

Nixon: Depressed and Ill

In the debate over President Ford's pardon of his predecessor, the question of Richard Nixon's health emerged last week as a tantalizing issue. What role Nixon's mental and physical condition played in Ford's decision, and indeed what that condition was, were topics of conflicting reports and endless speculation. At week's end one fact became known: in a new attack of thrombophlebitis, Nixon has another painful blood clot in his left leg.

When he announced the pardon, Ford spoke of the allegations and accusations against Nixon as a threat to his health. Within the White House there was—and is—a widespread conviction that Nixon's state of health is precarious, and this view was apparently a factor in the President's decision to grant the pardon now. A report that Julie Nixon Eisenhower had made a tearful plea to Ford on her father's behalf was emphatically denied by her husband David, but other intermediaries could have brought Ford such a message. The President may also have been influenced by newspaper reports that Nixon was "terribly depressed."

Two days after the pardon, Tricia Nixon Cox's husband Edward telephoned the Associated Press to report that the former President "is in a deep depression" despite the pardon. Cox would not allow his name to be used in the report. Later in the week, David Eisenhower focused on his father-in-law's physical condition, which he said was poor.

Seeking sun and solace, Nixon had moved from one opulent California fortress to another. Just before the pardon was announced, he and Pat left fog-shrouded San Clemente and drove 150 miles east to the 200-acre Palm Springs estate of his friend Walter Annenberg, U.S. Ambassador to Britain. But his swollen and painful leg kept Nixon indoors, away from the 18-hole golf course and eleven gravity-fed lakes and pools. On Thursday night two helicopters carried the former President and his entourage back to San Clemente. The next morning Nixon's personal physician, Dr. Walter Tkach, flew in from Washington.

Tkach announced that he had found a new blood clot in Nixon's upper left leg. In an interview to be published next week in *Medical World News*, Tkach recalls that Nixon had had thrombophlebitis "at least once before, in the same place, in the same leg." Tkach says that he had feared a recurrence, especially because his stubborn patient refused to wear the elastic bandage he prescribed. Tkach also complained that "I can't get this man near a hospital," and he had no success on that score last week.

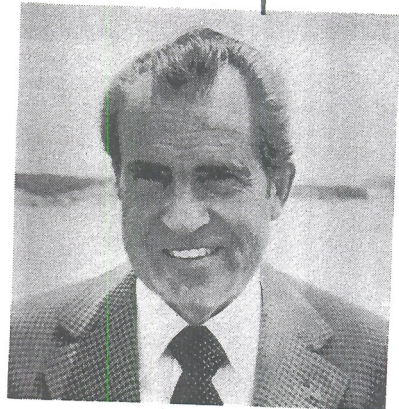
Nixon's ailment is a common one that annually afflicts more than 300,000 Americans. Thrombophlebitis is an inflammation of a vein (phlebitis) accompanied by a clot (thrombus) that has formed in the vein. It may occur anywhere in the body, but is most common in the legs, where clots seem to form more easily. People who sit or stand for long periods

are particularly susceptible, as are patients recovering from childbirth or surgery—one reason doctors get them out of bed as soon as possible. Once one is afflicted, however, bed rest (with the limb elevated) is usually the best therapy.

Anticoagulant drugs are often used to keep the clot from growing and therefore allowing it to be reabsorbed or to stay "fixed" to the vein wall, as Nixon's earlier clot has done. Although not in itself a serious ailment, if the deep veins are involved, thrombophlebitis can be dangerous because of the threat that a piece of the clot may break off and travel to the lungs, possibly causing death.

Nixon's mental and emotional state is difficult to assess, and is still the subject of conflicting reports. "Everyone is searching for clues," David Eisenhower told TIME last week. "He walked the Red Beach alone countless times in his 5½ years as President. That he is walking the Red Beach in solitude now does not mean that he is a broken man." Those who visit Nixon to discuss future projects such as his memoirs or the Nixon Foundation have found him "direct of mind" and "alert," but others describe him as "deeply depressed" and "very tired" and occasionally distracted.

On returning from San Clemente, Dr. Tkach provided the most pessimistic assessment of all. Nixon "is a ravaged man who has lost the will to fight," he said. Tkach added that he had agreed to let Nixon stay at home because the former President had told him: "If I go into the hospital, I'll never come out alive."



NIXON ON THE BEACH NEAR VENTURA, CALIF., LAST MONTH

