

The Presidency

by HUGH SIDEY

Ave—Durable Servant of Four Presidents

Averell Harriman, who turned 75 last week, is proving to be one of the most remarkable monuments to democracy that this nation has produced, far more durable and unchanging than most other national landmarks. While he has been serving his government, the United States Capitol, veritable symbol of the Republic, has been pushed forward 32½ feet and given a new face. The whole interior of the White House, an even more venerable heritage, has been ripped out, rebuilt and refurnished. Lafayette Square, where early Presidents used to walk, has been replanned and replanted. The Washington Monument has been automated and caulked, the Jefferson Memorial floodlighted, Sherman and his horse scraped down. But nothing about Ave Harriman has changed much except the Presidents who give him his assignments.

His craggy facade remains intact, with the original materials. His mind is sharp, his tongue tart. On his birthday at a surprise party for him and his wife Marie, he danced until 2 a.m., despite the fact that he had returned just a few days before from a 26,570-mile mission of peace around the world, establishing a new field record by, in the same day, breakfasting in India, lunching in Pakistan, having tea in Iran and dinner in Rome. At his

party he stood sturdily shoulder to shoulder for snapshots with the figures of Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill, which had been borrowed from Washington's National Historical Wax Museum for the commemorative evening. And, after being heaped with praise, he rose before 80 guests and wryly told those honoring him, "If I'd had half the people who are with me here with me when I was running, I might have been re-elected governor of New York."

Averell Harriman is more than a national monument. He is a living symbol of the relative constancy of American foreign policy over the last three decades.

Through bluebloods and haberdashers, Brahmins and cowboys, he has been able to serve, without great personal deviation, the American cause abroad—which indicates that, despite the catcalls of foreign policy critics, the country runs a pretty steady course.

For days before the party, the capital had been awash with political blood, drawn over the previous week's election. There were bitter denunciations of Lyndon Johnson's clumsy political activities and the ineptness of his crew in the White House. Hubert Humphrey had lost his native Minnesota to the Republicans along with just about every other reservation he strayed over—and he ruefully admitted it. His men were pointing out that Bobby Kennedy hadn't done so well either, while Bobby's boys with some mystical mathematics were shouting that his batting average was at least .600.

The rival factions all assembled on the camping grounds of the government in exile—Hickory Hill, Kennedy's home in McLean, Va. "Ave in '72—sorry Bobby" was the sign over the door. Jack Valenti, who still sleeps a little better at night because L.B.J. is President, came dressed in tennis clothes, representing Harriman's Hobe Sound idyls. Bill Moyers, Johnson's press secretary, arrived in a helmeted spacesuit (his wife tethered to him) posing as Harriman's future, after 75 more years in government, as an astronaut. He was surprised to see Averell at the party, Moyers remarked, because "according to the White House schedule, he is supposed to be on top of Mt. Everest negotiating peace with a Sherpa porter." Hubert Hum-

Back from his 26,570-mile trip, Averell Harriman reports to the President at the Johnson ranch and is introduced to the press. This was a few days before the President's operation.



phrey stood glowing with a large "Harriman for President" button pinned to his breast, and declared, "As long as I'm going to go down, I'm going to go down with Harriman." When H.H.H. made some reference to the election's statistical war of who lost what, Bobby Kennedy, dressed in one of Harriman's coats that hit him at the ankles, cracked across the room, "They must be counting the places we flew over." And Kennedy, in making his toast, declared, "Paraphrasing another Kennedy, there is more experience and talent assembled in this room than at any time since last night, when Marie and Averell dined alone." Even the great harpoonist Art Buchwald, dressed in a Yale

letter sweater, carrying crew cap and coxswain's megaphone, gave a mellow fictional biography of Harriman from the files of the USIA. It told how Harriman had been born in a log cabin, the son of a sharecropper, and how his mother enrolled him in Project Head Start to prepare him for Groton and Yale.

Averell Harriman in real life fell short of his great desires—to be Secretary of State and to be President. His birthday party was something like that. Other guests were the centers of attention—everybody wanted to see, in this first post-election get-together, how the rivals would behave. But Ave reacted just as he had all through his rewarding career. He hardly seemed to notice what didn't happen.