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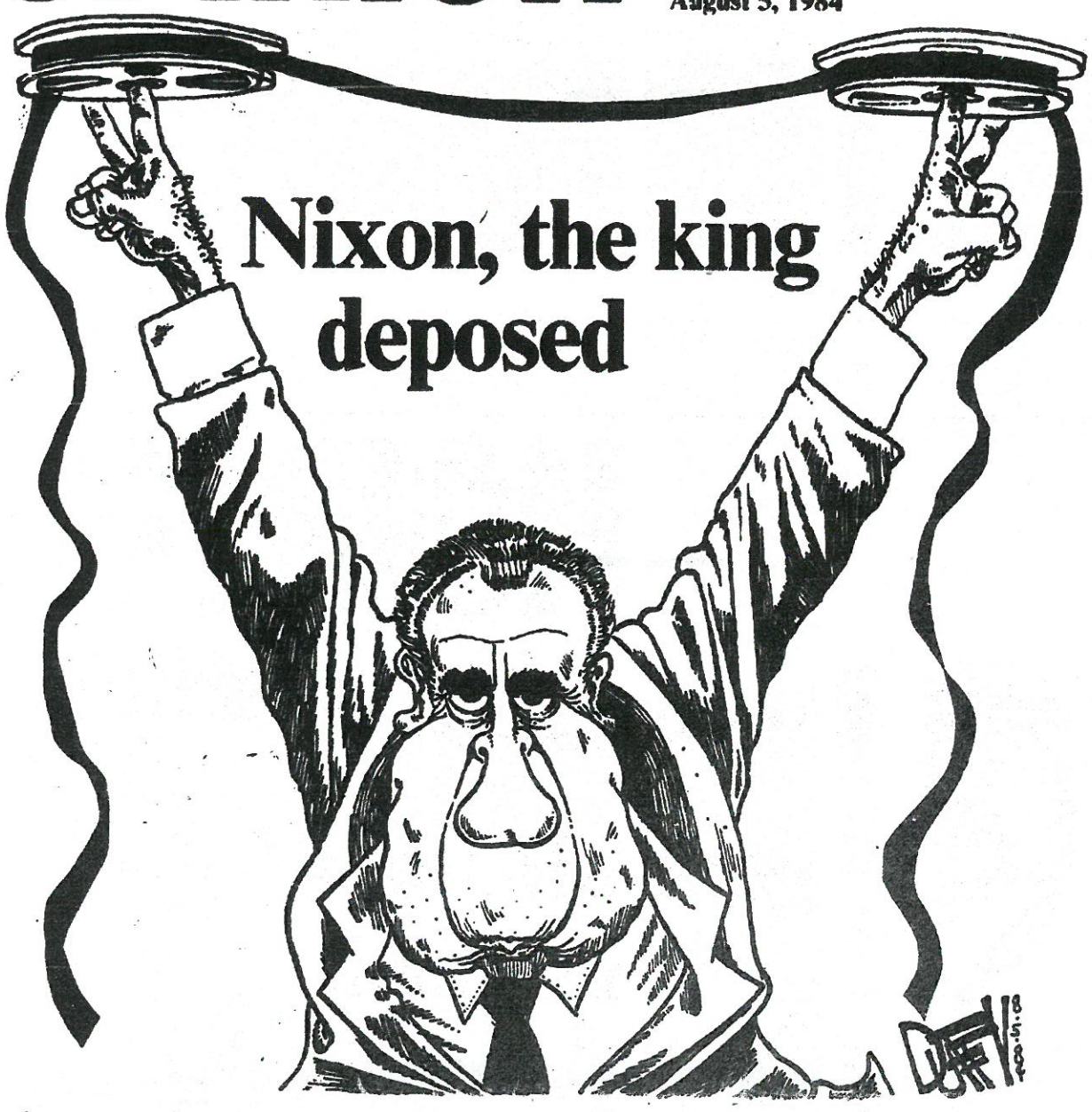

A new look at Aug. 9, 1974

By KENNETH M. QUINN

As a young Foreign Service Officer assigned to the National Security Council staff at the time, I have a number of memories of Richard Nixon's last day at the White House, Aug. 9, 1974.

The first thing I saw that day was the banner headline in The Washington Post — twice the normal size: "Nixon Resigns." Of course, I had known from his speech of the night before and the events of the previous week that his departure was inevitable, but somehow that headline brought it home.

Walking along New York Avenue behind the White House, I noticed the first physical manifestation of the political drama we were seeing unfold. Parked at the rear of the White House were two large trucks, obviously there to take away the Nixon family personal possessions.

