

Kings, Princes, Foreign States, Jewels and the 'Gifts Unit'

By Maxine Cheshire

On March 28, First Lady Pat Nixon, on the advice of White House counsel J. Fred Buzhardt, removed a stack of velvet jewel boxes from the wallsafe of her bedroom and dispatched them by messenger to the Gifts Unit in the Executive Office Building.

The boxes contained valuable gems given to her and her daughters over the past five years by King Faisal of oil-rich Saudi Arabia and two of his half-brothers.

The gifts, never acknowledged by the White House until The Washington Post was able to verify their existence from other sources in early March, include:

- A \$52,400 matched set of emeralds and diamonds (necklace, bracelet, earrings, ring and brooch) presented to President Nixon as a gift to his wife by Prince Fahd during a visit to the Oval Office on Oct. 14, 1969.

- A shoulder-length pair of earrings set with marquise diamonds and cabachon rubies presented to Mrs. Nixon by King Faisal on May 28, 1971, during a state visit.

- A diamond bracelet, containing a watch concealed in the clasp, given to Mrs. Nixon by Prince Sultan in July, 1972, along with a diamond and ruby pin for her daughter Julie and a diamond and sapphire pin for her daughter Tricia.

The \$52,400 figure for the set of emeralds and diamonds comes from Buzhardt, who confirms that President and Mrs. Nixon had the stones analyzed by Gem Trade Labs in New York on Dec. 10, 1969, and an appraisal made by Harry Winston, Inc., on Feb. 26, 1970.

Buzhardt says that he does not know the Nixons' purpose in determining the values of those pieces, nor does he know if the other jewelry was similarly appraised. The evaluations were not made for insurance purposes, he said, because the stones were "never insured."

At least a portion of the jewelry—the diamond bracelet and the pins—had gone unrecorded by the White House Gifts Unit for nearly two years until a reporter began making inquiries several months ago.

The Gifts Unit is a little-publicized office in the White House that processes about 3,500 gifts a year to the First Family—about 20,000 since President Nixon took office. About 90 per cent are from private U. S. citizens who send crocheted pot-holders, elephant-shaped cookies, amateur paintings and other items most of which have little monetary or historic value. An estimated 10 per cent, or 350 gifts each year, come from foreigners.

The records of gifts fill 200 filing drawers of index card size. The White House says emphatically that all such gifts are considered public property, but at the same time it maintains that the records are con-

fidential and part of the President's private papers. Reporters are barred from examining the files to determine what jewels, paintings, or other objects of substantial value have been given. Such disclosure, Buzhardt argues, "might embarrass donors—especially foreigners—and lead to diplomatic problems."

Mrs. Nixon and her daughters have "never for a minute" considered the Saudi jewels to be their own property, Buzhardt insists, and they have always intended to "turn them over" when the President leaves office. Until then, he considers it "perfectly proper" for them to be worn by members of the First Family.

Article I, Section 9, of the Constitution provides: "No person holding any office of profit or trust under them shall, without the consent of the Congress, accept any present, emolument, office or title of any kind from any king, prince or foreign state."

Congress, through legislation originally passed in 1881, has held such gifts illegal. Statutory revisions, passed in 1966, also forbid anyone related to government officials by "blood, marriage or adoption" to take gifts worth more than \$50.

The law recognizes that there are frequently times in international diplomacy when "it appears that to

See VIP, C3, Col. 1

VIP, From C1

refuse the gift would be likely to cause offense or embarrassment or otherwise adversely affect the foreign relations of the United States."

Gifts of this kind, including state gifts which are exchanged as a matter of etiquette between the President and visiting heads of state on state visits, are "deemed to have been accepted on behalf of the United States." They become the property of the U. S. government and are supposed to be turned over to some public repository, such as the National Archives, the Smithsonian Institution or presidential libraries.

Buzhardt declared:

"These private gifts (by Prince Fahd and Prince Sultan) are not technically state gifts — which are normally an exchange and publicly announced—but they are in the same category as state gifts. They are public property, in effect, and they must go to a public repository when the President's term ends."

But he declined to allow a reporter to screen gift records, claiming it could "cause international difficulties" with the countries involved.

"We don't know what problems it [disclosure] might create for them," he said. "If they treat the gifts . . . give them privately . . . then we have some obligation to abide by the rules of the international community.

"Foreigners feel a great deal differently in these matters than we do . . . they have different traditions about such things. Many aren't democracies . . . and they'd consider disclosure or personal gifts winding up in public repositories an insult.

"It could cause real trouble if all these gifts started getting listed in the paper . . . what they are worth . . . what country gave what. And we are accountable to

the customs and practices of the international community in this matter."

