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Nixon directs Marines at accident scene

CAMP PENDLETON, Calif. (AP) — Former President Richard M. Nixon tried vainly for an hour to save the lives of three Marines at a fatal traffic accident Thursday, a base spokesman said Friday.

"Mr. Nixon took charge of the accident scene," said Marine Capt. Lou Chatelle.

"He directed his Secret Service men to call for a medi-vac unit and he and one of his aides tried to help one Marine who was still alive."

A spokesman at Nixon's seaside home in nearby San Clemente confirmed the incident and said the former chief executive stayed at the scene for an hour, directing the operation.

A spokesman for Camp Pendleton, a sprawling base north of San Diego, gave this account:

Nixon was returning with his son-in-law and daughter, Edward and Tricia Cox, from a Marine Corps golf course Thursday afternoon when the accident took place directly in front of his car.

A Secret Service agent driving the Nixon car stopped and Nixon asked him to radio for medical aid.

Nixon and Cox then tried to free a Marine pinned in the wreckage where two other men were dead. Cox used a crowbar, but the third man was pronounced dead at the base hospital five hours later.

In the Nixon car immediately behind the Marines' vehicle which crashed off Las Pulgas Road on the base were Col. Jack Brennan, the former President's aide, and a Navy corpsman.

Details of the accident were unclear

and the incident was under investigation, a base spokesman said.

"All I know is that it was a head-on collision on Las Pulgas," said Capt. Chatelle, a public information officer.

The dead Marines were identified as Sgt. Davis A. Vandal, 28, of nearby Oceanside; Cpl. Ramiro A. Delgado Jr., 20, of San Antonio, Tex., and Sgt. Larry W. Grise, 24, of San Clemente.

Chatelle said it was "fairly common" for Nixon to be on the base where the golf facilities have been made available to him.

La Pulgas Road is an eastwest artery at the northwest edge of sprawling Camp Pendleton some 10 miles from Nixon's Casa Pacifica estate.