

# 20 Years at the White House

by Lloyd Shearer

WASHINGTON, D.C.

**W**hat do the network correspondents who cover the White House and travel with Jimmy Carter think of his Presidential performance to date?

Each correspondent generates his own opinion, but Bob Pierpoint of CBS, who has been covering the White House and its incumbents since 1957, has the advantage of perspective born of experience and comparison.

Pierpoint, 52, originally from Redlands, Cal., says, "Intellectually, Carter

is the smartest President I've covered. He's quick, perceptive, industrious, an incredibly fast study. He's put a lot out on the plate, and it may prove too much for the American people to digest. His goals are admirable, but his tactics are poor.

"I attribute that to lack of experience. But he's one President who's not backing away from the major problems of our time. It's a little early in the game to pass judgment on him, but he could end up being one of our greatest two-

term Presidents—or, with bad luck, he could be washed up after one term. We've got to give him a fair run."

Pierpoint, who's writing his memoirs, tentatively titled "At the White House," was assigned there in 1957 after serving CBS as Far Eastern bureau chief for three years. Eisenhower was then President.

"Ike," he recalls, "was more like a chairman of the board than a President. He had Jim Hagerty, George Humphrey, John Foster Dulles, Sherman Adams—a regular board of directors who ran

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things. In those days CBS had one man covering the White House, and I was the boy. Now we have four people. But whenever I think back to the Eisenhower Administration, I'm reminded of what a great press secretary Ike had in Jim Hagerty. He was the best. He always took care of the press. Regarded us as his boys. With him as press secretary, we had a decent life. When he said the lid was on for the day, the lid was on."

Pierpoint remembers Ike's successor, Jack Kennedy, as "a good President but not a great one. He was young and brash and progressive. He really wanted to move the country forward. He wasn't a standpatter like Ike, who, despite his tremendous popularity, never really had any changes in mind. Jack Kennedy really needed a second term. He was hoping for a more cooperative Congress in 1964."

Of Lyndon Johnson, Pierpoint says: "Johnson was probably the most qualified President I've covered. He really understood how the American system should work. He was colorful and unpredictable. He had experience and background, knew all the inside angles. But he couldn't work himself out of the Vietnam war. He had three different press secretaries—George Reedy, Bill Moyers, George Christian—all good, but they couldn't prevent Johnson from putting his foot in it."

## His view of Nixon

Pierpoint, who covered the Nixon Administration along with Dan Rather, found "Nixon was racked by terrible problems of insecurity. He looked down on people. He was always sorry for himself. He was power-driven and hungered for ego-satisfaction. It was a bad, bad time for us. He did not surround himself with people of warmth or friendliness. Many were in his own image.

"Jerry Ford, of course, was the direct opposite — decent, friendly, compassionate. A politician for conservative causes who didn't have a really new or progressive thought in 25 years. But a genuinely good guy."

Pierpoint, who was educated at the University of Redlands and the University of Stockholm, has worked for CBS for 27 years. He is married to the former Pat Adams, a painter also from Redlands, and says: "We met in a sociology course in college, 'Marriage and the Family,' and both of us are the offspring of retired vice presidents who worked for the Bank of America."

The Pierpoints have four children, one of their own and three from Pat's first marriage. They live in a newly bought home off River Road in Bethesda, Md., a half hour's drive from the White House where Pierpoint has spent most of the last 20 years and claims still to love it.

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*CBS correspondent Bob Pierpoint and artist-wife Pat. During his long White House beat—which he still enjoys—he has had a close-up look at six Presidents, from Eisenhower to Carter, is writing his memoirs.*