

20 Years Ago, It Was

Los Angeles

It was Sept. 23, 1952. Richard Nixon, his vice presidential campaign badly shaken by reports of an \$18,000 secret fund, was about to go on television at a studio in the El Capitan Theater in Hollywood to explain.

Out of it came the "Checkers speech," an emotional—some called it outrageously corny—highly effective appeal for public support.

And no one—not his wife, his closest aides, his television producer—knew in advance precisely what he was going to say.

Since then, the Checkers speech has been a benchmark in the Nixon political

career, one of his famous "six crises," a key event in political history.

Last night, more than two decades later, Mr. Nixon again turned to the public via television to explain his position and appeal for support in a difficult situation.

The Checkers speech provided a goldmine of material for Nixon satirists—"I want to make this particularly clear" came from the speech, in addition to references to his wife Pat's "respectable Republican cloth coat" and of course to the black-and-white cocker spaniel sent to the Nixons by an admirer and named Checkers by daughter Tricia. The speech saved Mr. Nixon's spot on the Republican ticket with General Eisenhower. And it saved his political life. He said he gambled on asking the public to demand that he remain on the ticket, and he won.

It was, as he said, "the worst experience of my life."

Looking back on it, he said "you have to expect in a campaign that your integrity, your loyalty, your honesty, your intellectual honesty may all be questioned. That's fair game. You have got to be able to take it."

But Mr. Nixon said by questioning his integrity, his opponents were questioning "the integrity of the Republican party and of General Eisenhower in selecting and



RICHARD NIXON IN 1952
He saved his political life with 'Checkers' speech

UPI Telephoto

'Checkers'

approving me as a (vice presidential) candidate."

When it was disclosed publicly he had been the beneficiary of an \$18,000 fund to help him meet his political expenses, the furor grew to the point where it became touch-and-go whether he could ride it out.

Republicans put up enough money to put him on television for a half-hour, got him a massive nationwide hook-up, pre-empted the "I Love Lucy" show and let him take his best shot.

Mr. Nixon refused to rehearse, or even talk to the program director. A salesman Mr. Nixon's size was hired as a stand-in for rehearsal and cameramen

were ordered to keep the lens on the candidate regardless what he did. (In the telecast, he finished by sitting on the corner of a desk.)

Mr. Nixon said he got the idea of using the cloth coat reference, the Checkers reference and the use of a Lincoln quote — "The Lord must have loved common people because he made so many of them" — while flying here from Portland for the telecast.

The speech, scribbled by Mr. Nixon on a legal yellow tablet, ran long. As time was running out, he had just begun to exhort his friends to write or wire the Republican National Committee to

keep him on the ticket.

He was still talking when his time ran out and he was cut off the air.

"I loused it up and I'm sorry," he told his television aide.

He gathered his notes, and then threw them on the floor. When a friend praised him, he said "No, it was a flop. I couldn't get off in time." When he reached his dressing room, according to aides, he let loose the tears he had been holding back.

Within 48 hours, in an emotional scene in Wheeling, W. Va., General Eisenhower was throwing his arm around his shoulder and saying, "Dick, you're my boy."

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