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THE EIGHTEEN-AND-A-HALF-MINUTE GAP

AS Haig called Jaworski on October 30, his associate Fred Buzhardt appeared in Judge Sirica's chambers, together with lawyers from the Special Prosecutor's office who were now working directly for Justice. The court meeting was to establish procedures for the transfer of the tapes. Buzhardt informed Sirica and the prosecutors that two of the nine subpoenaed recordings did not exist. One was a four-minute telephone call between Nixon and Mitchell that took place on the evening of June 20, 1972, three days after the break-in. The second was Nixon's fifty-five-minute meeting with John Dean on Sunday night, April 15, 1973, that took place just after Nixon had learned that Dean was talking to federal prosecutors.

Sirica scheduled a meeting in open court for the next day to deal with this alarming matter. In testimony from a series of witnesses over the next several days, the inquiry revealed that the taping system had been run in a cavalier fashion. It was not clear when certain tapes had been removed and then returned to storage; a Secret Service agent, asked on the stand how the recordings were logged, produced a brown piece of paper seemingly torn from a paper bag, with markings on it.

Each spool of tape lasted for six hours, and sometimes on weekends a reel ran out and was not immediately replaced. That, evidently, was what had happened to the April 15 recording; the tape had run out when Nixon and Dean met at 9:17 P.M., and since that happened to have been a Sunday night, there had been no Secret Service agent on duty to change the reel. As for the June 20 call, Buzhardt explained to the court that it had been made from a telephone in the residence quarters of the White House that had not been connected to the recording system.

Steve Bull disclosed to the court on November 2 that he had learned that the April 15 tape did not exist a month earlier, on September 29, when he had looked for it in order to give it to Rose Mary Woods to transcribe at Camp David. Bull also testified that he had obtained twenty-six of the tapes for Nixon in early June, and that the president had reviewed some of them in preparation for Dean's Senate testimony. On June 25, Nixon had even ordered one of the tapes to be flown to him in San Clemente; when no courier flight was available, Bull testified, Buzhardt had listened to it at Haig's request.

These revelations became the headlines of Saturday, November 3, just two days after the announcement of the selection of Jaworski to be the new Special Prosecutor.

It was November of 1973. A year earlier, Nixon had won reelection in a landslide, carrying every state except Massachusetts as well as more than 60 percent of the popular vote. Now, polls showed that 60 percent of the American people felt he was not capably handling the presidency. Nixon escaped the headlines by sailing with his friends Abplanalp and Rebozo aboard Rebozo's yacht. Back on land, *The New York Times*, *Time* magazine, and even the longtime Nixon loyalist *Detroit News* ran editorials urging that, as a public service, Nixon resign. "That weekend in Florida," Nixon later wrote, "was a new low point for me personally."

A strange thing happened that weekend. Buzhardt and Garment flew down to Florida, checked into a hotel near the president's estate, and went to see the boss. Nixon was firming his resolve and looking for ways to rehabilitate his image. The two lawyers had another notion in mind.

The Final Days opens with a scene of Buzhardt and Garment flying to Key Biscayne, convinced that after six months of losing battles with the Congress, the courts, and the Special Prosecutor, Nixon must resign, and they must advise him to do just that. Woodward and Bernstein write that this trip was one Al Haig did not endorse.

There is a factual error in the Woodward and Bernstein account,

but beyond that, the issue is the motivation of Buzhardt and Garment. Since May, the two lawyers had cleared their every move with Haig, and it defies logic that they would have made this trip without his permission or cognizance. In the Woodward-Bernstein version, the lawyers arrived and made their recommendation to a stunned Haig. Fighting his friends tooth and nail, Haig insisted that Nixon couldn't quit because Gerald Ford hadn't yet been confirmed. And Haig wouldn't even let the lawyers see the president in person, because, according to Woodward and Bernstein, he "knew that Nixon would reject the suggestion out of hand." Rather, on Sunday, he told Nixon only that the lawyers had come to Florida and why they wanted to see them. "He reassured the President that the lawyers were not doubting his innocence—only his chances to survive," and he assured Nixon that the recommendation belonged to Buzhardt and Garment, that he himself did not concur in it, and "did not wish his own position to be misunderstood." Then Haig conveyed to the lawyers that Nixon would not see them at all.