Under federal rules and regulations which implement the 1881 law and the 1966 revisions passed by Congress, the U. S. Chief of Protocol is charged with keeping records of all foreign gifts to either civilian or military personnel in all three branches of government. And he does, except for those received by the First Family.

President Nixon's legal advisers, according to Buzhardt, take the position that the President and his family are probably exempt from the rules and regulations revised in 1966 at the end of the Johnson administration. But they acknowledge that position has never been tested.

In 1969, right after President Nixon took office, there were a series of "phone calls, meetings and an exchange of memos" about how to handle foreign gifts between former Chief of Protocol Emil (Bus) Mosbacher and presidential assistant John Ehrlichman, who later resigned over Watergate.

"We decided not to go on the record one way or the other at that time as to whether Congress meant the law to apply to the First Family," Buzhardt said. "It had never been adjudicated in court."

So that the First Family "could comply with the law if the question was ever raised," Buzhardt said, it was decided to "keep precise records" on all gifts, foreign and domestic, but to maintain all files in the White House instead of having the protocol office keep track of foreign gifts. The existing Gifts Unit at the White House was expanded and the protocol office's records abolished.

To ensure that the First Family would be in compliance with the law if necessary, the Chief of Protocol, Congress' designated watchdog over such gifts, was given "access" to the White House files if he should need to see them.

Buzhardt says that he is confident this system would be "in compliance" with the law if Congress or the courts should ever rule that the First Family is not exempt. If they do not, he conceded, the records will continue to be considered part of the President's private files that go with him when he leaves office. There are now no duplicates elsewhere.

Buzhardt refused to say how many other gifts of jewels or other valuables the Nixons have received, either as state gifts or privately, from foreigners in the past five years.

Although he allowed a reporter to see the room in the Executive Office Building where the records are kept, he declined to permit anyone to inspect the records, except for three index cards pertaining specifically to the Saudi jewels.

On March 29, a clerk was instructed by Buzhardt to pull the cards on King Faisal's visit in 1971 and two visits by Prince Fahd in 1969 and 1971.

In attempting to do so, the clerk pulled a card on the visit of Prince Sultan, who came in 1972. They

all have the same last name: Abd al-Aziz al-Saud.

That card bears the notation that the diamond bracelet and pins were "not received" in the Gifts Unit until the previous day, "3/28/74." It was that day a reporter asked to see records on specific Saudi jewels which former White House employees said existed.

The diamond bracelet and the pins had by that time been in the possession of Mrs. Nixon and her daughters for nearly two years without being processed by the Gifts Unit.

The card indicates the unit was informed on July 1, 1972—before Mr. Nixon ran for re-election—that "jewelry" was among the items given by Prince Sultan. But a specific description reflecting its value was not attached until March 28 of this year. The card's primary file classification was "Clothing."

For more than a week, in March, the White House was uncertain whether the clerk had erroneously credited Prince Sultan with Prince Fahd's gift. Buzhardt checked to determine if there was still another unrecorded gift of Saudi jewels.

Finally, he said there was not. When Prince Fahd came back the second time, Buzhardt said, he brought only a letter from King Faisal.

Prince Fahd, half-brother of King Faisal, is regarded as the second most powerful man in Saudi Arabia.

Although another brother, Prince Khalid, has been designated King Faisal's formal successor, it is expected that Prince Fahd will become the main force behind the throne and could become King if Khalid, who has undergone heart surgery, should elect to abdicate.

Prince Sultan is Saudi Arabian minister of defense and aviation.

Asked if the Nixon administration's policy of treating records of gifts considered "public property" as "confidential" was not open to potential abuse, Buzhardt replied:

"If anyone wants to think that state actions in this administration would be influenced by the President and his family getting gifts that they know they are going to have to turn over to some institution for the public to gawk at . . . well, that's just far-fetched."

Buzhardt's position is reinforced by another White House spokesman, communications chief Ken Clawson, who says: "No member of this First Family would ever violate a law of the United States of America and anyone who thinks they would has a warped mind."

Although the Chief of Protocol has had "access" to the records, that access has not been exercised in a watchdog sense.

Mosbacher could not be reached. But Marion Smoak, who has been in protocol since early 1970 and had served two years as acting chief before stepping down on April 1, says he never found any need to look at the records and had "never heard" of jewels being given by the Saudis or anyone else. However, he

is "confident the records are good."

Smoak was not informed of the rubies and diamonds from King Faisal, although Buzhardt said they were publicized at the time as an official state gift.

According to the White House, a press release on the jewels was distributed to reporters covering the visit of King Faisal. However, neither The Washington Post nor The New York Times stories for that period mention the jewelry.

