeting of the Senate Republican Policy Committee, the senators were incredulous and outraged that Mr. Nixon had vowed to stay in office. They regarded his comments on inflation as evidence that the President was out of touch with reality.

"The President should resign," Sen. Barry M. Goldwater of Arizona yelled at Mr. Ford. Then he apologized to the Vice President for shouting at him. Mr. Ford appeared to be a savior in the eyes of the desperate Republican senators, and they gave him thunderous applause when he quietly excused himself a few moments later.

The senior Republican members of the Senate—Minority Leader Hugh Scott of Pennsylvania, Norris Cotton of New Hampshire, John G. Tower of Texas, William Brock of Tennessee, Wallace F. Bennett of Utah and Griffin—spent the afternoon in a series of conferences. They were convinced that Mr. Nixon had to get out of office, and



by Charles Del Vecchio—The Washington Post

Crossing street with Ronald L. Ziegler, Aug. 8.

quickly. Their discussions were directed almost solely at finding a way to persuade him to resign.

Back in the White House, the President already was closer to quitting than they knew. Timmons had told Mr. Nixon that morning that he was down to 20 hard-core votes in the Senate. He had since spoken to the five senators whose attitudes Mr. Nixon had asked him to assess, and all five said the situation was hopeless. Timmons repeated this to the President. Soon thereafter, Mr. Nixon met with the man who had done the most to rally support for him around the country, Rabbi Baruch Korff, and hinted he might quit. Mr. Nixon also placed several calls to Kissinger, asking him to assess the impact of resignation on foreign policy.

And, through Haig, he gave the most significant instruction of all. He told Ray Price to begin working on his resignation speech, this time not for any contingency.

Looking back on the events of the week preceding the resignation, some of the White House aides who were closest to events remembered it as a seemingly endless jumble punctuated by wild rumors, still wilder hopes and brief flashes of reality. Many of them worked far into the night at their desks and made additional phone calls when they reached home. A few of

them cried. ("Sometimes," Mr. Nixon had written in "Six Crises," "even strong men will cry.") But no one can pinpoint the precise moment when Mr. Nixon decided to resign.

"It was a decision made alone in the dead of night," said one former aide who knows Mr. Nixon well. "It was as personal a thing as a man can do."

Even Haig was never certain until it was over.

Events after Tuesday moved swiftly to resignation, but Mr. Nixon was suffering from the emotional impact of the painful decision he had almost made. Alternately moody and determined, he kept searching for a way out, kept asking aides and senators whether he might not yet prevail in a Senate trial. But he had taken all the steps that were necessary for his resignation, and Haig carefully carried out his orders. 7 A 027

On Wednesday morning Haig called Mr. Ford into the White House for a briefing and told him to be prepared to assume the presidency the following day. At lunch that day Haig told Goldwater he was "90 per cent sure" that Mr. Nixon would resign.

With an inevitability that he had long tried to avoid, Goldwater had been designated by his fellow Republican senators as the man to break the unpleasant news to Mr. Nixon that he had no real alternative to resignation.

However, Goldwater was spared a personal meeting. Acting on the advice of Timmons, Haig instead set up a meeting with three legislators — Goldwater and Minority Leaders Scott and Rhodes. The meeting was delayed, then delayed again by the President, who was fighting for time and his own emotional composure. Before the meeting, Timmons briefed the two minority leaders and urged that they not tell Mr. Nixon directly to resign. Haig intercepted all three congressmen on their way in to make the same point.

"I did that for two reasons," Timmons recalled. "First, I felt it was something they could live with more comfortably for the rest of their lives. I didn't think any of them wanted to tell the President to quit. Second, I thought the President would do whatever he decided was right regardless of what they recommended."

The meeting, when it finally came at 5 p.m., was anti-climactic. Scott recalls that Mr. Nixon, his feet propped up on the desk, spent time trying to reassure the congressmen and make them feel at ease about their mission. Goldwater told Mr. Nixon that he was down to 15 votes in the Senate, which caused the President to say to Rhodes that he probably only had 10 votes in the House.