It struck me that the inglorious fall from power was not a rapid, immediate process at all, but rather slow and agonizing, as the Nixons were forced to undergo that most humiliating process — eviction from their home. Every bit of personal property had to be packed, not because they chose to leave but because they were being thrown out. This may have been the most painful, personally agonizing thing the Nixons had to endure.

Within the Old Executive Office Building, where my office was, the word quickly spread that Nixon was going to make a farewell speech in the East Room at 9:30. We were all invited, and so the building emptied as staffers walked across West Executive Avenue to the White House. As I entered the narrow corridor that leads into the basement of the West Wing, I passed a Filipino steward carrying out one of Nixon's favorite *objets d'art* from the Oval Office: a metal sculpture of several birds perched on branches of a tree.

The basement corridor serves as a photo gallery for the White House photographer to display huge 12- by 16-inch blow-ups of pictures of the president. As we passed, a crew was removing them.

The crowd was getting heavy and we slowly made our way past the Situation Room, the photographic office, upstairs by the press office (near the Oval Office, where Nixon might have been spending his last few moments as president). Then outside through the Rose Garden, into the basement of the main section of the White House.

As I passed by a set of double doors leading into one of the inner courtyards, I could see two small van-type trucks filled with women's clothing, no doubt Julie's and Tricia's White House wardrobes being carted away, another one of those many signs that indeed Nixon was leaving.

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There was a strange sense of joy about the White House that Thursday morning as we walked up the main stairs to the first floor; the strains of music from the Marine band could be heard. All the lights were on. The atmosphere was merry, almost as if we were on a Christmas tour of the White House instead of coming to hear Nixon's last words as president. The East Room, where he was to speak, was packed.

A platform had been set up along the east wall, with Gilbert Stuart's huge portrait of George Washington providing a backdrop for Nixon as he spoke. To the front and left of the podium were chairs reserved for the Cabinet and other dignitaries. I had to settle for being squeezed into a corner.

Along the west wall of the room, flanking both sides of the door through which Nixon would pass, and directly opposite the stage, was an incredible array of TV, motion-picture and news photographers.

And then, as he had so many times before, Nixon entered the room as the band played "Hail to the Chief." A voice over the loudspeaker announced, "The president of the United States." Although disgraced and about to resign, Nixon still received the respect and trappings due the presidency. The office still maintained its dignity and majesty. Nixon's disgrace was personal.

Nixon came into the room followed first by his wife and then their two daughters and sons-in-law. They mounted the platform, with the president standing in front facing the crowd, Pat a step to the right and to the rear, and the four children forming a line behind. For some reason, I remember noticing that Ed Cox had a big white thread on the side of his suit.

I have two distinct memories of what occurred as they mounted the stage and turned to face the crowd. First there was an incredible accumulation of camera sounds. The "click-clicks" of the still cameras and the "whirrs" of the movie cameras combined to sound almost like a swarm of bees. Shutters continued to snap open and shut for an amazingly long time.

At the same time, the crowd gave Nixon the longest ovation I have ever heard. It just went on and on and on. I don't believe that anyone has ever reported that. I find the omission strange, because I thought the applause a particularly striking aspect of the entire affair, and I have to admit at the time I was puzzled as to how to explain it. For there was little doubt that practically everyone in the room now knew Nixon was guilty, that he was getting what he deserved, and

NIXON
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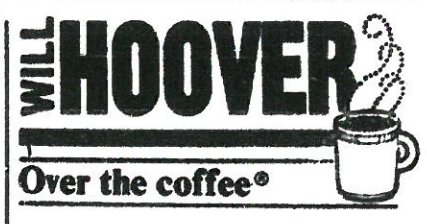
WILL HOOVER



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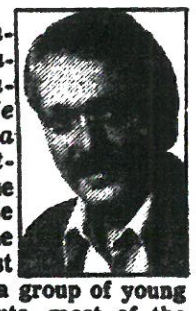


Sh-Boom, Sh-Boom, Sha-na-na-na-na-na-na-na-na-na; life could be a dream, Sweetheart. These are the most understandable lines from one of the early 1950s' biggest hits. Recorded by a group of young men with crew cuts, most of the remaining words went something like, *"Hey-nanny-ding-dong, a-ling-a-ling-a-ling...."*

This ditty became so popular that a follow-up song with a similar title that could be played simultaneously with "Sh-Boom" was released, giving listeners twice the absurdity that could be had with either recording played by itself. "Sh-Boom" was the personification of an era, which, if it wasn't a dream, it at least was a state of communal somnambulism.

This, then, was the '50s — those crazy, lazy, hazy, vacuous days when the living was easy, we looked to the future and dreamed of marvelous devices. Now that the gadgets have arrived, society has become preoccupied with looking backward. Who wants to think when times are so complicated? It's simpler to digress and ride the wave of nostalgia.