A check of news photographs shows that Mrs. Nixon and Tricia have worn various pieces of the Saudi jewels publicly in the last two years. But very few who saw them apparently suspected they were real.

Even Mrs. Nixon's press secretary, Helen Smith, who says she knew nothing about the existence of the jewels until recently, was under the impression that the First Lady and her daughters had been wearing "costume jewelry."

Mrs. Nixon wore the emerald and diamond necklace and earrings to a state dinner last October for Ivory Coast President and Mrs. Felix Houphouet-Boigny. She has worn the same earrings separately on several occasions, including her birthday celebration in March, 1973, where country music star Merle Haggard performed.

Tricia apparently borrowed her mother's ruby and diamond earrings for a \$1000-a-plate Republican dinner at which she appeared with Vice President Spiro T. Agnew in March, 1972.

The Washington Post first heard vague rumors about gifts of valuable "emeralds and diamonds" in 1971. But numerous attempts to get confirmation from the White House or the State Department were unsuccessful.

Mrs. Nixon's press secretary said she had never heard of any jewels and could find no one in the Gifts Unit to give her information until three years later, when a reporter was able to get specific information from sources independent of the First Family.

White House employees who have either retired recently or are nearing retirement, were finally persuaded to describe what jewels they could recall from memory.

Anxious to clear up the matter, Mrs. Smith supplied The Washington Post with a photograph of the emeralds and diamonds from Prince Fahd and announced that they had been sent to the National Archives with other gifts being held in safekeeping for a proposed Nixon library.

A quick check established that the emeralds and diamonds were not in the Archives and Mrs. Smith was subsequently instructed by White House Chief of Staff Alexander Haig to refer all inquiries to Buzhardt.

Buzhardt had some trouble tracking down the jewels.

He finally located most of them in Mrs. Nixon's safe. Tricia had one or more pieces with her in New York. Not all of what he was looking for, he discovered, was a matter of record.

There is no precedent for judging the propriety of having the Nixon women wearing such jewels until

the President leaves office because the same situation has never come up in quite the same circumstances in previous administrations.

Former First Lady Mamie Eisenhower got a diamond necklace from King Faisal's predecessor, King Saud, in 1957, and she is still wearing it. If she intends to leave it to the Eisenhower Library in Abilene, Kan., she has not informed the curator there.

But the law in those days did not make it illegal for wives, including First Ladies, to take such gifts. Lady Bird Johnson was the first President's wife to come under the 1966 statute and if she ever received or wore any expensive foreign gifts while she was in the White House, the fact escaped notice by the public or the press.

Mrs. Eisenhower was discreet about wearing King Saud's diamonds until she had left the White House because there was a furor in Washington at the time over Saudi Arabian largesse.

King Saud had played Santa Claus to the spouses of several American officials, giving \$12,000 worth of jewelry to the wife of a World Bank official (which she returned) and an Oldsmobile convertible to the wife of a deputy Chief of Protocol who was demoted and later ousted over the incident.

The Nixons themselves came under some criticism at the same time over gifts, but they were not from the Saudis. Although the Vice President was not supposed to keep foreign gifts, Drew Pearson wrote that the Nixons took with them when they left office "a museum piece rug from the Shah of Iran, a priceless Buddha head from the King of Afghanistan, a teakwood chest inlaid with mother of pearl from Mme. Chiang Kai-shek and three crateloads of gifts (from Latin America) including a silverware set valued at \$15,000."

