

# President, Now Confident, Shuns Isolation

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A year ago, he was living in a modest suburban home, rising early to fix his own breakfast, starting his day by reading the sports pages.

Today, he lives in a mansion, waited on by a retinue of servants and aides eager to do his bidding. He starts his day by reading a predigested summary of world news.

Have all the royal trappings and the burdens of office changed Gerald R. Ford? He says not.

"I don't think I have changed any in my appearance or my actions or my attitudes," he said yesterday as he relaxed in a brocaded arm chair in his sunny Oval Office overlooking the White House gardens.

It is true that he looks no older than he did on that fateful day of Aug. 9, nearly a year ago, when he stood in the East Room to take his

oath of office and proclaim: "My fellow Americans, our national nightmare is over."

He is still the same conservative, too, who espoused Republican doctrine in a hundred ballrooms across the nation in the waning days of the Nixon Administration.

## More Sure of Himself

But nearly a year in the Presidency has changed Gerald Ford in one notable way: He is far more sure of himself.

He no longer stumbles over his words, as he once did, when asked about foreign policy. His answers may reveal an occasional sketchy knowledge of the subject, but he speaks confidently and without hesitation.

Too, he no longer seems to view himself as a substitute President as he did in those first months after Richard M. Nixon's hasty departure from office.

His attitude today seems to reflect the words he used so often during his eight

months as Vice President: "I am my own man."

It is obvious, too, that he does not share the view of some of his predecessors that being President is one of the loneliest jobs in the world.

"I am very happy," he said. "I enjoy getting up every morning and thinking of all the problems we have to work on, and I don't hurry away at night because I want to finish what we had on the agenda."

He also feels that he has avoided some of the pitfalls of former Presidents swept up in a system that seems to encourage a "kingly Presidency."

## Degree of Openness

"We run the White House differently," he said, insisting that it is a far more open place and that he is not isolated from problems by over zealous aides.

The degree of openness in the White House is subject to challenge in some re-

spects. For instance, President Ford does not allow press coverage of White House social receptions, aside from formal introductory remarks. Such receptions were open to the press in previous Administrations.

But it is true that the President and many of his top aides are far more accessible than those of previous Administrations.

This can be attributed in part to the President's own style of operations during his quarter-century in the House and his eight months as Vice President. Amiable and forthright, he was one of the most accessible politicians in Washington through all those years.

But he says it was a book that he read as Vice President that strengthened his determination to avoid a "kingly Presidency" in the event he should ever assume that office.

The book was "The Twilight of the Presidency" by George Reedy, who had been press secretary for a time to President Johnson. In it, Mr. Reedy wrote gloomily of the remoteness and isolation of Presidents, shielded from people and problems of their own staffs.

Gerald Ford was impressed by what he read and ordered every member of his Vice-Presidential staff to read the book. He also suggested that it might be a good idea for every White House aide to read it.

"Presidents develop this aura of infallibility," he remarked, just months before taking over the office himself. "They all operate the same way."

The Reedy book, he said, convinced him that "some staffs get carried away just by the fact that they occupy an office over there [the White House], whether the President wants them to operate that way or not."

This week, asked if he felt he had avoided the royal trappings of office, President Ford replied, "We have tried to avoid them, and I know we have avoided most of them, if not all of them."

It is obvious, he went on, that a President has "a lot of conveniences" he would not otherwise have, but "I don't think that that has changed me any."

Asked if he felt any nostalgia for the suburban home where he and his family lived for many years before entering the White House, he smiled and said, "That was a wonderful place to live, but this is comfortable, too."