The factual error in this account is an assertion that Buzhardt had not yet listened to any of the tapes. Two witnesses, Bull and a Secret Service agent, had just recently testified in court that at Haig's request Buzhardt on June 25 had listened to the tape that no courier plane could be found to transport to San Clemente, and in a week, Buzhardt would verify that to the court. But the Woodward-Bernstein account is written in such a way as to insist that Buzhardt didn't hear any of the tapes until a much later date. We will see later in the chapter the reason for making this appear to be so.

Nixon told his press secretary, Ron Ziegler, that having reached the low point he was now prepared for the ascent. It was going to be "a turning point for our approach to dealing with Watergate," he later wrote. " 'We will take some desperate and strong measure,' I told Ziegler, 'and this time there is no margin for error.' " He planned a televised speech for November 7, precisely one year after he'd been reelected, to launch Operation Candor. He would display not the wounded president but the man who had come back from many previous political defeats and who would once more rise from the ashes. The speech would be followed by ten days of "bridge-building" breakfast meetings and private chats with hundreds of Democrats and Republicans in Congress, and a swing through the South to trumpet the message that the president was still on the job and fighting for the country.

* * *

This, then, was the setting for one of the more curious episodes in the history of Watergate, the eighteen-and-a-half-minute gap in a taped conversation. The gap has usually been attributed to a mistake on the part of Nixon's personal secretary Rose Mary Woods, and/or to a deliberate attempt by a mechanically clumsy president to erase information detrimental to him. But there was a more sinister aspect to the affair than has previously been understood, and it involves Haig and Buzhardt and an especially well-timed and dramatic revelation by Deep Throat.

Back on September 28, anticipating that the appellate court would rule that the tapes must be turned over, Nixon had asked Haig to arrange for Rose Mary Woods to go to Camp David and transcribe the subpoenaed conversations. Woods was a particularly good choice for this task because she knew intimately the president's patterns of speech, and also knew most of the voices on the recordings—those of Haldeman, Ehrlichman, and other counselors. Fiercely loyal to Nixon, she could be counted on to delete the expletives and the scatological characterizations that sometimes dotted their chatter, not to be shocked by the conversations, and to keep silent about their contents. To help with the technical arrangements, Haig turned to John Bennett, the deputy presidential assistant whom Haig had appointed custodian of the recordings in July.

The next day, Woods and Steve Bull drove to Camp David carrying eight tapes and three Sony tape recorders provided by Bennett. In the privacy of rustic Dogwood Cabin, Woods began what she soon discovered would be a long and painstaking weekend of listening and typing. She spent twenty-nine hours just on the first item listed on the Special Prosecutor's subpoena, the June 20, 1972, meeting in the president's EOB office attended at various times by Nixon, Ehrlichman, and Haldeman, a meeting that lasted from 10:30 A.M. to nearly noon. As pointed out earlier, the quality of the recordings taken from the EOB office was less satisfactory than those recorded in the Oval Office.

The president was at Camp David that weekend and came in to check on his secretary's progress. She told him it was slow going because she had to replay sections of the tape over and over to get an accurate account. Nixon himself put on the headphones and listened for about five minutes. "At first all I could hear was a complete jumble," he recalled in his memoir. "Gradually I could make out a few words, but at times the rattling of a cup or the thump of a hand on the desk would obliterate whole passages." The Oval Office tapes that he had personally listened to back in June had been much easier to understand,

he told Woods, and then left the cabin after sympathizing about her arduous task.

Bull had a problem, too, that weekend. He was to locate the conversations called for in Cox's subpoena on the correct six-hour tape reels, and cue them to the proper beginning spots to ready them for Woods. He found the June 20 EOB tape, but could not match up the conversation on the reel with the subpoena list. The list asked for one conversation among the participants, and there had been two on the morning of June 20, one between Nixon and Ehrlichman, and a second immediately thereafter between Nixon and Haldeman.

Haig phoned the cabin on the morning of September 29 to see how the work was going, and Bull told him he simply could not find the one long conversation referred to on the subpoena. Haig called Buzhardt, who had remained in Washington, and explained the situation. Buzhardt made a judgment, which Haig then passed to Woods, who typed a note that she gave to Bull. The note later became part of the documentary evidence assembled by the House Judiciary Committee. It reads, in full: "Cox was a little bit confused in his request re the meeting on June 20th. It says Ehrlichman Haldeman meeting—what he wants is the segment on June 20 from 10:25 to 11:20 with John Ehrlichman alone. Al Haig."

