35

A White House in Turmoil

Two reporters from the *Washington Post,* Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, had been following the developments from the Watergate break-in, and their stories indicated that there might be some association between some members of the White House staff and the men being indicted. The question of large sums of money being paid to people to remain quiet was also being raised. In addition to the five men caught in Larry O'Brien's office, two others had been arrested-G. Gordon Liddy and E. Howard Hunt. I still didn't have a firm grasp on how this was going to play out. All I knew was that we, the Secret Service, had no part in it.

In December 1972, we were notified by the SAIC of the Truman Protective Division that eighty-eight-year-old former President Harry S. Truman, who had been suffering from ill health for some time, had been hospitalized near his home in Independence, Missouri. Director Rowley was the SAIC of the White House Detail during the Truman administration and had been quite close to both President and Mrs. Truman, so I notified him immediately.

The morning of Tuesday, December 26, 1972, we got word that President Truman had died. The Truman family wanted the funeral services to take place in Independence and to be subdued and kept rather private. Truman had been known as a plain speaker, and a state funeral was not his style.

In 1948, when Truman ran against Republican Tom Dewey, a campaign supporter shouted out at a rally, "Give 'em hell, Harry!" To which Truman replied, "I don't give them hell, I just tell the truth about them, and they

think it's hell." He was also known to have said "The buck stops here" and "If you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen."

President Nixon flew to Missouri on December 28, and after placing a wreath at the casket of former President Truman, he paid his respects to Mrs. Truman, daughter Margaret and her husband, Clifton Daniel, and their children.

It was around this time that Vice President Agnew, after living in a hotel for four years, bought a new home in Kenwood, Maryland. This meant we would have to secure that residence-which required a great deal of money that had not been budgeted for that fiscal year. I still thought the government would be better off purchasing a nice home on a nice piece of property in the Washington area that could serve as the permanent residence for the Vice President of the United States. As it was, we had to do a survey and provide an estimate of everything that needed to be done to make this new residence meet our security standards.

THE JANUARY 20, 1973, Inauguration was fast approaching, and the Presidential Protective Division and the Vice Presidential Protective Division had their advance personnel working with the Inaugural committee and its staff. One advantage the Secret Service has is that every four years this event is pretty much a reproduction of what transpired four years prior. There are not many changes in schedule or activity, and in the case of an incumbent president taking the oath again, everything is much simpler, with no transition necessary. One unique feature at this Inauguration, however, was that because it had been less than thirty days since the death of President Truman, the flag at the top of the Capitol was still flying at half-staff.

On January 19, the night before the Inauguration, President Nixon and his family attended a concert at the Kennedy Center; then, on January 20, there was the usual swearing-in at the Capitol; a luncheon; an Inaugural Parade; and Inaugural Balls-five of them-that evening. In my position as the AD, I stayed in the Secret Service command center so I could oversee all the operations and make adjustments if needed.

Once again antiwar demonstrators posed a problem. Even though much had been done to withdraw from Vietnam and it was a steady work in prog-

ress, the antiwar crowd never seemed satisfied and wouldn't be until all the troops were withdrawn, all bombing stopped, and hostilities ceased. About sixty thousand protestors were kept well away from the parade route, but a small group managed to get close, and when President and Mrs. Nixon rode by, standing halfway out the roof of the limousine, the protestors hurled oranges and apples and other debris at them. Fortunately, none of the fruit met its mark.

Two DAYS A FTER the Inauguration, the SAIC of the Johnson Protective Detail called and advised me that former President Johnson had died at his home on the LBJ Ranch in Texas of an apparent heart attack. I knew he had been having some health difficulties and he wasn't taking good care of himself, but I was still shocked and saddened by the news. He was just sixty-four years old.

There was a public viewing at the LBJ Library in Austin on January 23 and 24, and then President Johnson's body was flown to Andrews Air Force Base aboard USAF 26000, the same plane on which he had taken the oath of office in 1963 and subsequently in which he traveled the world. A motorcade brought the body to Constitution Avenue, south of the White House, and there it was transferred to a horse-drawn caisson for the slow march to the Capitol.

The president's body lay in state in the Capitol Rotunda overnight as thousands came to pay their respects. At the formal funeral services in National City Christian Church in Washington the next day, I stood in the back and looked around the room, seeing many familiar faces-people whom President Johnson would have been humbled to know had come to pay their respects: Mrs. Mamie Eisenhower, Robert McNamara, numerous civil rights leaders, members of Congress and Supreme Court justices, and so many others who had served loyally with him. President and Mrs. Nixon and the Agnews sat in the front row on one side, while Mrs. Johnson, Luci, Lynda, their husbands, and five-and-a-half-year-old Lyn Nugent-the little boy who brought so much joy to President Johnson during some of his darkest days-sat across the aisle.

