

Nixon Flies West On Commercial Jet

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By Lou Cannon

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President Nixon slipped out of the White House yesterday with a party of 25, drove to Dulles International Airport in an unmarked car and left by commercial airliner for the Nixon estate at San Clemente.

The President's departure caught many in his own staff by surprise, including deputy press secretary Gerald L. Warren, who had told White House reporters earlier in the day that they would be informed about presidential travel plans. This announcement enabled Mr. Nixon to leave without any of the press that usually accompanies him.

He also left behind his chief of staff, Alexander M. Haig Jr., who may join Mr. Nixon later in California.

Deputy communications director Ken W. Clawson said Mr. Nixon had chosen to fly by commercial plane "to set an example for the rest of the nation during the current energy crisis."

White House officials said the Spirit of '76, the President's four-engined Boeing 707 which usually transports him on such trips, will not be taken to San Clemente. Neither, they said, will any other government plane.

Other White House offi-

cial are to fly to San Clemente on commercial airplanes. Warren said this staff, which includes himself, will be held to a minimum.

Warren said the announcement of the President's departure was concealed from the public for "security reasons." The reservations were made Christmas Day, he said.

It was the first time that any President or President-elect had used a commercial plane since Thanksgiving Day, 1960, when John F. Kennedy flew back from Palm Beach the same month he was elected. The occasion for that trip was the premature birth of a son who later died.

The President's party purchased 13 one-way first-class fares at \$217.64 each for a total cost of \$2,839.32. Twelve coach seats, most of them occupied by Secret Service agents, were occupied at a per seat cost of \$167.64 and a total cost of \$2,011.68.

Mr. Nixon left the White House at 4:25 p.m. by an exit usually reserved for visiting diplomats. He drove without escort through the traffic to Dulles in a blue Continental instead of his customary black limousine.

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At the airport the President, Mrs. Nixon and their daughter Tricia boarded United Airlines' Flight 55 from Dulles to Los Angeles International Airport.

The plane is a 238-passenger DC-10 jumbo jet, which Warren said Mr. Nixon chose because "the flight is never quite full."

"No one was bumped from the plane," Clawson said. "There was plenty of space for everyone on the airline, and there was no inconvenience to anyone."

The White House has been sensitive in recent weeks to stories that Mr. Nixon

planned to fly away for a holiday to his other retreat at Key Biscayne at a time when many prospective vacationers were unable to book reservations. Warren emphasized last night that all stand-bys waiting to fly on the United plane were accommodated.

White House spokesmen and Mr. Nixon have also said in the past that the President could not fly planes smaller than the Spirit of '76 because they lacked the necessary communications equipment.

Yesterday, Clawson said the White House made "adequate and appropriate communications available on the aircraft."

This was an apparent reference to a so-called "suitcase satellite" which can put Mr. Nixon in touch with government and military nerve centers.

Despite such assurances, which Warren said demonstrated Mr. Nixon's "confidence in the airlines," the customary split-second presidential timing was noticeably absent.

The United plane had been scheduled to depart at 5:30 p.m., but was delayed until 6:15 p.m. by rain and fog.

Network news associations, which earlier in the day had canceled more than 30 reservations for Florida airlines, arranged to cover Mr. Nixon's arrival with their West Coast bureaus. But the networks made no secret of their annoyance at the method of the President's departure and the mystery that has shrouded his on-again, off-again travel plans.

"For the first time ever, no one in the news business is with the President of the United States on a trip," CBS Washington Bureau chief William Small said.

The President left the White House press behind briefly last month when he flew to Key Biscayne without announcement. But a chartered plane of photographers followed him, and some reporters were already in Miami anticipating his arrival.

Small said he had complained all week about the White House's non-disclosure policy, which had forced CBS to rent rooms in Flor-

ida in anticipation of the Key Biscayne trip.

White House spokesmen announced last week that they were abandoning the usual policy of taking along a pool of press reporters.

Yesterday, a few hours before the President's departure, Warren said that the "mode of the President's travel" might not permit him to take a press pool, a statement which did not apply to the flight Mr. Nixon made. Warren's reference apparently was in anticipation of a flight by Mr. Nixon to Key Biscayne on a small Lockheed Jetstar.

Accompanying Mr. Nixon on the trip, in addition to his wife and Tricia, were his secretary, Rose Mary Woods, press secretary Ronald L. Ziegler, military aide Marine Lt. Col. John Brennan, physician William Lukash, appointments secretary Stephen Bull, secretary Margaret Acker and Mr. Nixon's valet, Manola Sanchez.

The remaining members of the party are Secret Service agents, a communications expert and two aides from the White House military office.

Warren said that while in California Mr. Nixon will work on the State of the Union and budget messages, on energy legislation and "hopefully he will get some rest." He said he expected the President to return to Washington after New Year's Day.

Mr. Nixon is also likely to attend the wedding of his chief White House physician, Dr. Walter Tkach, to Cheryl Galliard, who works for the Western White House staff. The wedding is Friday.