Bull promptly went back to his search, and it was then that he discovered that two of the other subpoenaed conversations were missing; he passed the information to Haig.

The entire crew returned to the White House on Monday, October 1. Woods had still not finished transcribing the first conversation, but back at her White House office she now had a more convenient mechanical setup. The Secret Service had supplied her with a Uher 5000 recorder that included a foot pedal for easy operation.

Just after two that afternoon, she rushed into Nixon's EOB office, visibly upset and saying, "I have made a terrible mistake." After completing her work on the Ehrlichman conversation, she told Nixon, she had forwarded the tape to make sure that she had indeed transcribed all of that section. As she was doing so, a call came in on her office phone and she had a conversation of four or five minutes. When she hung up and went back to work on the tape, she was rudely greeted by a shrill buzzing sound. A section of the Haldeman conversation had been wiped out.

Later, Woods would reconstruct her mistake for a court hearing. She stated that she must have pushed the "record" button on the machine rather than the "stop" button, while unintentionally resting her foot on the pedal throughout her phone call, an action that kept

the machine running and, in effect, recording noise over the previously recorded conversation.

Nixon calmed Woods and told her the mistake was not of consequence because Buzhardt had told him that the Haldeman portion was not among the subpoenaed tapes. Haig called Buzhardt, who reconfirmed that the Haldeman conversation was not on Cox's list, and Nixon was relieved.

He should not have rested easy, because Buzhardt was at the very least plain wrong. The counsel had been in continuous touch with Cox since the subpoena had been served, and was in possession of a memo from Cox, dated August 13, that clarified the grand jury subpoena and made it plain that what he expected was Nixon's conversation with "John D. Ehrlichman and H.R. Haldeman in his Old Executive Office Building [OEOB] office on June 20, 1972 from 10:30 a.m. until approximately 12:45 p.m." Any lingering doubt that both conversations were sought was removed by the additional statement in Cox's memo that "Ehrlichman and *then* Haldeman went to see the President" that morning (italics added for emphasis). Moreover, Buzhardt had also had his alarm bells rung on the matter of the subpoenaed tapes by the news from Steve Bull that two of the conversations couldn't be located. That he reassured Nixon a second time as to the Haldeman conversation's irrelevance suggests that Buzhardt either didn't look at Cox's explanatory August 13 memo, or that he deliberately ignored it. Error of omission or commission?

When Bennett took the stand in Sirica's courtroom on November 6 and described his custodianship of the recordings, his role in providing the tapes to Bull for the trip to Camp David, and so on, the issue was the missing two conversations. The next day, November 7, when Bennett returned to the stand, he told the court that he'd had a talk the previous evening with Rose Mary Woods during which she complained of an unexpected "gap" in one of the tapes she was reviewing for the president.

But this wasn't the gap in the June 20 conversation that she had inadvertently caused. It was a different tape, which as it would turn out had no gap. Woods hadn't mentioned the gap in the June 20 tape to Bennett, but had told Bennett that she'd been reviewing a tape that hadn't even been subpoenaed, an April 16, 1973, Nixon-Dean meeting. "I think she was puzzled," Bennett testified. "The tape was on the machine. She said, 'I've got a gap in this.' " Two days earlier, Bennett told the court, he'd given Woods a new batch of six tapes and had said that the president wanted her to listen to that particular Nixon-Dean conversation and that it was among those reels somewhere.

Rose Mary Woods was called to the stand the next day. She said she had checked the tape and had been mistaken and that there was no gap in that tape. When cross-examined, she made clear that all she had meant by the word "gap" was a missing conversation. With that, the inquiry into this particular gap was settled, and the hearing went on to consider other matters. But by raising the specter of one gap, Bennett had opened up the possibility that the still-secret four-to-five-minute erasure on the June 20 Haldeman tape would shortly be uncovered in the court hearing. That, of course, would be damaging both to Woods and to Nixon.

Meanwhile, Bennett's testimony was the occasion for some curious doings at the *Washington Post*.

There were two stories on the front page of the *Post* on November 8, 1973, the day on which Woods testified. Under the headline TAPES HAVE PUZZLING "GAP" were two articles. One, under the subhead NIXON AIDE TESTIFIES, was the straight news account of Bennett's court testimony on the previous day, in which he had quoted Rose Mary Woods about a gap that puzzled her. The second, situated next to the first, was under the subhead PARTS "INAUDIBLE."

