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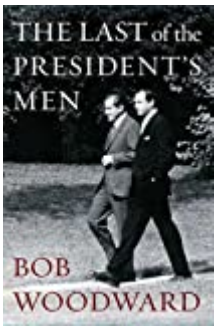


**Bob Woodward.** *The Last of the President's Men.* New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015. 304 pp. $28.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-5011-1644-5.

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## Back to the Watergate Well

In *The Last of the Presidentâs Men*, author Bob Woodward relates the experiences of Alexander Butterfield in the Nixon administration. Butterfield, who served as deputy assistant to the president from 1969 until early 1973, was one of a handful of people with knowledge of Richard Nixonâs secret taping system. Butterfield is known to history as the man who publicly revealed the existence of the tapes during testimony before the Senate Watergate Committee, chaired by Sam Ervin, in July 1973. Butterfieldâs revelation set off a year-long battle for control of the tapes, culminating in President Nixonâs resignation in August 1974.

In his research for this book, Woodward interviewed Butterfield for forty hours in 2014-15. He also relied on Butterfieldâs unpublished manuscript and documents that Butterfield took with him when he left the Nixon White House. What emerges from this source material is a âdeeper, more disturbing and baffling portrait of Nixon,â a figure who is at the same time âboth smaller and largerâ than is known from previous accounts about him (pp. 2, 3).

Prior to his service in the Nixon administration, Butterfield was an air force pilot and colonel, who aspired to become a general officer and air force chief of staff. But promotion depended on his first being in the âsmoke,â in the thick of things in a âhighly visible jobâ in Washington, DC, or in Vietnam, where he had already flown combat missions (pp. 5-6). In short order, Butterfield found his way âinto the smoke,â which would have been a fitting title for this book. How he entered the smoke underscored an important theme here: the importance of personal relationships at the highest levels of government. Shortly after the 1968 election, Butterfield reached out to UCLA classmate H. R. (âBobâ) Haldeman, president-elect Nixonâs soon-to-be assistant to the president (chief of staff), who interviewed Butterfield and offered him a position as deputy assistant to the president.

In the Nixon White House, Butterfield worked closely with Haldeman and with the president himself on daily scheduling matters and the flow of paperwork and orders. He âshadowedâ the president and gained insights into Nixonâs management style, personality, and mar-

riage. His rapid entrance into Nixonâs inner circle is directly attributable to the high degree of trust and power that Nixon extended to Haldeman in making personnel choices for the White House staff.

*The Last of the Presidentâs Men* contains a number of previously unpublished anecdotes about President Nixon. While they do not reveal any new character traits of the president, they deepen our understanding of the extent of his loneliness, emotional isolation, and detachment from others. Butterfield vividly illustrates Nixonâs well-known awkwardness in social situations in his description of a birthday party held at the White House in March 1969 for Paul Keyes, writer and producer of the television show *Laugh-In*. Upon entering the room, where guests already had gathered, Nixon said nothing for what seemed to be an eternity. Finally, after stammering and struggling for words, Nixon pointed down at the maroon carpet, and with reference to Keyesâs green blazer, said âgreen coat ... red rug ... Christmas colors,â and left the room (p. 44). Elsewhere, Butterfield described witnessing Nixon repeatedly patting a secretaryâs bare legs in an avuncular way aboard a helicopter. Butterfieldâs reaction combined shock with pity for Nixon, whose actions, while completely inappropriate, manifested his deep loneliness.

*The Last of the Presidentâs Men* is unique among the hundreds of books that have been written about Nixon and Watergate. Most first-person memoirs and accounts by the other âpresidentâs menââHaldeman, John Ehrlichman, John Dean, Jeb Magruder, and Charles Colsonâwere written thirty to forty years ago, during a period of great public interest in Watergate. These individuals also wrote books because they needed money to pay legal expenses as defendants in cases concerning Watergate and related abuses of power. Others, such as John Mitchell and Butterfieldâuntil nowâleft no first-person accounts. One wonders how the âWoodward filterâ affected Butterfieldâs telling of his story. Might Butterfield have been moreâor lessâforthcoming without Woodwardâs involvement in this book? It is noteworthy that Butterfield is not the bookâs coauthor, that he did not write its foreword or introduction, and that he relinquished editorial control to Woodward. Butterfieldâs voice is clearly present, however, in the words that Woodward lifted from documents and interviews with him. The story of Butterfield, who was not paid to tell it, will likely receive more attention simply due to the fact that Woodward, author of ten previous best sellers, including *All the Presidentâs Men* (1974), which he coauthored with Carl Bernstein, is the author. Perhaps Butterfield will publish his own memoir someday; one suspects that it, along with the boxes of documents in his possession and recordings of his interviews with Woodward, will be donated to the Nixon Library.

Butterfield does not shed new light on Watergate. He does, however, reveal deep regret over his role in an abuse of governmental power: domestic intelligence gathering targeting Nixonâs enemiesâreporter Seymour Hersh and presidential candidate Ted Kennedyâfor political purposes. Butterfield told Woodward that he âremains appalled at his behavior and weaknessâ (p. 108). Woodward noted that Butterfield âkept bringing it upâ in their discussions (p. 136). He was well aware that he bore moralâand legalâculpability for his actions. âIf his role in the Kennedy spying had been discovered,â Woodward writes, âhe was certain he would have gone to jailâ (p. 106). This is an example of Butterfield making admissions to Woodward that were against his own interest, although he was at a safe remove from events that occurred almost forty-five years earlier.

One of the more interesting aspects of *The Last of the Presidentâs Men* is Woodwardâs use of information from documents in Butterfieldâs possession concerning national security and foreign policy matters. In some cases, the documents, many of which were reprinted in the bookâs appendix, still bear classified markings. It is unclear if appropriate federal agencies reviewed and declassified them. The documents, which Woodward was not able to find at the Nixon Library or anywhere else, contain important new information. For example, in January 1972, Nixon admitted in a handwritten note on a memorandum from National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger that despite ten years of total control of the air in Laos and Vietnam, the result has been âZilchâ (p. 114). Just a day before he wrote his note, Nixon had told CBS reporter Dan Rather that the results of bombing of North Vietnam had been âvery, very effectiveâ (p. 113). In future months during 1972, the âZilchâ memorandum notwithstanding, Nixon actually intensified the bombing (p. 115).

Other documents in Butterfieldâs possession underscore the Nixon administrationâs obsession with secrecy and its suspicion of its own allies. One document concerns American spying on Israelâs ballistic missile program. Another involves Kissingerâs argument to Nixon that the United States should be willing to agree to a bilateral peace treaty with North Vietnam, if South Vietnam refused to sign a settlement. In his memoirs, Kissinger omitted mention of his preferred course, and he