I flew with the family aboard Air Force 26000 to take the body back

to Texas, where LBJ was placed in his final resting place, in the family cemetery at his beloved LBJ Ranch. Following the interment, Mrs. Johnson had a reception in the house, and I was pleased to be able to express my condolences to her personally, as well as on behalf of the entire U.S. Secret Service.

I had intended to return to Washington by commercial aircraft later that night or early the next morning. When I was at the ranch, however, I happened to be talking with the crew of the JetStar assigned to the vice president and learned that they had flown some officials to Bergstrom Air Force Base from Washington, and were returning to Washington with no passengers aboard.

The pilot said, "Why don't you ride back with us, Clint?"

I gladly accepted. Then a strange thing happened. Jack Valenti, who had been LBJ's assistant at the White House and was at that time president of the Motion Picture Association of America, approached me.

"Clint," he said, "I'm trying to find a ride back to Washington. I had hoped to be able to fly back on the big jet, but I was told that the only way they could accommodate me would be on the JetStar."

And then humbly he added, "And they said that you needed to provide authorization for me to accompany you, since you are the highest-ranking U.S. government official and you have control of the aircraft."

It was indeed an ironic situation. Jack Valenti, once one of the most influential men at the hand of the President of the United States, was now in the position of needing a favor from me. It turned out that one of President Johnson's devoted secretaries, Juanita Roberts, also needed a ride, so we flew back to Andrews Air Force Base that evening, just the three of us and the crew aboard the JetStar. It was a quiet, comfortable flight.

In a sad coincidence, President Nixon announced that an agreement had been reached for a cease-fire in Vietnam the night after Johnson died. Two months later, the last U.S. combat troops would leave South Vietnam and the remaining American prisoners of war would be freed, thus ending our direct intervention in the conflict, and the man who would have felt the impact of it deepest of all had not lived to see it come to pass.

As it turned out, ending the Vietnam War would not be Nixon's legacy either.

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LESS THAN A week after President Johnson's funeral, G. Gordon Liddy and James McCord were convicted of conspiracy, burglary, and bugging the Democratic Party's Watergate headquarters. Five other men who were indicted with Liddy and McCord had pleaded guilty early in the trial to all charges against them.

Shortly thereafter, McCord wrote a letter to Chief U.S. District Judge John J. Sirica stating that there were others involved-people who had not yet been named, and that there had been political pressure and perjury in the trial. This sparked the U.S. Senate to create the Select Committee on Presidential Campaign Activities, which became known as the Watergate Committee. Its task was to thoroughly investigate the activities related to the 1972 presidential election campaign.

By the end of March, Alexander Butterfield, deputy assistant to the president, had resigned his White House post to become the Federal Aviation Administrator, and it was revealed that two top White House staffers, John W.Dean III and Jeb Stuart Magruder, appeared to have had advance knowledge of the Watergate affair. Behind the scenes, Dean, who was the White House legal counsel, started working with prosecutors in an effort to get immunity. He claimed that he was a scapegoat and that the people who were most deeply involved were some of the men closest to the president.

Ever since the Watergate break-in had occurred, Nixon had repeatedly denied that he or any of his staff were involved. Then, on April 30, 1973, President Nixon fired Dean and accepted the resignations of his chief of staff, Bob Haldeman, chief domestic advisor John Ehrlichman, and Attorney General Richard Kleindienst.

As soon as I got word that this was going to happen, I assigned an around-the-clock detail to guard the files in the Executive Office Building. No one was to bring anything in or take anything out. I had seen the way Nixon's staff operated, and I knew that if they had the opportunity, they would be shredding files like crazy.

Meanwhile, Nixon had appointed L. Patrick Gray to replace J. Edgar Hoover as FBI director. Hoover had died in May 1972, but Gray failed to receive Senate confirmation and withdrew his name from consideration.

Nixon then appointed an interim FBI director, William D. Ruckelshaus. The White House was in complete turmoil. It appeared that everyone was running for the woods to get as far away from the burgeoning scandal as possible.

President Nixon finally reached out to Clarence Kelley, a retired FBI agent who was serving as the chief of police in Kansas City, Missouri. Kelley was easily confirmed and became the new director of the FBI on July 9, 1973.

By this point, the Watergate hearings were being broadcast on television. It had become a national drama, a real-life soap opera, unfolding day by day. I was sitting in my office on July 13, 1973, when Deputy Director Boggs came in and said, "Clint, today's testimony is something you need to watch."

"What's going on?" I asked.

"They've just announced a surprise witness. Alexander Butterfield is about to testify."

I raised my eyebrows and said, "Thanks, Pat."

I turned on the television in my office just as Butterfield was being **sworn 1n.**

Well, this should be interesting.