This second story was written by Bernstein and Woodward, and said that "portions of the seven White House tapes" that Nixon was to turn over to Sirica "are 'inaudible' and thus will probably fail to definitively answer questions about Mr. Nixon's role" in Watergate. Quoting "White House sources" to whom the reporters had talked over the past three days, the story said the tapes were marred by " 'gaps in conversations,' 'unevenness,' 'excessive background noise,' 'periods of silence,' and 'cut-ins and cut-outs during conversation.' " The article stated flatly that "there is serious concern among the President's aides and advisers that the latest problems regarding the tapes will further strain the credibility of the White House." For instance, the reporters quoted a "high-ranking presidential adviser" as saying, "This town is in such a state that everybody will say, 'They've doctored the tapes.' " This same official had "made clear he rejected that notion."

Two paragraphs down, the reporters quoted a source who clearly did anything but reject the doctoring notion:

> Of five sources who confirmed that difficulties have risen concerning the quality of the tapes, one said the problems "are of a suspicious nature" and "could lead someone to conclude that the tapes have been tampered with." According to this source, conversation on some of the tapes appears to have been erased—either inadvertently or otherwise—or obliterated by the injection of background noise. Such background noise

> could be the result of either poorly functioning equipment, erasure or purposeful injection, the same source said. The four other sources disputed that there is anything suspicious about the deficiencies and insisted the tapes are marred only by technical problems that can be satisfactorily explained in court.

Who was the one source who believed that an effort might be under way to destroy evidence? Later, in *All the President's Men*, the authors of the article revealed that it was Deep Throat. Sometime in the first week of November 1973, Woodward initiated a meeting with his source in the underground garage, and received startling information: "Deep Throat's message was short and simple: One or more of the tapes contained deliberate erasures."

Deliberate erasures?

At the time of the *Post*'s two articles, as the later admission in *All the President's Men* makes clear, Woodward was apprised of erasures at least a week ahead of the moment at which an eighteen-and-a-half-minute gap in a tape would be discovered at the White House. Concurrently with the publication of the article, Judge Sirica had Rose Mary Woods on the stand and was investigating a tape gap. And Sirica could be expected to read the paper, especially if an article about problems with the tapes was on the front page under the byline of the reporters who had the best sources about Watergate. The hope may have been that Sirica would go more forcefully into the tape gap with Woods, and uncover the real gap, or perhaps that by focusing on the issue of tape gaps Sirica would be pushed to order that more tapes be turned over to the court, thereby further damaging Nixon.

At the point in time when Deep Throat told Woodward about "deliberate erasures," the first week of November 1973, five or at the most six people in the White House knew or could have known about a possible gap in a tape. They were: Nixon, Woods, Bull, Haig, Buzhardt, and perhaps Bennett. Those who knew about a gap also knew that Woods had not made a deliberate erasure. In their book, Woodward and Bernstein say that following Deep Throat's tip they called four sources in the White House who said there was nothing suspicious about the deficiencies on the tape—and then the reporters added some information that had not been in their earlier article: The four Bernstein sources knew nothing at all about any erasure. The article also had made clear that Bernstein's other four sources disagreed with the one who labeled the erasures "suspicious." Woodward and Bernstein's sources had heard through the grapevine that the tapes were of poor quality. The book also confirmed that the source of the remark about

the gaps being of "a suspicious nature" and possibly leading "someone to conclude that the tapes had been tampered with" was the same Deep Throat.

Their article had not said their source had called the erasures deliberate, just "suspicious"—but the book, published the following year, asserted that Deep Throat had said so. Use of the term *deliberate* implies that the source knew someone had destroyed evidence, a criminal act. How could Deep Throat have known this? There are three possibilities. Someone could have told him, he could have listened to the tapes and deduced it—or he could have made the erasures himself.

Of those who listened to the tapes (and therefore had the opportunity to alter them), two would not have talked to Woodward about them under any circumstances—Nixon and Woods. Woodward has said that Deep Throat was a single source, not a composite, and Steve Bull was never in a position to know many of the other secrets that Deep Throat passed to Woodward during the course of Watergate. The same can be said of John Bennett, who only had access to some but not all of the information conveyed by Deep Throat to Woodward in that era. Fred Buzhardt died in 1978, and Woodward has said in more recent interviews that Deep Throat is alive and that Woodward will tell all about him if he dies. That leaves Haig.

