

**"We act like it can't happen again, and it did
allot of stuff after, there was allot of hew-hawing and
passin' laws and givin' speeches but I, do you ask me,
do I think we learned anything from it [Watergate]?"**

No.

wide grin

*James Carville quote from Documentary,
"All The President's Men Revisited", aired April 21, 2013*

**"Mr. Chairman, I think this; I strongly
believe that the Truth always emerges. I don't know
if it'll be during these Hearings, I don't know if it'll
be through the processes of history, but the Truth
will out some day."**

*John W. Dean III testimony from The Select Committee on Presidential Campaign Activities,
aka the Sam Ervin Senate Watergate Hearings, July 25-28, 1973*

UHER 5000 Counter 0001

Late Summer 1973

The crackling of dry elm logs in a low and lingering fire, the small, oddly shaped room, stifling it was or would have been had the air conditioning not been on at full tilt. The wallpaper, a rich olive green with a tiny gold diamond pattern, adorned all four walls, making the Lincoln Sitting Room a closeted, cloistered, quasi-claustrophobic space. The soft tick-tock, tick-tock, tick-tock of the burlled walnut fireplace mantle clock, its arms inching ever closer to midnight. Forward, Play, Reverse, Record, Forward, Play, Reverse, Record, each key hit with swollen, age-spotted, fumbling fingers, the pattern repeated on the UHER 5000 five, nine, maybe even ten times by the Commander-In-Chief, the Master of the White-House, this generation's Leader of the Free World. 3,700 hours of recordings, was the effort to Erase All worth it? The question asked only in passing as 18 1/2 minutes were quietly, yet with cunning premeditation, eradicated...forever?



Late Summer, 2018

A drizzly, damp night in Washington DC under a dark, moonless sky, one which forced lowly public servants and power politicians alike to seek protected confines, shelter from the rain, maybe, but also from the flack which surely infested the souls of that city when premeditated acts went horribly wrong, *"...when things fall apart, when the centre will not hold..."*. A tiny piece of history on celluloid, no wider than a length of fragile ribbon, lay dormant and still in a temperature and humidity-controlled vault for some forty-five years, its fearsome power never eroding even with the washing away of time. This is but one story, the story of a gap on film, a tiny piece of audio screaming to be heard by anyone ingenious enough to listen - 18 1/2.

UHER 5000 Counter 0002

“Ed! I did it! It's here. I'm not kidding! All of it! I got it...ALL!” yelled a shocked and amazed and bedazzled man donning headphones, hunched over an antiquated reel-to-reel tape-recording machine.

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### *Ed Tooksberry's basement, Late Summer, 2018*

Cinder-block foundation, no insulation, no 2x4's, no Gyp-rock, no fixtures, no nothing...save for two long, rough-hewn wooden work benches built to chair height, running side-by-side against the far wall of this massive, singular underground space. Two bare bulbs hung from the one-by-twelve ceiling joists, metal chains dangling in the air as their ever, so, low-tech mechanism.

A High-Tech atmosphere was however awash in this damp, spider-web ridden basement, housing, it did, two banks of audio equipment which sat on bracketed shelving, lined up in a sort of U-shape around all three cement walls. The set-up was impressive:

- 13 Fascam cassette decks to copy “*the*” tape at various speeds
- dozens of micro-cassette recorders
- one “Mission Impossible”-facsimile Nagra SNS sub-miniature reel-to-reel to measure the “wow and flutter” (the percentage of low and high frequency speed fluctuations, head alignment and track configuration to establish a baseline)
- a sophisticated audio-filtering station and a 460 line spectrum analyzer in order to view the audio being processed as a wave form
- massive amplifiers and super high power optical microscopes of varying degrees  
Equalizers and digital computer read-out monitors a-plenty

These and hundreds of other scientific/electronic devices stacked one on top of the other in stately rows. It could have been the epi-centre of the NASA Johnson Space Centre save for the lack of a rocket and a Control Room dizzy with astrophysicists. Only two amateur techno-nerds were doing the work down here, mere suburban audio junkies determined to do the impossible.

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"Geez, Harry, you said that last week too. Will ya stop already? Not every odd buzz is a darn word, you know. I think you're imagining stuff now. Maybe we have to stop ordering-in food online and walk up those stairs and get some fresh air, all this electromagnetic energy is eroding your synapses which is eroding your reasoning power, not to mention your hearing capability," responded Ed, not even looking up at Harry as he had been down this road with his techno cohort far too many times.

"Drop your gosh-darn headset and get over here!" yelled Harry.

"Fine. Cripes. Anything to get you to shut the heck up!" yelled back Ed as he threw down his headgear on to the knotty-pine workbench and with slumped shoulders and a whole heap of exhausted resignation slid his desk chair over to Harry's bench, an action committed countless times in as many years.

In actuality, the pair had been at this since 1978, on and off, slowly saving up for better equipment over the years, a rather easy thing to do as they were partners in a electronic-home entertainment store located in the old town area of Columbia Heights, a suburb of Washington DC. Super-Sound Stereo was an unassuming store in a row of brown stones, just plate-glass windows with a bleak, utilitarian interior atmosphere of Gyp-rock walls and Styrofoam ceiling squares and a dull faux marble linoleum.