Butterfield sat in front of the Senate committee, hands clasped together, as the questioning began.

"Mr. Butterfield, are you aware of the installation of any listening devices in the Oval Office of the president?" Senator Fred Thompson of Tennessee asked.

I waited as Butterfield sat there in silence for a few moments.

"Yes, sir, I was aware of listening devices. Yes, sir," Butterfield replied.

"When were those devices placed in the Oval Office?"

Butterfield said he didn't know exactly, but recalled that it was sometime in the summer of 1970, as was a similar taping system in the president's office in the EOB. I was sure Butterfield had his dates wrong, because I remembered that the installation was done while I was at the Federal Executive Institute in January and February 1971. He went on to explain how the system operated and that the Secret Service had installed it at the president's request. It was voice-activated, and few people knew it was there.

"My guess is that Haldeman and Ehrlichman did not know;' Butterfield answered at one point.

"And how would you go about obtaining what was said?" Thompson asked.

"In the obvious manner;' Butterfield said, calmly "To obtain the tape . . . and play it."

I knew of the taping system but had not even given a thought to what this could do to the Watergate hearings. It was like a house of cards that had started to come down slowly, and we were all holding our breath, waiting, knowing that at some point the whole thing was going to come crashing down.

AROUND THIS SAME time I received an urgent message to report to the director's office, along with my deputy, Paul Rundle. Whenever I received this type of summons I got a queasy feeling that something unpleasant was about to happen. We went to the director's office, and after being seated and exchanging pleasantries, Director Rowley said, "Gentlemen, I have a request from the White House that I want you to execute. The president wants a change in leadership at the top of the White House Detail."

I was stunned. I thought things were going along relatively well, considering everything else that was happening.

"Bob Taylor and Bill Duncan were specifically mentioned;' Rowley said. "Nixon wants them replaced."

Again I was shocked. Duncan had been with Nixon since the campaign in 1968 and seemed to be well liked. He was one of the very best. I knew Taylor had had some run-ins with Haldeman, so that didn't surprise me as much, but still. What was going on?

There was one more-Art Godfrey, a solid agent, a great guy who had been on the White House Detail longer than anyone else, and we were told to replace him as well.

"You make the selection on replacements and get it done as soon as possible," Rowley said.

Rundle and I went back to my office, closed the door, and had a long discussion about who would best fit the slots. We finally came up with Richard Keiser for SAIC and Robert Burke for Deputy SAIC.

Giving people bad news is never fun, or easy. But telling Bob Taylor, Bill Duncan, and Art Godfrey that they were being transferred was extremely difficult. Paul Rundle knew the history I had with these guys and he offered to be the one to break the news. He couldn't tell them that the president wanted them off the detail, and I think they thought it was Rundle's decision. There were lots of rumors-all unfounded-because no one knew the truth except Director Rowley, Rundle, and me.

IN THE MIDST of all this turmoil, there was a tragic accident. On May 26, 1973, I received a telephone call I never wanted to receive. A helicopter transporting agents assigned to PPD crashed near Grand Cay, the Bahamas, and one of the agents was killed. Clifford Dietrich, married and a father of two girls, drowned when the Army helicopter crashed into the ocean and he was trapped inside. I tried to do everything I could for the widow and her children. I went to the funeral in Connecticut and spent time with her, her daughters, and her mother and father. President Nixon was on his way to Iceland to meet with French president Pompidou and could not attend, but Mrs. Nixon and Julie came to the funeral and spoke with the family. I took it personally. He was one of my men. Such a tragic loss.

THERE 1s ONE bright memory I have during the chaotic summer of 1973. I was advised that a group of government officials were flying on a chartered Air Force plane to visit the Truman Library in Independence, Missouri. I had a limited interest in going to the library, but thought it would be productive to visit and inspect the Truman Protective Detail. So I notified the detail of my intentions and soon received a response that surprised me. Mrs. Truman had been made aware I was making this trip, and she requested I come to her residence for tea. I gladly accepted, and the arrangements were made. When I boarded the aircraft at Andrews Air Force Base, I found myself among high-level government officials, including John Eisenhower, son of the former president. They were not aware of why I was making this trip, and I didn't tell them.

When we arrived at the Kansas City airport, the Truman Detail SAIC

met me with a car and drove me to the Truman residence, while the others went on their way to the library.

Mrs. Truman met us at the front door, and after the agent introduced us, he politely excused himself

"Mr. Hill, it is such a pleasure to finally meet you," she said. "Please come in and have a seat."

I sat down in a well-worn wingback chair as Mrs. Truman went to the kitchen and made tea for us. We had an interesting conversation about the agents who were assigned to her and how much she thought of them. She said that, really, they were family. We talked about the White House, and I explained how things had changed over the years, and she reminisced about the people she remembered from her years in the presidential residence. We sat there talking, very comfortably, almost like we were old friends, for nearly an hour. It was a memorable afternoon.

