

SFE Examiner OCT 5 1972

A Rare Look at Nixon

in His Hideaway

By Victor Wilson

S.F. Examiner—Page 29
☆☆☆ Thurs., Oct. 5, 1972

WASHINGTON — (NNS) — When President Nixon wants to get out of the White House and into his "hideaway," he simply walks across fence-enclosed West Executive Avenue to the old Executive Office Building, up one flight of steep gray stone steps, and there he is.

Only a favored few have ever entered the second-floor EOB hideaway. So Washington correspondent and columnist Frank Van der Linden has scored what newsmen call a "beat" by being able to tell what it's like.

The reporter, there for a rare solo interview, was impressed first by what he terms "the symbols" of presidential power: White telephones in four convenient places — on a desk, an oval table in a corner, on an end table beside the red and white sofa, and on another end table next to a yellow overstuffed arm chair. Nixon can reach nearly anyone or nearly any place in the world on one of those phones.

Van der Linden, one of the few capital newsmen close to Nixon, also was impressed by the arm chair, a presidential favorite. Nixon has spent so many hours in it reading that its back cover simply wore out. The whole chair then was re-covered with its new yellow fabric.

Writing in his latest book, "Nixon's Quest for Peace" (Luce, \$6.95), Van der Linden says he noticed, too, controls for a stereo system on the end table, its twin speakers concealed in the room's window draperies. He also spotted a couple of record albums labeled "Rhapsody in Blue" and "Victory at Sea." Nixon's a classical music fan, but likes much contemporary music, too.

As for the rest of the non-working furnishings, Van der Linden writes, Nixon has surrounded himself in his hideaway with loved and familiar things, such as photos of himself, his wife and their two daughters, so arranged on racks that it's possible to kaleidoscope his political

career from a young California House member to the pinnacle of American power.

(The EOB itself, incidentally, is a Victorian gingerbread castle on Pennsylvania Avenue, the writer explains, a fortress of gray granite walls, chimneys, mansard roofs and columns. An anonymous wit once called it "American Ironic." It originally housed the State, War and Navy departments; now its other high-ceilinged rooms house Vice President Agnew, and beves of presidential assisants.)

Van der Linden, during his interview, noticed also some not-so-well-known marks of time on the President: "His face had more wrinkles, the lines were more deeply etched; his hair had a few more streaks of gray." But the dark brown eyes were bright and alert, and his "demeanor" befitted the President of the United States.

"He speaks of international affairs in the lingo of sports," Van der Linden goes on. "He refuses to 'bug out' in Vietnam; he plays his 'blue chips' in poker games . . .

with the Russians." Of one politician, Nixon remarked that "he's trying to cut me up," and vows "I'll pull the rug out from under him." His talk includes a few "hells" and "damns."

Though the public has never seen him do so, Van Der Linden says, Nixon is a briar pipe smoker, enjoys an occasional after-dinner cigar. The writer quotes a Nixon companion: "He's not the world's most elegant pipe smoker. He spits a lot."

Also seldom if ever seen in public, the author goes on, is Nixon wearing glasses. But he "uses them for his hours of close reading," and in conversation, sometimes waves the spectacles for emphasis, or nibbles at the frames.

Van der Linden is able to write that Nixon keeps his weight "down to a steady 170 pounds." He does so, the newsman says, "by having a five-minute breakfast, and a cottage cheese lunch." He is an infrequent golfer, and a rather confirmed walker.

After lunch, Van der Linden says, Nixon usually naps in a tiny study off the Oval Office in the White House, and at about 3 p.m. starts his "second day." He spends as much of an afternoon in the EOB hideaway as he can, and if a formal dinner is scheduled for evening, "he can bathe, shave, dress in white tie and tails and be out on the North Portico to greet the guest of honor — all in 26 minutes."

Van der Linden has a couple of acute points about Nixon and the Vietnam War. He writes . . . "Nixon is still a hawk at heart, who clings to his lifelong conviction that peace can be secured only by strength and courage and an iron will . . ."

Then, surprisingly:

"His off-the-record conversation is even more hawkish than his public remarks . . . In private, he is tougher than Spiro Agnew."