Metered street parking was the only option for customers but the Triple S was a long-standing business situated in a well-travelled part of town so it managed to do a fair trade. Word of mouth, friendly service, top-of-the-line products and a reliable parts and repair department made the Triple S the standard for all electronic needs from Columbia Heights to Wheaton, the latter, a suburb to the north where these suburban dads lived and raised their families.

Ed slowly yanked on Harry's headset, expecting nothing but the usual buzzing, clicks and pops, the white-noise he had listened to for so long he had it memorized like an actor memorizes lines, when his ears were immediately assaulted with the unthinkable - words, actual words, fuzzy, some garbled but *there* nonetheless, spoken from The Man himself and from H. R. H., all the sentences lost to time ringing in his ears. It was there, every bit of it, and all Ed could blurt out was, "Harry! Rewind! Rewind the damn thing! Plug in my set, we both need to hear this...now!"

Harry jumped as a jack-rabbit in his well-worn swivel chair, plugged in the second set of ear-phones and hit the Rewind button like Jerry Lee Lewis hitting piano keys. The Game was ON and they were hearing history - real, never-before-heard, apparently-lost-forever gosh-darn history - the stuff of political legend.

All eighteen and a half minutes, all of it, from start to bloody finish...

Ed stared at Harry and Harry stared right back. What they were hearing was the most incredible conversation, not what was expected, by anyone, but in the end it really did make sense that Dick wanted it gone. Some 45 years later what was considered "erased" was very much alive and well and booming in the ears-drums of two astounded men.

When the tape stopped and the end of the strip flapped over and over, around and around it went on the still-turning wheel, these electronic junkies leaned over the workbench, unable to say one word nor move one muscle. It was as if they had become as one, as Lord Carnarvon when he broke through the clay opening of King Tut's Tomb. Astonishment lingered...and then a slow bubbling up of fear. They had the key. They knew everything now. And now they knew they were the only civilians who knew. People would kill for this, of that there could be no doubt. Amazement and joyous wonder melted from their eyes and a deer-in-headlights gaze appeared and remained.

Ed jumped up, grabbed two flashlights, hammered down on the metal chains of the bare ceiling bulbs and shot back the beam of light right into Harry's face. Fear in ghostly faces. What to do next?

UHER 5000 Counter 0003

The White House Basement, Late Summer, 2018

An unknown man dressed in dark navy serge - sitting hunched over a steel leg and faux-wood Arborite table lit with a green glass and brass study lamp, pad of paper before him and a ball-point pen in hand - stopped writing, ripped off the headphones he had been wearing, tore the top page off of that pad and grabbing it tightly in his fist, took double steps up the stairs to the West Wing Main Floor, to the office just next to the Oval. Barely a quick rap on the heavy, sound-proof, gloss-white painted door and in he rushed, disregarding entirely the conversation being held in this well-appointed, colonial-style office with crackling fire and A/C both on the go - Atmosphere and Image above all else. The door swung wide and fast; yet, despite the speed, a brass name-plate could be seen, the office-holder's name unintelligible in that swift action but the designation itself unmistakable - Chief of Staff - as "*The man with the yellow pad*" stood outside in the hallway, leaning against the wall, listening, watching, smiling....

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Some 45 years had passed and in 2018 Watergate wasn't even a moniker politicos splashed around anymore to describe dirty tricks gone wrong. The generation who lived through it and one or two of the next were either long gone or too old to care and now today's history students had to forage through dusty books or ratty old newspapers in the attics of their grandparents to know the story.

But in the summer of '72, Watergate was born and throughout that summer and the two years which followed, it was a label which went from unknown to over 50% of Americans in one Gallup poll to a house-hold name, and for a time, the Constitution of the United States and the future of that same super-power hung in the balance. Reporters and informants were bugged, people's lives were threatened and President Nixon's "Plumbers" fixed leaks, their tools, not wrenches but bugs and bombs, the leaking fluid not water, information.

After the botched break-in of the National Democratic Headquarters in Washington DC, Richard Nixon's "Berlin Wall", also known as Chief of Staff H. R. Haldeman and Assistant to the President for Domestic Affairs, John Erlichman, did their utmost to insulate the President and continue the onslaught of those "dirty tricks", which had begun well before Watergate and went back as far as Eisenhower's Presidential Campaign of 1952, involving forging government documents, wire-tapping, threatening people with IRS audits, stealing documents, forging press releases, cancelling Democratic rallies, subversion of Justice and on and on. And in the end, all that really mattered, were the words spoken on an audio tape, from microphones placed in strategic positions around the White House and in the old Executive Office Building where Nixon had his private office. Even a hard-boiled lawyer like Tricky Dick can assume too much and what he thought was his private property - those 3,700 hours of tape - became public property via the unanimous ruling of the Supreme Court on July 24, 1974, just as evidentiary and liable as the records kept by the Nazis documenting the precise number of Jews and others who were slaughtered in concentration camps during WWII. You would think Dick would have learned from the Third Reich's mistakes. He did not.

Nixon was thought to have erased 18 1/2 minutes of those 3,700 hours and Ed & Harry were now reliving the lives of Graham Bell and his assistant Thomas Watson when they heard for the very first time a man's words through thin air, uncovering voices on this once thought empty piece of celluloid, history, now, which long ago held fearsome promise for all time.