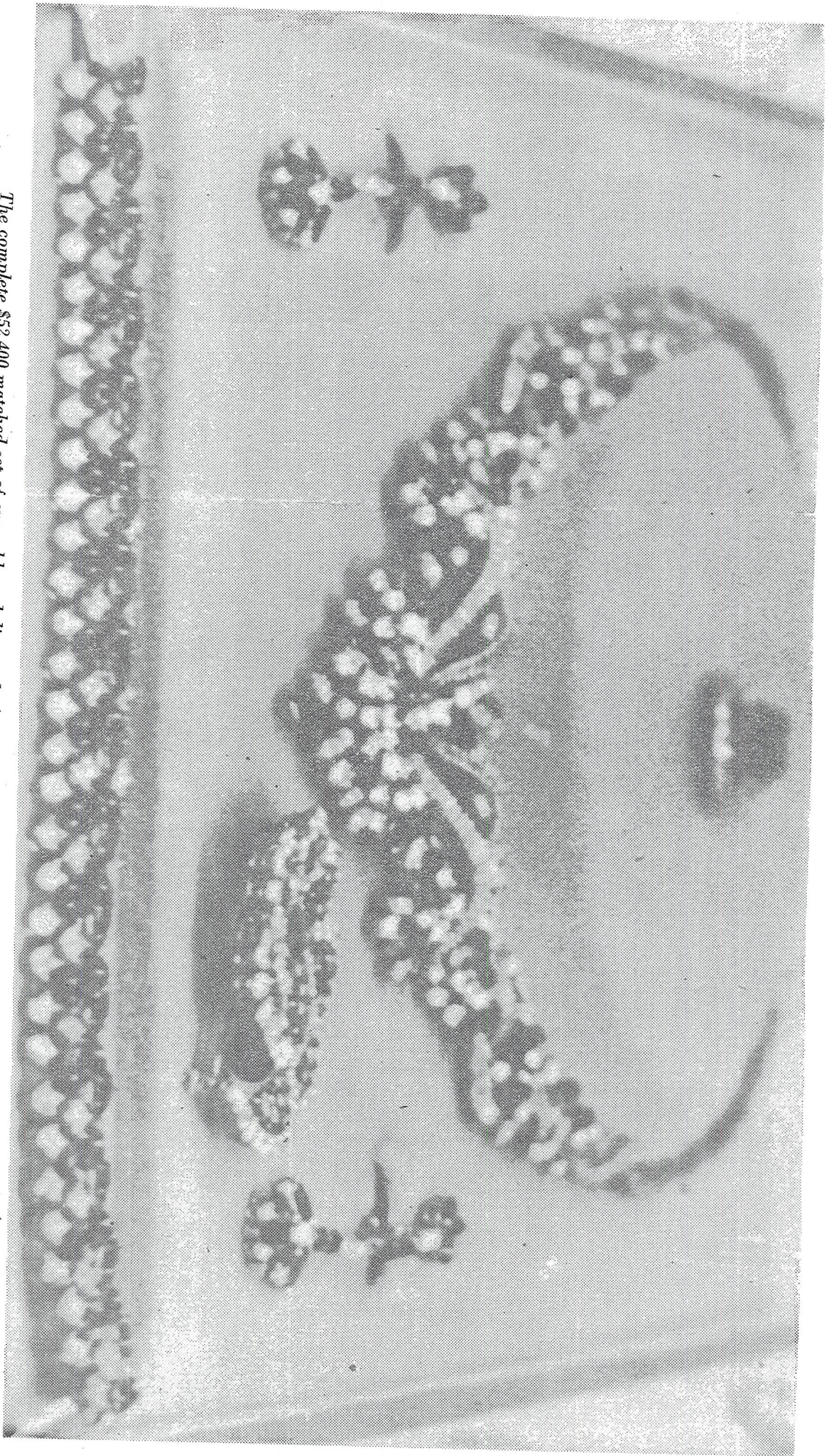
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Pat Nixon wearing diamond and emerald earrings given to her by Prince Fahd in 1969. The occasion is Mrs. Nixon's birthday celebration at the White House in March, 1973.



Tricia Nixon Cox wearing ruby and diamond earrings given to her mother in 1971 by King Faisal. The occasion is a \$1,000-a-plate dinner which Mrs. Cox appeared at with former Vice President Spiro T. Agnew in March, 1972.



The complete \$52,400 matched set of emeralds and diamonds (necklace, bracelet, earrings, ring and brooch) from Prince Fahd.

ABD al-AZIZ, Sultan Ibn
Minister of Defense
and Aviation
Saudi Arabia

Julie & Tricia
CLOTHING:(costume) P FL
a typical Arabian costume,
consisting of jacket, trousers
robe and head gear, for the
President

JEWELRY:
"jewelry for Mrs. Nixon, Julie and Tricia"(not rec'd
Gift Unit.) 3/28/74 rec'd in Gift Unit-a bracelet type
diamond watch, which was for Mrs. Nixon, a brooch
of rubies and diamonds for Julie, the brooch of sapphires
and diamonds for Tricia(not rec'd).

REC'D: ?

BY: Mrs. Nixon to
Gift Unit

ACK'D:

7/1/72
RN

Card

DISPOSITION:

DATE:

* - Not rec'd Gift Unit

** Archives - Box

631

1972

da

16-71700-2

GPO

A "gifts unit" file card on gifts for the Nixon family from Saudi Arabian Prince Sultan in 1972. "Clothing" is the primary classification of the card, with a notation that "jewelry" had been brought for the President's wife and daughters. The jewelry was not received in the gifts unit and fully described until March 28, 1974, when a reporter asked White House counsel J. Fred Buzhardt to determine its whereabouts.



Mrs. Nixon wearing the earrings and necklace from the \$52,400 Prince Fahd gift at a White House state dinner for Ivory Coast President Felix Houphouet-Boigny in October, 1973.