

Murray Chotiner,

By Lou Cannon

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He was called the creator of Richard Nixon by Mr. Nixon's enemies and the discoverer of him by Mr. Nixon's friends. The President counted him as one of his most abiding supporters. Historians agree that he rescued Mr. Nixon from the most severe crisis of his vice presidency and preserved his place in public life.

Murray Chotiner died yesterday, on the eve of his President's fifth State of the Union message. His death closed a chapter of an era of bare-knuckles California politics that once divided the country but which came to seem strangely tame and even reassuring in the year of Watergate.

"Just stand there in your Navy uniform, keep your mouth shut and I'll get you elected to Congress," is the way Mimi Nemeth, one of Mr. Chotiner's three ex-wives, recalled his initial advice to Mr. Nixon.

Mr. Chotiner engineered Mr. Nixon's headline-grabbing campaign against Rep. Jerry Voorhis in 1946, which depicted Voorhis as an ally of Communists without ever calling him one. He used the same format in 1950 when Mr. Nixon, fresh from his victory over Alger Hiss, ran for the Senate against Democrat Helen Gahagan Douglas.

Mr. Chotiner devised "a pink sheet," on pink paper, that compared Mrs. Douglas' voting record with that of Rep. Vito Marcantonio, of the Communist-line American Labor Party. Mr. Nixon won.

"I say to you in all sincerity that if you do not deflate the opposition candidate before your own campaign gets started, the odds are that you are doomed to defeat," Mr. Chotiner said in explaining his philosophy to a Republican campaign school in 1955.

Mr. Chotiner's career was intertwined with Mr. Nixon's, but he was well known in California politics before Mr. Nixon came on the scene. He managed the cam-



Murray Chotiner, right, as Nixon campaign manager, discusses with Sen. Richard M. Nixon the opening of his campaign for Vice President in August, 1952.

paigns of various GOP congressional candidates and of Sen. William Knowland and Gov. Earl Warren.

Mr. Nixon's biographer Earl Mazo recalls that Mr. Chotiner used to chuckle over stories saying that he "created" Mr. Nixon.

"Damn it, why do they always say I was the creator of Nixon," Mazo remembers Mr. Chotiner as saying. "I started out by creating Earl Warren."

But it was Mr. Nixon, more than any Chotiner pupil, who appreciated his advice about taking the offensive. This advice, by Mr. Nixon's own account, probably salvaged Mr. Nixon when President Eisenhower attempted to jump him from the ticket in 1952 after accounts about a "Nixon slush fund."

In his autobiography, *Six Crises*, Mr. Nixon recalls that he was just starting to write a letter to the Republican National Committee protesting what was happening when Mr. Chotiner "bluntly" barged in to his office.

"Dick," he said, "is a good campaign manager must never be seen or heard. But

if you're kicked off this ticket, I'm going to break that rule. I'm going to call the biggest damn press conference that's ever been held . . . And I'm going to tell everybody who called who, what was said—names and everything."

"Would you really do that?" Mr. Nixon asked.

"Sure I'd do it," Mr. Chotiner answered. "Hell, we'd be through with politics anyway. It wouldn't make any difference then."

Mr. Nixon said that Mr. Chotiner left without waiting for a reply.

"I was glad that he had come in," Mr. Nixon wrote. "His devil-may-care attitude, so uncharacteristic of him, had broken the tension and given me a needed lift."

Mazo gives Mr. Chotiner credit for the famous "Checkers speech"—"The kids, like all kids, loved the dog and I just want to say this, right now, that regardless of what they say about it, we are going to keep it"—which turned the tide of Republican sympathy to Mr. Nixon and preserved his place on the ticket.

Nixon Associate

"Murray was the only one in the entourage who wasn't destroyed by events," says Mazo. "He knew that Nixon would wind up doing what he wanted him to and that everything would turn out all right—and it did."

Mr. Chotiner's family moved from his birthplace in Pittsburgh, Pa., to southern California in 1922 when he was 13. He obtained a law degree from Southwestern University in Los Angeles after completing a year of prelegal studies at UCLA. Only 19 at the time, he had to wait two years to be admitted to the bar.

In his law practice Mr. Chotiner gained a reputation as a shrewd, effective attorney. Some of his clients, including several with gangland connections, were once described by Mr. Chotiner as "unsavory, to say the least."

Mr. Chotiner first became significantly active in politics in 1942 when he headed the southern California organization for Warren's first gubernatorial campaign. He performed a similar service for incumbent Sen. Knowland in 1946, the same year he served as public director for Mr. Nixon's first campaign.

Despite a frequently troubled private life, the jowly Chotiner was popular with a myriad of lawyers, politicians and reporters for a quick and sometimes sardonic sense of humor. "He always made the campaign workers feel they were somebody important," recalled one veteran of the California campaigns.

Mr. Chotiner was preparing to assume an important role in the 1965 Eisenhower-Nixon re-election campaign when a Senate subcommittee asked him to explain his dealings with two clothing manufacturers accused of kickbacks to government procurement offices. He denied the charges and the investigation was dropped.

However, the investigation apparently cost Mr. Chotiner a role in the campaign, and he subsequently played only a minor part in Mr. Nixon's unsuccessful



Associated Press Photos

Murray Chotiner is pictured in 1971 at his Washington law office, a block from the White House.

1970 attempt by the Nixon administration to win Senate elections against "radical" candidates. Some of Mr. Chotiner's friends say Mr. Nixon had hired him for the Senate campaign after a newspaper article appeared declaring that Mr. Nixon had abandoned his former campaign manager.

Essentially, Mr. Chotiner never got along with the crew-cut, confident young businessman types that came to typify both the Nixon administration and the Committee to Re-elect the President. He also was not on close terms with Nixon aides H.R. Haldeman and John D. Ehrlichman and, during the 1972 campaign, was given the largely token job of "ballot security."

In private conversations Mr. Chotiner became increasingly critical of the "stupid" conduct that had led to Watergate. "Murray would have run a tough campaign but it wouldn't have been stupid," Mazo said yesterday. "I also doubt that it would have been crooked."

Mr. Chotiner played a role in the largely unsuccessful

1960 and the California governorship in 1962.

Nonetheless, he remained loyal to Mr. Nixon and convinced that he could some day be elected President.

His ex-wife, Mimi Nemeth, said in a recent interview that she regarded Mr. Nixon and Chotiner as essentially the same: "The two men are so similar that it's eerie. . . . They look more alike than brothers do. They both have the receding hairline, the crinkly hair, the five o'clock shadow, the jowls. When (John) Mitchell became attorney general, I began calling it the jowl administration."

When Mr. Nixon became President in 1969 he attempted to install Mr. Chotiner as the No. 2 man at the Republican National Committee, an action that precipitated the resignation of Chairman Ray Bliss. Subsequently, Rogers Morton took the job after winning a pledge that Mr. Chotiner would not be appointed to the job.