Rhodes agreed with Mr. Nixon, privately thinking that the loyalist vote

was higher than that, that Mr. Nixon might actually have 50 or 60 votes. Scott gave the President an estimate that he had 12 to 15 votes in the Senate. What was Scott's assessment? Mr. Nixon wanted to know.

"Gloomy," Scott said.

"I'd say d---- gloomy," the President replied.

The three congressmen left the Oval Office convinced that Mr. Nixon would quit, although he had never said so directly. But he had talked about acting "in the national interest," and had joked darkly about his own future. There were no former Presidents left alive, Mr. Nixon said.

"If I were to become an ex-President," he added, "I'd have no ex-Presidents to pal around with."

Meanwhile, the new government already was forming in the shell of the old.

Philip W. Buchen, Mr. Ford's old law partner and executive director of the presidential Commission on the Rights of Privacy, had gone to the Vice President's Alexandria home on Tuesday night for a previously scheduled meeting. He found Mr. Ford "bearing a responsibility he hadn't anticipated."

"I think he felt very sad about the events of Monday and what the effect of it was on the former President and his family," Buchen says in retrospect. "The last thing you could read in it was any elation. It wasn't like a campaign candidate finding out he had almost 100 per cent in the polls . . . He was concerned not only for the man he was replacing but for the responsibility he was facing. He had a serene confidence, but he couldn't help feeling that destiny was overtaking him."

Mr. Ford asked Buchen to take on the responsibility of calling some old friends to begin transition planning for the new administration. Buchen called John Byrnes, the former Wisconsin congressman and a close friend of Mr. Ford in the House; former Pennsylvania Gov. William Scranton; Bryce Harlow, an adviser to President Eisenhower and one of the most knowledgeable men in Washington; Sen. Griffin and Clay Whitehead, who was just resigning as head of the White House Office of Telecommunications Policy. 7 A 027

This group met for seven hours on Wednesday at the Washington home of William G. Whyte, the U.S. Steel Corp. chief lobbyist and a friend of Mr. Ford's for 20 years. By coincidence, the meeting started at 5 p.m., the same time that Goldwater, Scott and Rhodes were seeing President Nixon in the White House. Scranton, who caught a late plane, did not arrive at the transition meeting until 7:30.

The advisers discussed the outline of the new administration. Even at that

early date they were convinced that Haig must go, and the name of Donald Rumsfeld immediately came up as his replacement. But Haig could wait. The priority was the press office, long the special province of Ron Ziegler.

"It was a necessity to clean it out," Buchen said. "That was the first thing that had to be changed and changed quickly."

Without dissent the Ford advisers agreed that pipe-smoking J. F. TerHorst of The Detroit News, a long-time friend of the Vice President, was the man to replace Ziegler. TerHorst was on vacation working on his biography of Mr. Ford when the call came from the Vice President the next day. SAUG

Out of that meeting at Whyte's home and a subsequent session at Buchen's office at 1800 G St. the following evening came the shape of the Ford transition. Mr. Ford agreed promptly with his advisers' principal recommendation, which was that a transition team be named right away. Five were selected: Scranton, Interior Secretary Rogers C. B. Morton, NATO Ambassador Rumsfeld, former Democratic Rep. John O. Marsh of Virginia, and TerHorst. It was the consensus of the group meeting at Whyte's home that Mr. Ford must move swiftly to put "his own imprint on the presidency."

The task of bringing back Chief Justice Burger from Amsterdam for the swearing-in of the new President was accepted by Sen. Griffin. It turned out not to be an easy one. When Griffin called Burger's assistant, Mark Cannon, and asked for Burger to return, the chief justice coldly relayed the message through his aide: "I don't think I should come back until there's something official." (And he didn't. At the last moment, unable to find commercial transportation, the chief justice was to rush back aboard a military airplane.)

The final hours were now at hand.

"No one who was there, who had been there through all that had happened, will ever forget it," recalled a White House aide. "The resignation had a life of its own. We were all devoured by it."

