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Sleepless Nixon Goes to Students

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WASHINGTON — Unable to sleep, President Nixon went to the Lincoln Memorial at dawn yesterday and pleaded with a handful of young peace demonstrators for understanding of his efforts to end the War in Vietnam.

Secret Service agents were horrified — in the President's words — that he left the barricaded White House to confront student protesters at the Lincoln Shrine.

Telling a newsman of his encounter with the young people, Nixon said:

"I told them that I know you think we are a bunch of so-and-sos — I used a stronger word to them — I know how you feel. You want to get the war over.

"Try to understand what we are doing. Sure, you came here to demonstrate. Go shout your slogans on the Ellipse. That is all right. Just keep it peaceful."

UNCONVINCED

Some of the students remained unconvinced, including two 20 year old sophomore girls from Syracuse University: Ronnie Kemper and Joan Pelletier.

"It was unreal. He was trying so hard to relate on a personal basis," Ronnie told a reporter. "But he wasn't really concerned with why we were here."

Joan said:

"I hope it was because he was tired but most of what he was saying was absurd. Here we had come from a university that's completely uptight, on strike, and when we told him where we were from, he talked about the football team. And when someone said he was from California, he talked about surfing.

"Afterwards we were wishing it had all been a dream."

Barbara Hirsch, 24, a social worker from Detroit, said "I was about to say my brother is awaiting orders to go to Vietnam or Cambodia. But before I got up my nerve he walked away."

CALLED REPORTER

Another Syracuse girl, Lynn Shatzkin, 21, said:

"He did not make sense. People would ask him questions and he would talk about something else."

Nixon had retired about 2 a.m. after his news conference but found he could not sleep. He got up and called United Press International White House correspondent Helen Thomas at her home at 3:30 a.m. to tell her of his

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See KPFA News, 9 May 70, this file

Lawrence Lipton, 15 May 70,
filed Indochina/Comment.

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esteem for the late Merri-
man Smith, former UPI chief
correspondent at the White
House.

Then he roused his
Cuban-born valet, Manuel
"Manolo" Sanchez, asked
him if he ever had seen the
Lincoln Memorial at night,
found out he hadn't and the
result was the five-minute
ride that brought the two of
them and a detail of what he
termed "petrified" Secret
Servicemen to the Memorial
at 5 a.m.

About eight students were
on hand. Before the Presi-
dent left nearly an hour lat-
er, about 50 people were on
hand.

"They were fine kids from
all over the country," Nixon
said when he returned to the
White House.

"I told them that I know it
is awfully hard to keep this
in perspective. I told them
that in 1939 I thought Neville
Chamberlain was the great-
est man living and Winston
Churchill was a madman.

"It was not until years lat-
er," Nixon added, "that I re-
alized that Neville Chamber-
lain was a good man, but
that Winston Churchill was
right."

WORRIED

Nixon said that he doubted
if his reference to the two
former British prime minis-
ters got over with the youths.

The Secret Service, Nixon
said, apparently was wor-
ried, because Sanchez kept
coming up to him and saying
there was a phone call for
him. But he said he told San-
chez: "I want to talk to these
people."

"It was one of the most in-
teresting experiences of my
life," Nixon said. He had
seen a student wearing a
jacket from his old school,
Duke University, and re-
marked that:

"Here at the Memorial I
was sort of carried back to
when I was in college myself
and in law school."

Nixon said he thought the
informal chat was far more
useful than bringing students
into the White House. "There
were no TV cameras and no
press," he said.

"They did not feel the awe-
some power of the White
House. I was trying to relate
to them in a way they could
feel I understood their prob-
lem."

He told them to have a
good time and "don't go
away bitter."

Sanchez said later he was
"amazed" at how respectful
the students were to Nixon.
He said one student booed
the President but others si-
lenced him with disapproving
stares.

HOTEL BREAKFAST

The nucleus of the students
at the Memorial, the original
eight, told Nixon they were
from Alfred University,
Alfred, N.Y.

Before he got back to the
White House, the President
surprised a few early morn-
ing sightseers by visiting the

Capitol and then driving to
the Mayflower Hotel for
breakfast.

Later he went across the
street to thank soldiers from
Ft. Myer, Va., and Ft.
Meade, Md., for the way they
had dealt with demonstra-
tions in the area last October
and November. Nixon said
those events were generally
peaceful and he was sure
yesterday's demonstration
would be, too.

He was back in the White
House by noon, starting time
for the activities on the El-
lipse. His family had driven
in a few minutes before from
Camp David, Md.

From the back windows
and the portico of the White
House, they could see the
demonstration.



President Nixon went out at dawn yesterday to Lincoln Memorial to talk to these antiwar demonstrators