

Richard Nixon's impenetrable isolation at San Clemente

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SAN CLEMENTE — A few days ago, several doctors well known in this town were observed driving into the grounds of former President Richard Nixon's Casa Pacifica estate.

Their presence led to an immediate spate of rumors and conjecture that someone in the Nixon family was ill or had met with an accident, possibly the former president himself.

There was no truth at all to such speculation. The explanation was quite simple.

Like any family settling down in a community, the Nixons wanted to make arrangements for several "family" physicians who could treat any minor ailments and be nearby and available to make a house call at any hour if needed.

But so impenetrable has been the shell of isolation into which Nixon has withdrawn that the simplest facts about what he is doing, whom he is seeing, his whereabouts at any given moment are often blown up by unwarranted speculation.

Two weeks ago Friday, Nixon resigned the most powerful office on earth. Today it is almost as if he had vanished from that earth.

Some of his friends and neighbors here are candidly quite worried about Nixon's frame of mind and his well being as he remains shut in behind the electronically guarded walls of the 26-acre property on a 100-foot cliff overlooking the Pacific.

They want to respect his apparent desire for privacy scrupulously but they wonder at the same time if they shouldn't try to make some gesture of neighborliness and welcome — perhaps invite the Nixons to a small dinner party.

One of them is Paul Presley, owner of the nearby San Clemente Inn whose \$300,000 home adjoins the Nixon property on the promontory. Presley knows the Nixons quite well. But he hasn't seen the former president since a large crowd of local well wishers greeted the family at the adjacent Coast Guard station when they arrived by helicopter Aug. 9.

"I don't know what to do," says Presley. "On the one hand I don't want to intrude. I would like some signal that he might like a visit, a chat, maybe go out to dinner. But I certainly don't think it's good for him to cut off all contact with the outside."

Gov. Ronald Reagan was passing through San Clemente last week and he stopped in the town.

"I thought of dropping in to see him," Reagan told a Nixon friend. "But then I thought — maybe he doesn't want to see me. So I went out."

Pat Nixon is even more out of contact than her husband who has been seen on several occasions strolling and taking a swim on the beach below the home.

She has not been seen in the small town.

The grocery shopping is done at the local Alpha Beta supermarket by the Nixon's longtime close family servant, Manolo Sanchez. His wife, Fina, does the cooking.

Tricia Nixon and her husband, Edward Cox, have— apparently — remained at the home the past two weeks.

They accompanied Nixon on a drive up the coast to Ventura for a picnic one day. It was a roundtrip of more than 300 miles. No one outside Casa Pacifica knew about it until they were back.

One of Nixon's favorite Mexican restaurants is the El Adobe at San Juan Capistrano a few miles from San Clemente. The former president invariably dined there several times during his vacations here but he has not been there since his arrival.

A tiny nucleus of a staff is here with the former president working in offices in the Coast Guard compound which was once known as the Western White House.

Ronald Ziegler, the former chief press secretary, is the head of the staff, helping Nixon with the myriad problems involved in the transition from chief executive to private citizen.

Also here are former appointments secretary Stephen Bull and former military aide Col. Jack Brennan. Dr. Walter Tkach, Nixon's personal physician, came here with the family. It is not known if he still remains. There are also two secretaries.

A telephone call to the "Western White House" is handled by the Coast Guard switchboard which puts the call through to Ziegler's office.

A girl in the office usually answers the call and if it is an inquiry from the news media she replies pleasantly but abruptly:

"This is not a press office."

Early last week, a communications expert moved into Casa Pacifica to remove the sophisticated electronics equipment which had given the former president the capability within moments to reach any part of the world or order a Strategic Air Command strike.

The man said he was under guard the entire time. He was told specifically not to move from one room to another without Ziegler's okay.

He crossed the courtyard of the Spanish style hacienda one afternoon and saw not one single person. Outside the house is a swimming pool and grass patio which previously had been carefully manicured.

"Leaves were blowing across the lawn and into the pool," he said. "It had a ghostly and eerie effect."

A sizable (its exact size not known) Secret Service detail has been assigned to guard the former president indefinitely. In the past weeks they have been scurrying around to real estate agents making arrangements to rent or buy a home.

The figurative as well as literal walls behind which Nixon has taken refuge even made a major problem of what would seem to be a not too difficult job of serving a court subpoena on a man who is now a private citizen.

The federal court order from Judge John Sirica instructing Nixon to appear in Washington at the opening of the Watergate coverup trial of John Ehrlichman, H. R. Haldeman, John Mitchell and three other former White House aides has been in the Los Angeles office of U.S. Marshal Gaylord Campbell since Monday. 19 AUG

There had been no word up to late last week that it had been served. Campbell said he was "negotiating" with Nixon's staff to present the subpoena but declined to say where or when it would take place.