The final outside glimpse of those last, desperate hours of the Nixon presidency fell to Ollie Atkins, the renowned White House photographer who had over the years been responsible for the most compelling and personal pictorial portraits of the President. Atkins was summoned on Wednesday night by Mr. Nixon to make photographs of him and his family before dinner. T A S B

The Nixons, their daughters and sons-in-law and Rosemary Woods were gathered together. It was obvious to Atkins that Mrs. Nixon, Tricia and Julie had been crying. And it occurred, correctly, to the photographer that Mr. Nixon had just told them that he was going to resign.

In these last hours, Mr. Nixon's thoughts were for his family. Before Atkins left, the three women broke into tears again. Mr. Nixon hugged Julie, the daughter who was so much like him and who had urged him repeatedly not to quit. SAUG

The President had composed himself by morning. One aide remembers his haggard look—"all the fight had gone out of him"—but he talked gently to subordinates at whom he had raged a few days before. Once he poked his head into Dean Burch's office and asked casually how he was doing.

He prepared carefully for Gerald Ford, receiving him in his office at 11:02 a.m. and informing him in a shaken but controlled voice that he would be resigning the presidency.

Mr. Ford, saddened, nodded his head and spoke words of sympathy to the President, who eight months before had chosen him as his successor. Then they talked for an hour and 10 minutes. Twenty minutes later a trembling Ron Ziegler informed his nemeses in the White House press corps that Mr. Nixon would make his announcement on television at 9 o'clock that night.



By Douglas Chevalier—The Washington Post

Making a point during farewell speech, Aug. 9.

It was all over with Mr. Nixon by now, and he knew it. He spent the afternoon in his hideaway office in the Executive Office Building working on the final draft of the resignation speech provided by Price. As far as his key aides know, there never was any thought of Mr. Nixon's admitting crimes on national television, an omission that would attract the attention of many critics on Friday morning. But aides also speak of the President's "statesmanship" and "graciousness," and of his desire to leave office in a manner that inflicted few wounds upon the nation.

Mr. Nixon had two more ordeals before his speech to the nation, and they proved more difficult for him than the television speech.

"He stuck to the script on the air, and he did very well," a former close aide said. "Off the air, he was in bad shape, and everyone who saw him knew it." SAUG

No one knew it better than the congressman who met with Mr. Nixon that evening before he went on the air. He held two meetings, one at 7:30 for the leadership, and another at 8 for an expanded group of congressmen who had been staunch supporters in the difficult defensive months of Watergate.

He was well controlled in the first meeting, previewing what he would later tell the nation. But the 8 o'clock session was too much for him after the strain of his final week.

He was the essential Nixon then, the old Nixon who had preached the gospel of always getting ahead, of never quitting, of treating his adversaries as

enemies rather than honorable political opponents.

Once upon a time, said Mr. Nixon, he had run a race in high school, a race where the winner had crossed the finish line, a race where he had been lapped by another runner. "I'm not a quitter," Nixon said, holding back the tears.

Sen. Tower was crying now, openly. So were some of the House members. Mr. Nixon forged ahead, trying to find the right words, and not finding them. He spoke of his search for peace. He did not, to the surprise of those who had heard him in such personal moments before, criticize the press or those who had brought him to the brink of impeachment. Toward the end of his 25-minute speech he talked about his family.

"I hope I haven't let you down," he said, repressing sobs. "I hope I haven't let you down."

Then he was overcome and could say no more. He had pressed back against a row of chairs as he spoke in the crowded Cabinet Room, and he seemed to stumble as he finished. Still trying to hold back the tears, he bowed his head and walked out. Moments later he would compose himself in private for the public ordeal of yielding up the presidency that he had treasured, abused and finally lost.

(Washington Post staff writers Marilyn Berger, Carl Bernstein, David S. Broder, Michael Getler, Carroll Kilpatrick, Richard L. Lyons, Murrey Marder, Lawrence Meyer, Spencer Rich, Jules Witcover and Bob Woodward contributed to this report.)