

# Nixon Staff, Under Gray San Clemente Skies, Tries

By JOHN HERBERS

Special to The New York Times.

SAN CLEMENTE, Calif., Jan. 9—President Nixon celebrated his 61st birthday today with an awkward surprise party in his office that underscored the enormous changes that have taken place in his Administration and his handling of the Presidency in the last year.

Last year, as he ended his sixth decade of life, Mr. Nixon was confidently wielding possibly the greatest political power held by an American President as he entered a second term after a re-election landslide. Today, even his sup-

porters conceded that the most pressing question facing him was how to survive in office as a result of assorted scandals that had rocked his Administration.

Mr. Nixon came here Dec. 26 to escape the midwinter dreariness of Washington. Since then it has rained almost constantly, there was a minor earthquake, the tide that washed the beaches was the highest in 300 years and the news has been filled with reports of mudslides and accidents.

This morning, the skies still gray and overcast, the 25 or so members of his staff at the

Presidential compound overlooking the Pacific here sought to cheer the President with a surprise party in his office.

While Mr. Nixon was conferring with his chief of staff, Gen. Alexander M. Haig Jr., the aides, followed by a small pool of reporters and photographers, crowded into the office. The staff, Mrs. Nixon, the Nixons' daughter, Mrs. Tricia Cox, and the President's good friend, Charles G. Rebozo, struck up a squeaky "Happy Birthday" and rolled out a large flat cake decorated in blue, yellow and white with "Happy birthday, Mr. President."

Mr. Nixon stood at his desk before a large oceanfront window. He wore a maroon jacket and tie and gray slacks. His face seemed somewhat puffy and weary but he smiled broadly as the cake was placed on his desk.

"Hey, King, want a little lick?" he called to his Irish setter, King Timahoe, which was mingling with the crowd. "King, you get first taste."

After a little coaxing, the dog began licking a corner of the cake as the crowd laughed.

"He was given to me on my birthday five years ago," Mr. Nixon said. "He did not like cake then."

## Drives 100 Miles for Night

In the confusion, the President leaned against his desk and the cake and got a considerable amount of gooey icing on his hands and jacket. He looked hesitant about how to deal with the situation.

"Let King lick it off," someone said. Mr. Nixon sat in his chair and King returned and carried out his orders. The crowd laughed lightly.

The staff also gave Mr. Nixon 61 red roses. He directed that these be divided among women members of the staff. Then, motioning toward the gray skies, he said, "Take the rest

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## to Cheer Up President With 61st Birthday Party

of the day off. Go out and enjoy the sun, the swimming."

Later in the day, Mr. Nixon and his family slipped away and drove to Palm Springs, more than 100 miles away, to spend the night on a private estate.

His aides, who were left behind, said that during the day many hundred telephone calls, card and letters wishing him a happy birthday came in from all over the country.

### Period of Isolation

Over the last year, Mr. Nixon has alternated between periods of isolation and periods of contact. Three days ago, he went unannounced for an automobile ride with Mr. Rebozo, who has been constantly at his side here. Last weekend, Roy L. Ash, director of the Office of Management and Budget, came from Washington to confer with the President about the new budget. He never saw the President. Instead, he spent much of Saturday conferring with General Haig, who presumably reported to Mr. Nixon.

Yesterday, the White House ended the disclosure phase of Operation Candor, an effort began in November to clear Mr. Nixon's name. It did so with the release of statements denying charges that Mr. Nixon acted improperly in interfering with antitrust ac-

tion against the International Telephone and Telegraph Corporation and raising the price of milk after being promised up to \$2-million in campaign funds from milk interests.

His assistants made it clear today that no further disclosures were planned, even though they had indicated at one time that many additional documents on those and other subjects would be released.

### Reassertion of Leadership

The statements yesterday marked a return to the use of political rhetoric that characterizes the President's defense before Operation Candor began. The statements consisted largely of a defense based on facts already known. But today, once again, the White House was saying, as it

said from time to time last year, that the President would reassert his leadership by taking charge of things.

"The President is looking forward," said his spokesman, Gerald L. Warren, "to working with the Congress, the Cabinet, the American people to attack the critical issues in both foreign and domestic policy—peace in the Middle East, the energy crisis, health, housing and manpower."

An extraordinary effort was being made to rebut reports that the President's power was not split among various factions in his Administration and that he was taking less of an active role in decisions than he did before the Watergate troubles.

"He is approaching this year in a positive way," Mr. Warren said, as the President, his family and Mr. Rebozo drove off to Palm Springs.