

## ***Krogh & the Watergate Scandal***

Egil “Bud” Krogh was a young lawyer who worked for the Nixon administration in the late 1960s and early 1970s as deputy assistant to the president. Military analyst Daniel Ellsberg leaked the “Pentagon Papers,” which contained sensitive information regarding the United States’ progress in the Vietnam War. President Nixon himself tasked Krogh with stopping leaks of top-secret information. And Nixon’s Assistant for Domestic Affairs, John Ehrlichman, instructed Krogh to investigate and discredit Ellsberg, telling Krogh that the leak was damaging to national security.

Krogh and another staffer assembled a covert team that became known as the “plumbers” (to stop leaks), which was broadly supervised by Ehrlichman. In September 1971, the plumbers’ first break-in was at the office of Ellsberg’s psychiatrist; they were looking for documents that would discredit Ellsberg based on mental health. Reflecting on the meeting in which the break-in was proposed and approved, Krogh later wrote, “I listened intently. At no time did I or anyone else there question whether the operation was necessary, legal or moral. Convinced that we were responding legitimately to a national security crisis, we focused instead on the operational details: who would do what, when and where.”

The break-in, which was illegal, was also unproductive. Nothing was found to discredit Ellsberg. Importantly, the ties between this break-in and Nixon were much more direct and easy to establish than the ties between Nixon and the Watergate break-in. Krogh later pled guilty to his role in the break-in and was sentenced to two-to-six years in prison. At his sentencing, Krogh explained that national security is “subject to a wide range of definitions, a factor that makes all the more essential a painstaking approach to the definition of national security in any given instance.” Judge Gesell, sentencing Krogh to serve six months in prison and remain on unsupervised probation for another two years, said, “In acknowledging your guilt, you have made no effort, as you very well might have, to place the primary blame on others who initiated and who approved the undertaking. A wholly improper, illegal task was assigned to you by higher authority and you carried it out because of a combination of loyalty and I believe a degree of vanity, thereby compromising your obligations as a lawyer and a public servant.”

Krogh, who cooperated with the Watergate prosecutors and never bargained for leniency, served only four-and-a-half months of his sentence. The Washington State Supreme Court disbarred Krogh in 1975, although he successfully petitioned to be reinstated in 1980 and became partner in the Seattle law firm Krogh & Leonard. Krogh has spent much of the past 45 years supporting legal ethics education and writing and lecturing on the topic of integrity. Writing for *The New York Times* in 2007, he stated, “I finally realized that what had gone wrong in the Nixon White House was a meltdown in personal integrity. Without it, we failed to understand the constitutional limits on presidential power and comply with statutory law.”



**Discussion Questions:**

1. How was ethical fading a part of Egil Krogh's eventual journey to prison? Explain.
2. At the time the decision was made, what factors caused the morality of the decision to break into the office of Ellsberg's psychiatrist to fade from view?
3. Krogh has said that he went into his White House job "with tremendous enthusiasm and commitment—almost to a fault." Do you think this is reflective of his actions in the Nixon administration? Why or why not?
4. In what ways did authority figures affect Krogh's actions? Explain.
5. How might one guard against ethical fading in a high-pressure work environment?
6. Krogh believes that the Bush administration's policies and practices regarding torture during the Iraq War reflect the same types of decision-making errors that he was guilty of regarding the plumbers' operations. Do you agree? Why or why not?

**Resources**

*Blindspot: Hidden Biases of Good People*

<http://www.worldcat.org/title/blindspot-hidden-biases-of-good-people/oclc/687655333>

*Blind Spots: Why We Fail to Do What's Right and What to Do About It*

<http://www.worldcat.org/title/blind-spots-why-we-fail-to-do-whats-right-and-what-to-do-about-it/oclc/679940661>

*The Whole Truth: The Watergate Conspiracy*

<http://www.worldcat.org/title/whole-truth-the-watergate-conspiracy/oclc/6223134>

*Sidetracked: Why Our Decisions Get Derailed, and How We Can Stick to the Plan*

<http://www.worldcat.org/title/sidetracked-why-our-decisions-get-derailed-and-how-we-can-stick-to-the-plan/oclc/807028907>

*Willful Blindness: Why We Ignore the Obvious at Our Peril*

<http://www.worldcat.org/title/willful-blindness-why-we-ignore-the-obvious-at-our-peril/oclc/639161268>

The Break-In That History Forgot

<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/06/30/opinion/30krogh.html>

*Integrity: Good People, Bad Choices, and Life Lessons from the White House*

<http://www.worldcat.org/title/integrity-good-people-bad-choices-and-life-lessons-from-the-white-house/oclc/141852377>

Egil Krogh's Lessons Learned

<http://www.lawandpolitics.com/washington/Egil-Kroghs-Lessons-Learned/0ca80bdc-6a6f-102a-ab50-000e0c6dcf76.html>

*Nightmare: The Underside of the Nixon Years*

<http://www.worldcat.org/title/nightmare-the-underside-of-the-nixon-years/oclc/1676387>

*Being Nixon: A Man Divided*

<http://www.worldcat.org/title/being-nixon-a-man-divided/oclc/904756092>

*One Man Against the World: The Tragedy of Richard Nixon*

<http://www.worldcat.org/title/one-man-against-the-world-the-tragedy-of-richard-nixon/oclc/906798379>

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