In a tenth anniversary program about the Watergate burglary, on June 17, 1982, "Nightline" moderator Ted Koppel asked Woodward and Bernstein to describe their famous source. Bernstein responded, "This is a person who occupied a sensitive position in the executive branch of the government, who, although he was unwilling to give us primary information about the story, he would confirm or steer us in the right direction on information we had obtained elsewhere."

Woodward added, "Carl is right is describing this person as an indirect source, somebody who would say 'Look in this direction.' He would confirm things. He was not the person coming in with a wheelbarrow and dumping the entire story and saying, 'All right now. Now print it.' "

Yet that is precisely what Deep Throat did, allegedly in the garage meeting, in the first week of November 1973: He dumped a story on Woodward, who promptly printed it at the precise moment when it could do the most damage to Nixon's credibility.

We asked Woodward in our interview about the apparent contradiction among his various explanations of Deep Throat's role as his source. Did he only confirm information, as Woodward and Bernstein have stated on "Nightline" and elsewhere, or was he a primary source, as is

clear from the story of early November 1973? Woodward answered, "Just like any relationship you may have with somebody, a source or otherwise, it's evolving. . . . The book makes it clear." Reminded that he and Bernstein had said something quite different on "Nightline," Woodward said, "Okay, but . . . as you see from the story [of November 8] we said we had five sources, right?" Wrong. Woodward ignored the fact that the article had made clear that while there were five sources, the other four had contradicted Deep Throat. Woodward then added, "Now, I would have to go back to notes and the book and the stories and the sequence and so forth, and I'm not sure I'm saying in there that he was the first source at all. So you're leaping to a conclusion."

In several telephone calls we attempted to put these and other questions about Deep Throat, and questions about his and Woodward's Watergate reporting, to Carl Bernstein. He first told us he would not answer any questions until he had spoken with Woodward, and later requested a letter containing some of our questions. A letter was sent, but he did not respond.

It may be that the inconsistencies in Woodward's and Bernstein's characterization of Deep Throat as a source are only the result of Woodward's attempt to hide his source and to lend appropriate literary drama to his book. Despite Woodward's demurrer, Deep Throat may have been a composite of several sources, as some historians and journalists have concluded. Despite Woodward's other demurrer about the source still being alive, Deep Throat may have had more than a touch of Buzhardt in him. *The identity of Deep Throat is a phantom that it is no longer of any importance to chase. It was always a cover story designed to lead detectives in the wrong direction, and has now outlived its usefulness. What is apparent is that in November of 1973, Chief of Staff Alexander Haig played a key role in feeding damaging information about the White House tapes to his former Navy briefer, Bob Woodward, on the eve of Nixon's Operation Candor, on which the president had pinned such high hopes.*

Nixon was into the sixth of the ten sessions he had scheduled with Congressional leaders on November 14, 1973, when Fred Buzhardt sat down at the White House with Miami trial attorney Samuel Powers. Haig had gotten his name from Morris Liebman (who had also recommended Jaworski) during the weekend he had accompanied the president to Key Biscayne. "I was brought in like a surgeon to do an appendectomy," Powers told us. He came in to represent the White House in the tapes hearing in Sirica's court. On November 14 he was sitting with Buzhardt to review the seven conversations—nine subpoenaed minus the two that couldn't be found—due to be turned over to

Sirica, and to catalogue those portions for which the White House planned to claim executive privilege.

In *The Final Days*, Woodward and Bernstein claim that November 14, 1973, was the first time Buzhardt listened to any of the White House tapes. This claim is interesting since Buzhardt had first listened to a presidential tape recording on June 25, and would shortly testify so in open court.

Of greater importance is something Buzhardt actually did on November 14. That day, he and Powers began work on the June 20 tape, the first one listed on the subpoena, and the tape in which there was a gap that had so alarmed Rose Mary Woods. Buzhardt had twice assured the president that that gap was of no consequence. Now, he and Powers sat down to listen to the tape with stopwatch in hand. "Fred told me we could expect to find a four-to-five-minute gap on either Ehrlichman or Haldeman," Powers recalls. The Ehrlichman section was clear. The gap approached and started. Five minutes went by, and the gap did not cease, but continued on until nearly eighteen-and-a-half-minutes had passed. As if that wasn't enough, Powers now looked at Cox's August 13 clarification memo and saw that the gap was squarely in the area that Cox had subpoenaed. He said so to Buzhardt—who disagreed. Powers was adamant: They were going to have to produce that tape. He recalls insisting that when one reviewed the subpoena and the clarification memo together, "there was no way you couldn't conclude" that the Haldeman conversation was part of the subpoena. Powers also says that when he had demonstrated that, Buzhardt made no further argument against bringing the tape and its gap to the court.