So let's rock! There are diversions to be had: Butch wax, black slacks, bobby sox, boogie woogie, Bill Haley and The Comets, The Cold War, The Korean Conflict, Clarabelle the Clown, coonskin caps, Durward Kirby, Dave Garroway, James Dean....

James Dean was the rebel without a cause. He symbolized a generation of

Ronald Reagan, most nostalgic president we ever had.

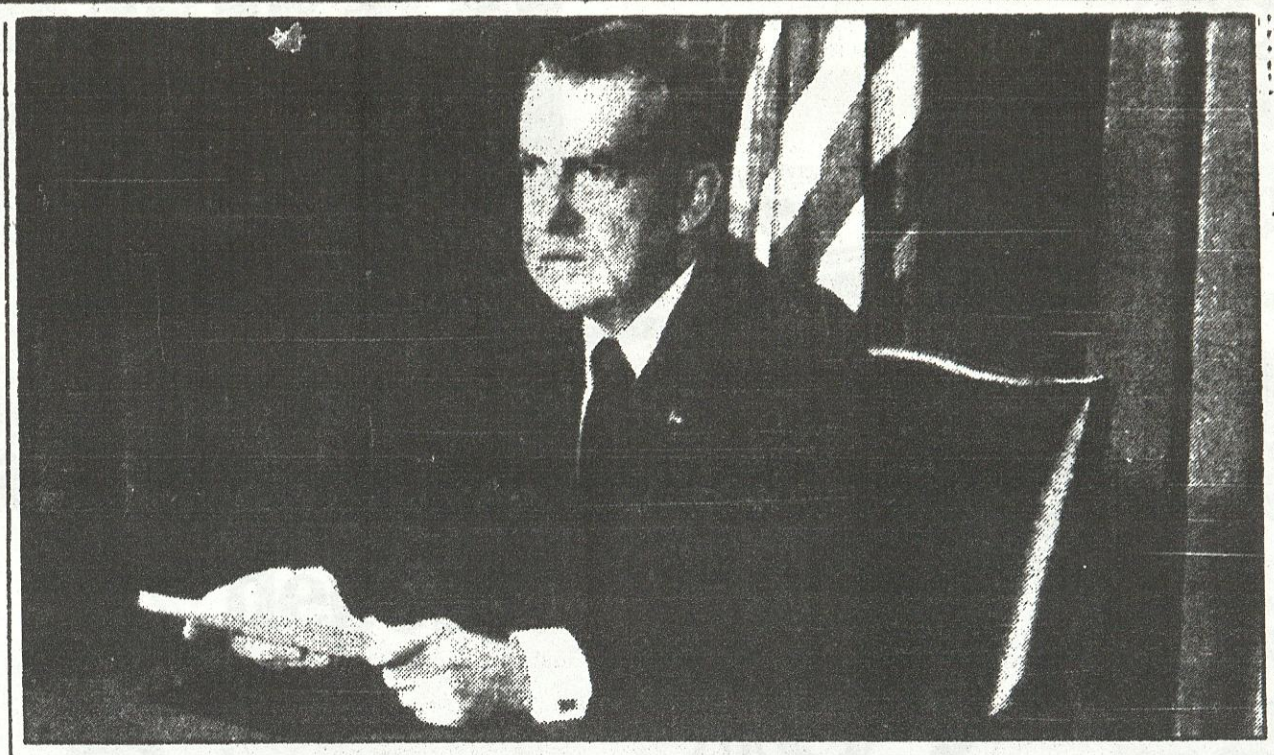
rebels who didn't know what their cause was. How could they know what they were mad at when their brains were clogged with "Sha-na-na-ding-dong, a-loop-dee-diddle-day"? So, they preened their ducktails, polished their black leather jackets and practiced jaundiced facial expressions. "Who cares? ... I don't know ... So what, Daddy-O?" they explained.

... Drive-ins, The March of Dimes, Disneyland, Daisy Mae, Winky Dink....

Remember Winky? Before he came along on Saturday morning, the '50s were entirely black and white: Black shoes, white sox, black pants, white shirts, black cars, white houses. Along came Winky's cartoon show. You had to have a special plastic colored screen to decode the secret messages. After Winky Dink, the '50s were black and white and green.

... Flattops, tail fins, fake-outs, Four Star Playhouse, Francis The Talking Mule, Gumby, Godzilla, Gabby Hayes, Holden Caulfield, Homer and Jethro, J. Fred Muggs, "gee whiz!" Joe McCarthy....