On the return flight, one of the officials asked me, "Mr. Hill, what did you do in Independence?"

"Mrs. Truman asked to see me, so we spent the afternoon having tea and reminiscing," I said matter-of-factly.

They were speechless. None of them had ever met the Trumans. I had the honor of having met President Truman as a former president, and now Mrs. Truman. Pretty special.

IN AUGUST 1973, President Nixon traveled back and forth from the White House to Camp David on an almost daily basis by helicopter. When he was at the White House, most evenings were spent having dinner on the yacht *Sequoia*, cruising along the Potomac. Later in the month he flew down to Key Biscayne for a few nights, and then spent the rest of August in San Clemente.

Most of the top staff Nixon brought to the White House in 1969 had now departed. Vice President Agnew, meanwhile, found his name appearing in the news alleging he had engaged in illegal activity, and a criminal investigation was under way. He held a news conference and charged Attorney General Elliot Richardson and U.S. Attorney George Beall of leaking information about the investigation to the media. The situation with Vice

President Agnew grew worse each day. I did not have any proof that Nixon's people were behind the seething investigation that delved into Agnew's finances prior to his becoming vice president, but knowing how they operated, I wouldn't have put it past them.

On October 10, 1973, Paul Rundle and I received word that Vice President Agnew was in court in Baltimore, Maryland. He was going to plead guilty to a criminal charge against him and resign the vice presidency. He had informed Sam Sulliman, the SAIC of his detail, what he was about to do and had requested no one other than Sulliman and a very few others be made aware of what was about to transpire. The information was not even provided to his staff Rundle and I were caught unaware and quickly had to create a new protective unit: as soon as Vice President Agnew resigned, the speaker of the House of Representatives was next in the line of succession to the president. It was embarrassing not to have had advance knowledge, but I respected Agnew's decision and also the SAIC for not informing anyone.

Agnew pleaded no contest to tax evasion charges, admitting that he did not pay taxes on some taxable income back in 1967, when he was an elected official of the state of Maryland. It was disheartening to hear this news, because I had grown to like the vice president a great deal. Two days later, Nixon announced that his choice for vice president was Congressman Gerald R. Ford of Michigan.

At some point during that terrible week, Mrs. Agnew called me in tears. She was such a lovely woman, and had been so giving and kind to all the agents.

"Clint," she said, "how did this happen? I don't understand it. Can you please explain it to me?"

I tried my best to explain as well as I understood the situation what the charges were about, but I didn't have all the details, and I didn't want to speculate on what I thought had really happened. But if there was one thing I had learned in the past fifteen years, it was that politics was a damn dirty business.

Now THE WATERGATE investigation was heating up, with more information being revealed and more accusations about White House participation

being made. Back in May, Nixon's new attorney general, Elliot Richardson, selected Archibald Cox to be the special prosecutor to investigate the Watergate matter. After Alex Butterfield revealed the existence of the secret taping system, Cox issued a subpoena asking for copies of any tape recordings that had been made in the Oval Office. Nixon refused to comply.

On Saturday, October 20, 1973, Nixon ordered Richardson to fire Cox. Richardson refused and resigned. Then Nixon ordered William Ruckelshaus, who was now deputy attorney general, to fire Cox. Ruckelshaus refused and resigned as well. Solicitor General Robert Bork was the remaining senior Justice Department official. Nixon ordered him to fire Cox, and he did. This all happened on one night, and the news media promptly labeled it the "Saturday Night Massacre."

A few days later, Director Rowley called a staff conference. The deputy director, assistant directors, and our deputies all gathered in the conference **room.**

Mr. Rowley came in smiling and said, "Gentlemen, I have made a decision and want to advise you of it. I will retire at the end of this month."

Shocked silence filled the room. I don't believe any of us, except perhaps AD Burrill Peterson, Rowley's closest advisor, had had any inkling this was coming. Mr. Rowley expressed his appreciation for our loyalty to him and the organization and for the hard work we each had exhibited over the years. He then wished us well and left the room.

What is going to happen now? Who will the next director be? There had been so many changes in such a short time period, it was astonishing.

Within days, George Shultz, who was at that time secretary of the treasury, submitted a list of people his office wanted to interview in connection with the director's position. My name was on the list.

I was surprised, but also flattered and humbled. There could be no bigger honor. To be the director of the Secret Service would mean I had reached the pinnacle of my career.

When I walked into the office for the interview, I was offered a seat, but I remained standing.

"Mr. Secretary," I said, "thank you for giving me this opportunity. But I am here to ask you to please take my name off the list. I am not physically or emotionally capable to be considered for the position."