

Nixon 'Thought of Quitting Earlier'

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More than a year before he actually resigned as President on Aug. 8, 1974, Richard M. Nixon seriously considered doing so because of the troubles caused him and his close friends by Watergate according to Raymond Price Jr., Nixon's chief speech writer.

This account is contained in "With Nixon," a book by Price to be published in November by the Viking Press. The book will be the first public defense and highly favorable interpretation in print of the Nixon presidency by a White House confidant who stuck it out to the end.

Price said Nixon was so upset before delivering his first television speech about Watergate on April 30, 1973 — in which he announced the resignation of "two of the finest public servants it has been my privilege to know," John D. Ehrlichman and H. R. Haldeman, his domestic affairs assistant and chief of staff — that he came close to leaving the White House himself.

"We were together at Camp David going over the speech," Price recalled, "when the President set me back on my heels by saying, 'you have always been my conscience — do you think I should resign? Just write it into the next draft, and I'll do it.'"

Price wrote that while the President was "looking for reassurance," it was also "obvious that he had been giving a great deal of

thought to resignation, that he was deeply tormented, racked by a sense of personal responsibility for what he had been forced to do to people close to him, his nerves frayed, his conscience torn."

Describing that day as "the emotional nadir of his presidency," Price says that Nixon persisted in asking whether resignation was the right thing. In retrospect, Price wrote, he believes the President was "plagued by a heavy sense of foreboding" about the Watergate disclosure that finally caused him to resign.

Price says he argued the President out of leaving office that day. One of his main points, he recalled — one with which Nixon agreed — was that Vice President Agnew, who was still a half year away from his own forced resignation, was incapable of carrying on diplomacy "to prevent war and preserve the peace."

Price believes that the President did not know about Watergate break-in plan. However, he says that Nixon was involved early in the efforts to cover up the criminal activities by his subordinates.

"Once I saw the transcripts of the June 1972 tapes — the so-called 'smoking gun' tapes — I felt that the game was lost, and I recommended resignation," Price said in writing of the final days of the presidency.

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