Tailgunner Joe was the kind of patriotic force that many Americans miss the most. Joe believed in the control of information. Otherwise, the Reds might get their hands on it and wreak havoc. God and Joe both knew there were Commies lurking behind every file cabinet who needed to be rooted out and punished. So, Joe created blacklists that kept thousands of in-



I hereby resign the Office of President of the United States.

Sincerely,

Richard Nixon

NIXON

Continued from Page 1C

that he had put himself in the position where he had to leave the White House in disgrace.

Surely some of the applause was out of loyalty, but even those who had worked closely with Nixon and served him knew that in the end he had caused his own destruction. Yet they were standing there clapping and clapping, the sound punctuated only by the continued clicking of the cameras.

The only explanation that made any sense to me was that the human tragedy of Nixon came through at that moment, that those who were there had a special understanding of how far he was about to fall and of the depth of the anguish that he must have experienced the night before and was experiencing that day. Nixon was never more the Shakespearean tragic hero than he was that day.

Another element, no doubt, was that most people there remembered Nixon's good days — the opening to China; the Middle East settlement — and were trying to let him know that there would be some good memories. Perhaps others felt sympathy, and thought their applause would help him through the day. These are only guesses though.

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In thinking about Nixon's leaving, I've tried to decide which events in history it might be compared with, and I have concluded that deposing or executing a king comes closest. Probably only that could have produced the mixed emotions that seemed to be reflected there at the White House that day: the moral certainty that the man about to be punished deserved his fate; and yet a nagging suspicion that in deposing the king perhaps we were damaging more than just the man himself, because there is that inexplicable attachment to the trappings of the institution which a person assumes when he takes on the mantle of king or president that he is never really able to completely give up.

I wonder if that is how Nixon saw himself that day: as the king deposed, the king sentenced to a political if not physical death. And I wonder if Nixon's moment of execution didn't come when he stood there up on stage and a thousand cameras began shooting. Nixon might have thought this was his firing squad — the press that had done him in; the phalanx of photographers there to perform the *coup de grace*. And that's the memory that stands out the most: Richard Nixon standing before his firing squad in the East Room at the White House.

Nixon spoke then, and I don't remember much of what he said except for the part about his mother and that he had not taken a cent. And then it was over. He was done. He stepped off the platform, walked out of the East Room into the main vestibule of the White House and then down the stairs to the basement, where he and his family would exit through the back door and board the waiting helicopter.

The crowd pushed out onto the balcony of the first floor and stood there watching the scene as he walked out below us onto the red carpet leading up to the helicopter. Nixon turned to wave briefly and then the door slammed shut.

As we waited for the helicopter to warm up, I remember looking over the crowd. On my left, with an easy view of everything, was James Schlesinger, tall and distinguished but most of all somber, staring over the heads of those packed in front of him. His face was grim but betrayed no other emotion.

To my right were two much shorter White House employees, a gardener wearing a scruffy jacket, dirty forest-green pants, and well-worn shoes. Next to him was a cook, still wearing his white chef's hat and apron. Both of them jumped up and down to try to see over the crowd and waved furiously as the Nixon family, whom they had served and no doubt loved, left forever. The cook was crying.

The helicopter lifted off the grass and turned 90 degrees to the right and began its slow ascent as it moved south away from the White House.

The view from the balcony of the White House is one of the most striking in Washington. The Jefferson Memorial is directly to the south and there is a path cut through the trees so that the view is unobstructed. Slightly to the left is the Washington Monument. This was my final view of Nixon that day, the helicopter moving directly away from the White House toward the Jefferson Memorial. And then, when it got to the Washington Monument, it made a left turn in the direction of Andrews Air Force Base.

For one second the three — Jefferson, Washington and Nixon — were juxtaposed. But the helicopter with Nixon kept going and quickly disappeared, leaving only Washington and Jefferson.

'. . . how I will undo myself'

King Richard — Aye, no; no, aye; for I must nothing be;
Therefore no no, for I resign to thee.
Now mark me how I will undo myself.
I give this heavy weight off of my head
And this unwieldy scepter from my hand,
The pride of kingly sway from out my heart.
With mine own tears I wash away my balm,
With mine own hands I give away my crown,
With mine own tongue deny my sacred state,
With mine own breath release all duteous oaths.
All pomp and majesty I do forswear;
My manors, rents, revenues I do forgo;
My acts, decrees and statutes I deny.
God pardon all oaths that are broke to me!
God keep unbroke all vows that are sworn to thee!
Make me, that nothing have, with nothing grieved,
And thou with all pleased, that hast all achieved!
Long mayst thou live in Richard's seat to sit,
And soon lie Richard in an earthly pit!
God save King Harry, unkinged Richard says,
And send him many years of sunshine days!

— *Act IV, Scene 1, "Richard the Second," by William Shakespeare.*