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Nixon at 62: Virtual Exile, Hard Times

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SAN CLEMENTE, Calif., Jan. 9— Five months to the day after resigning from the world's most powerful office, former President Richard M. Nixon quietly celebrated his 62d birthday today in virtual exile on his 26-acre compound.

Around him, the last trappings of power were being dismantled in anticipation of the Feb. 9 end of the six-month transition period provided by law for ex-Presidents. Within the next month, he will lose his free postage privileges, his White House-provided switchboard and the two military personnel who man it, and the Coast Guard detail protecting the entrance to La Casa Pacifica—already reduced

from a 24-hour, seven-day watch to an eight-hour weekday service.

Also departing will be President Nixon's closest personal aide, Ronald L. Zeigler, the loyal former press secretary, who is to leave in February to begin a six-month tour for W. Colston Lee, Inc., one of the nation's largest lecture promoters. Marine Lt. Col. Jack Brennan, Nixon's chief of staff, is to return to Marine headquarters in Washington and then to the Naval War College.

Nixon will be left with a small staff of secretaries and Secret Service security officers, a far cry from the massive technical and personnel machine that kept the Western White House functioning.

As for the former President, the few

friends and associates who have access to him report that he is still struggling back from the emotional and physical nadir of October, when he nearly died from complications of his chronic phlebitis condition. He is still weak, and thin, these individuals report, and his blood pressure fluctuates erratically. But, they add, he appears to be out of danger and gaining slowly.

Last Friday, two days after the verdict in the Watergate trial, Nixon for the first time since his illness ventured out of La Casa Pacifica to the adjoining Coast Guard base, where his federally maintained offices are located. Now, dressed casually in sweater and sport shirt, he makes the trip almost daily, walking the few

See NIXON, A6, Col. 1

NIXON, From A1

hundred yards and spending two or three hours in his office.

He has begun preliminary work on his memoirs with Dr. Frank Gannon, a writer and scholar who worked for him in the White House. He still tires quickly, friends say, and has not plunged in with his typical discipline. The holidays were a high point in the Nixon routine. Daughters Tricia and Julie and their husbands were here. A 10-foot tree, decorated by Mrs. Nixon stood in the living room of the main house. The family received short visits from actress Elizabeth Taylor and singer Frank Sinatra, who came by helicopter on different days to the Coast Guard base.

Sinatra later sent down a print of MGM's compilation of its musical movie history, "That's Entertainment," which the family watched a few days before Christmas. The former President displayed a detailed knowledge of the stars of the past, calling out their names as they appeared on the screen, even when others in the family were stumped as to their identities.

On that same evening, the daughters surprised him with a travelogue

of his Middle Eastern trip last June. Reportedly, he enjoyed the film, but said it didn't do justice to the size and enthusiasm of the crowds that greeted him.

From scattered reports, it appears that some of Nixon's fondest moments are spent recalling his impact on foreign affairs and the high regard in which he is held overseas. During a visit this week by Rabbi Baruch Korff, one of his staunchest supporters, Nixon displayed dozens of letters and telegrams with get-well and birthday wishes from foreign leaders. (Chou En-lai sent a get-well telegram in October, expressing "sincere wishes for your early recovery.")

Said Rabbi Korff: "When he held out some of the birthday greetings, his face, from a sad look, was suddenly lit up. It was a great lift."

The rabbi, who organized the National Committee for Fairness to the Presidency and the Nixon Justice Fund, added that one of the former President's repeated hopes is to play a role, perhaps as a lecturer in the United States and overseas, as an independent adviser in the field of foreign affairs.

"When Churchill was replaced by Atlee he made his way to America

and made the 'Iron Curtain' speech," said Rabbi Korff. "With the prestige he enjoyed overseas Mr. Nixon could certainly make a contribution."

The former President has been reading much about Sir Winston Churchill these days. Gannon, the aide helping with the memoirs, helped Randolph Churchill write a biography of his father, the British prime minister during World War II.

The rabbi, who spent several hours with Nixon over a two-day period, described his emotional state as ranging between "sadness over the course of events and hopeful for the future." On the topic of Watergate, Nixon spoke again of "errors of judgment" and being "too yielding to subordinates," said Korff, but the rabbi steered away from what he considered the delicate areas of Watergate whenever Nixon alluded to them.

Korff and others report that Nixon is burdened by a sense of mistreatment from both Congress and the Ford administration. These friends claim that in addition to legislation passed by Congress tying up the former President's official papers, Nixon has been unable to obtain personal mail, cartoons and other memorabilia left at the White House.

Korff said: "All his and Mrs. Nixon's personal effects, his personal records, his memorabilia from his entire career, his cartoon collections, his elephant and gavel collections and even his personal pin are being kept from him." (PEN - NYT)

In addition, the former President is reportedly troubled by financial problems. The phasing out of the transition support services (the General Services Administration is cutting down from nine to three full-time maintenance personnel requires Nixon to assume extensive costs out of a staff and services budget of only \$45,000 between now and the end of the fiscal year.

"They are going to have some real problems starting Feb. 9," said Warren Kane, clerk of the Senate Appropriations subcommittee that oversees the transition. Kane toured the San Clemente facilities this week, where trailer-style offices are being torn out and telephone lines disconnected. The Coast Guard force, which used to spend time planting flowers and sprucing up the grounds, has been cut in half to its normal complement of 10.



Associated Press

Ann Christie and Rabbi Korff show cake with 62 candles for Nixon.