June 20: Haldeman and Nixon speaking together. At that point in time, John Dean knew everything, and Nixon and Haldeman knew very little. It was still three days before Dean would slip to Haldeman the idea that the CIA should be used to block the FBI. If Nixon or someone who wanted to protect him was going to erase any tape, that person would choose the June 23 tape, the one that later became the smoking gun. *There was nothing on the June 20 tape that was crucial to the president's defense, or that could incriminate him in the eyes of the public. The deliberate erasure had not been made to protect the president, but to embarrass him.*

The Final Days portrays Haig as shocked and angry when Buzhardt tells him of the big gap. They go around on the subpoena and the explanatory Cox memo until Haig finally says, "I must share your judgement. . . . How the hell could we have been confused on this, Fred?"

Surely he was not confused. He had first looked into the matter of whether this tape was covered by the subpoena in September, and in early November Deep Throat had leaked information about possible "suspicious" tampering with the tapes.

Buzhardt was not able to find and inform Haig until later in the evening of November 14, Powers recalls. But "the president, as I understood it, was entertaining some senators, some of the leadership of the Senate, in the East Room of the White House, and Haig didn't want to interrupt him." The night passed, and Nixon remained uninformed, as he did during most of the following day, when he made a televised speech to the convention of the National Association of Realtors.

In *The Final Days*, Haig's silence is described as the act of a man who has compassion for the president and who doesn't want to give him bad news when he's in a crowd. "Haig worried about the effect of the news on the Old Man. The constant public exposure throughout the week would be a strain. This news, coming so soon after the disclosure that two of the subpoenaed conversations were not on tape, would be devastating to the president's position. The additional pressure would take its toll."

Nixon recounts in his own memoir that the news did, indeed, take a toll on him. "It was a nightmare," Nixon wrote of the moment when Haig and Buzhardt finally informed him of the gap, late in the afternoon of the fifteenth. "How in hell, I asked, could we have made a mistake about something as fundamental as whether or not a particular conversation was covered by a subpoena?" Moreover, on the other bad news, the gap that ran for so long, "No one could explain how or why it had happened or account for the shrill buzzing sounds that punctuated the otherwise blank portion."

Despite his rage, Nixon determined to press on with his public relations offensive. Two days later, on November 17, in a session before the Associated Press Managing Editors Association convention at Disney World, the president uttered a memorable phrase. "People have a right to know whether or not their president is a crook. Well, I am not a crook." In a less well-reported section of that speech, Nixon also spoke about the essential need to shield certain matters under the claim of national security. To buttress his point that this was not simply a ploy to keep investigators away from illegal activities, he cited the fact that the shield was being used "not only in Ellsberg but also in another matter so sensitive that even Senator Ervin and Senator Baker have decided that they should not delve into it."

On November 20, when asked at the Republican Governors Con-

ference, "Are we going to be blindsided by any more bombshells?" Nixon replied, "If there are any more bombs, I'm not aware of them." He made that reply, Nixon recalled in his memoir, because he still hadn't heard from Buzhardt whether or not the erased conversation could somehow be recovered, and "I knew that if I indicated even the remotest possibility of a new bombshell, I would have to say what it was—and I still was not sure of the answer to that myself."

The Butterfield revelation that had been withheld from Nixon; the handling of the battle with Cox and the resultant Saturday Night Massacre; the foray to Key Biscayne to raise the specter of resignation; the continuing attempt to keep everyone away from Moorer-Radford; the "deliberate erasures" events and leak to Woodward—since Haig and Buzhardt had come to the White House in early May to save the president, all these things had happened, and each one was a body blow to Nixon's hold on the presidency. The sheer number of accumulated errors now make moot the question of whether these were deliberate or innocent mistakes. The pattern was there, if anybody had been able to read it at the time.

On November 21, 1973, the next bombshell, that of the eighteen-and-a-half-minute gap, exploded in Judge Sirica's courtroom as the counsel to the president approached the judge and the prosecution lawyers in Sirica's chambers, and began by saying, "Judge, we have a problem."