

Ford: Pulsar's Better Idea?

By Maxine Cheshire

Along with their Christmas decorations this year, some jewelry stores around the country are displaying a blown-up photograph of President Ford wearing an electronic Pulsar wrist-watch.

The picture was taken when he appeared in October at the historic House Judiciary subcommittee hearings at which he explained his reasons for pardoning former President Richard M. Nixon.

The photo, along with a facsimile of The New York Times front page on which it appeared, was sent out for nationwide promotion purposes last month by Pulsar's manufacturer, Time Computer Inc. of Lancaster, Pa.

The watch was a gift last February from White House legal counsel Philip D. Buchen, the President's former law partner and one of his closest personal friends.

Mr. Ford was then Vice President. Buchen was at that time a member of the board of directors of the Star Watch Case Co. of Ludington, Mich., which makes the Pulsar watch case. He was also their lawyer.

Buchen, who already owned one Pulsar given to him by the Star company's president, Edgar Schwaibold, was given another by Schwaibold.

According to White House spokesman Larry



President Ford, Pulsar on wrist, testifying on the Nixon pardon before the House Judiciary Subcommittee in October.

New York Times Photo

Speaks, Buchen decided to pass his second watch along to "his old friend, Jerry Ford." Spokesmen for the White House and the watch manufacturers all state flatly that neither the Star company nor Pulsar knew this would happen or that the watch was originally part of any promotion scheme.

Schwaibold is out of the country, but his wife said last week that "You must be very careful to say that my husband gave the watch to Mr. Buchen and Mr. Buchen then gave it to Mr. Ford. Make that distinction. It is a very delicate matter."

However, Pulsar's spokesman, Martin Gitlin, said last week that Schwaibold notified Pulsar that "Ford now owns one of our watches" and alerted them to watch for him to wear it in public on occasions when he might be photographed.

Pulsar's parent company, HMW Industries Inc., was almost bankrupt four years ago before they perfected their electronic timepiece and began promoting it as an international status symbol among world leaders and show business stars.

The names of VIPs who buy Pulsars or acquire them as gifts usually find their way into press releases.

President Ford may be the first Chief Executive to actually own a Pulsar, but he is not the first Chief Executive to be touted in Pulsar's publicity as an owner.

A press release dated Oct. 31, 1973, claimed

that former President Nixon got one as a Christmas present from his daughter, Julie Eisenhower.

According to Gitlin, the "Nixon watch" was purchased at Tiffany's in New York. But Robert Swanson, who handles the Nixons' account there, says that Mrs. Eisenhower only inquired about a Pulsar for her father and never actually bought one.

Last year sales of 60,000 Pulsars grossed \$9 million. This year, according to published reports, the watches are selling at the rate of 10,000 a month. Two oil-rich Kuwaiti sheiks bought \$80,000 worth at one time from Washington's Charles Schwartz & Son.

The Shah of Iran owns four, according to Pulsar. Ethiopia's deposed Haile Selassie bought several. So did Jordan's King Hussein, who passes them out with his royal crest engraved on the back.

Vice President Nelson Rockefeller gave Pulsars to Republican governors who visited him at his Pocantico Hills estate in May, 1973. His brother, David, chairman of the board of Chase Manhattan Bank in New York, took several with him to use as gifts when he visited China.

Pulsars start at \$285 for a stainless steel model and run up to \$2,700. The one President Ford wears, according to the White House, is a gold-filled model that retails for \$395.

Although Mr. Ford received the watch in February, he did not start wearing it regularly until two months ago. For a while, he wore it almost every day. He apparently stopped two weeks ago, after reporters started asking questions about the watch.

Buchen is one of the White House lawyers currently advising the President in the formulation of a new policy on private gifts from American and foreign citizens.

Some of President Ford's advisers want him to announce that he will henceforth decline to accept nonofficial gifts from anyone if they are worth more than a nominal value.

If past administrations are any indication, President Ford and his family can expect to receive around 18,000 domestic and foreign private gifts this year. Most will be only tokens of esteem, with little monetary value, but some will be costly items such as jewelry, paintings and antiques.

These do not come under the Foreign Gifts and Decorations Act of 1966, which declares that all gifts from "kings," princes or foreign states" worth more than \$50 are the property of the U.S. government.

There is no law that specifically bars First Families from accepting nonofficial largesse, although lesser government officials and employees are prohibited from doing so by a federal code of ethics and conflict of interest legislation.