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THE PRICE OF POW

Kissinger, Nixon, and Chile

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YEOMAN CHARLES E. RADFORD DID NOT WANT TO BE reassigned to Washington, but it was the fall of 1970 and he was in the Navy and his country was at war. Radford, twenty-seven years old, had been hand-picked by Rear Admiral Rembrandt C. Robinson to serve as his confidential aide and secretary on the National Security Council staff in the White House. The bright and ambitious Radford was an obvious choice for the sensitive job: he was married and had young children; he was a devout Mormon who did not drink and would never consider using drugs; and he was fierce in his determination to earn a commission and become a Navy officer. Radford reported for duty on September 18, replacing a civilian secretary who was being transferred. There was obvious tension in the office, and Admiral Robinson, in one of their first meetings, demonstrated why, Radford recalls: "He made it clear that my loyalty was to him, and that he expected my loyalty, and that I wasn't to speak outside of the office about what I did in the office."

Admiral Robinson was the liaison officer between the

Joint Chiefs of Staff and the National Security Council, and his office was a sensitive one: the White House's most highly classified documents, including intelligence materials, routinely flowed through it. By mid-1970, Henry A. Kissinger, President Richard Nixon's national security adviser, had developed complete confidence in Robinson's discretion and loyalty.

It was not surprising, therefore, that Robinson was deeply involved in the secret Kissinger and Nixon operations against Salvador Allende Gossens, of Chile, who had astounded the Central Intelligence Agency and the White House by winning the September 4 popular election for the Chilean presidency, although Allende received only 36.6 percent of the vote in a three-way race. Radford, who arrived at his new post a few weeks after the Chilean election, vividly recalls the sense of crisis: "This wasn't supposed to happen. It was a real blow. All of a sudden, the pudding blew up on the stove." Admiral Robinson and his superiors were "wringing their hands" over Chile, Radford says, "almost as if they [the Chileans] were errant children." Over the next few weeks, Radford says, he saw many sensitive memoranda and options papers, as the bureaucracy sought to prevent Allende from assuming office. Being an options paper was a proposal to assassinate Allende.