

Our President's Surprising Conduct



Arthur Hoppe

PLEASE FORGIVE my drawn and haggard look this morning, but I grow weary under the heavy burden of running the country. It is a lonely, thankless job.

I've had to assume this grim responsibility, of course, because of the recent behavior of President Nixon — which, to say the least, has been surprising.

"Surprise!" says the President, popping into the White House press room the other day. "I just wanted you boys to know," he says, "that I'm off to Moscow in May to maybe have a nuclear ban or two with the Russkies."

And, oh, how he enjoys the startled look in the eyes of the ace newsmen!

"Surprise!" he says, popping up on television, "I'll be heading for Peking any day now to make peace with those 750 million heathen Chinese."

Or, "Surprise!" he says. "I just froze your wages and prices and floated your dollar. So have a nice day."

If he isn't making the surprise appointment of a Texas Democrat to his Cabinet, he's holding a surprise meeting in Alaska with the Emperor of Japan.

It's clear that Mr. Nixon dearly loves surprises. His administration's been one surprise after another. In fact, what we're dealing with these days is Government by Surprise.

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IT PLACES a terrible burden on us ace newsmen. In the good old days, we'd simply dash off a line like: "But it's perfectly clear that Mr. Nixon would no more fire J. Edgar Hoover than he would toss Mrs. Nixon out of the White House for some floozie."

That was fine. We ace newsmen sound-

ed as though we were running the country and we didn't have a care in the world. But now!

Write a line like that and the next day there's Mr. Nixon on television again. "Surprise!" And there goes Mr. Hoover and Mrs. Nixon in one fell swoop.

No wonder our nerves are all a jangle. Just last week, a Washington colleague in a piece on the SALT talks thoughtlessly threw in the sentence: "But, of course, President Nixon would never launch a first strike against the Russians."

He awoke that night in a cold sweat crying, "Good Lord! What have I done?" But, fortunately, he was able to kill the sentence before publication — thus saving the world from nuclear holocaust.

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TRUE, power has its rewards. Lobbyists and influence peddlers are constantly taking us ace newsmen to lunch, pleading with us to predict that Mr. Nixon would be looney to support their cause or appoint their client.

But it isn't easy. In the lonely hours of the night, each of us ace newsmen must ask himself that unbearable question: "Have I, in all fairness, belittled the chances of the best possible man for the job?" Or: "Have I, in my wisdom, predicted that Mr. Nixon would avoid at all costs the best possible course for my country?"

Naturally, however, even the powers of us ace newsmen have their limits.

For example, Mr. Nixon is so thoroughly committed to his policy of gradual withdrawal from Vietnam that he could never bring our boys home overnight and thus end the war in a twinkling.

Pass it on.

Meet Arthur Hoppe in person today at noon in the Emporium downtown where he will be autographing his new book, "Mr. Nixon and My Other Problems."