

# Nixon Warms Up to a Cool (35°) Interview on TV

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SAN CLEMENTE, Jan. 4—The main item of conversation among the men who occupy the White House and those who cover it is not President Nixon's forthcoming meeting here with Japanese Prime Minister Sato (summits are getting to be a bit old hat these days) but his interview on the Columbia Broadcasting System Sunday night.

Mr. Nixon has not held a news conference in more than seven weeks, and therefore the one-hour show, and what it revealed of Mr. Nixon and the techniques of television itself, continue to provoke lively discussion.

To begin with, what Mr. Nixon said and did before and after the show intrigued the C.B.S. personnel concerned with the affair almost as much as the interview itself.

An old hand at the perils of television, he spent all Sunday afternoon "war-gaming" possible questions in his hide-away office in the Executive Office Building, and was so preoccupied with the coming encounter (according to an account he gave the man who interviewed him, Dan Rather) that he did not watch either of the championship football games that afternoon.

Minutes before the interview, Mr. Nixon exhibited a lively and knowledgeable interest in the technical arrangements, commenting on the placement of the cameras and rejecting (because it might have proved too cumbersome) a C.B.S. suggestion that the interview begin with one or two informal questions in front of the office fireplace.

When a make-up artist appeared to improve Mr. Rather's cheekbones, Mr. Nixon immediately and approvingly identified the cosmetic as "7-N"—a light pancake especially concocted for swarthy types like Mr. Nixon and, for that matter, his interviewer.

Mr. Nixon was not, however, the only impresario around the White House that evening. In its own interest (and, as it turned out, the President's) C.B.S. had persuaded the White House to make a number of fundamental changes in its customary technical arrangements to meet a problem that Mr. Nixon's aides spend an immense amount of time fretting about: his tendency to perspire on camera.

An agreement to "refrigerate" the Oval Office was reached among C.B.S. officials and two White House television consultants—Mark Goode, a former American Broadcasting Company offi-

cial, and Bill Carruthers, who still has Soupy Sales, the comic, among his clients.

The White House engineer closed off all the warm air ducts, and by air time the temperature had dropped to 35 degrees. After the television lights were turned on, the thermometer rose 20 degrees, and by the end of the show it was up to 65.

## No Home Fires Burning

The network also recommended a lighter pancake make-up for the President (to open the pores), recommended subdued lighting (to create an atmosphere of intimacy, and lessen the heat), and dissuaded White House aides from igniting Mr. Nixon's woodburning fireplace.

The Nixon people are very big on woodburning fireplaces (it is a rare aide who does not have one lit during the winter), but this time they swallowed their preferences in the interests of dryness.

What did the show accomplish for both parties?

Substantively, Mr. Nixon revealed a desire to run again, loyalty to Vice President Agnew, a deep reluctance to criticize George C. Wallace, and a campaign strategy that will emphasize positive initiatives in foreign affairs while explaining setbacks on the domestic front (e.g., the present high rate of unemployment) as an unfortunate but inevitable consequence of his efforts to wind down the war.

Cosmetically, he displayed expert preparation and some nervousness.

To viewers he seemed unsettled by Mr. Rather's request that he address himself to Mr. Wallace's philosophy. C.B.S. officials on the scene report that he became most animated when Mr. Rather asked him whether his trips to Moscow and China and his withdrawal strategy in Vietnam were timed to enrich his political prospects.

He clenched his fist (unseen to viewers), and looked Mr. Rather in the eye; on all other questions, he seemed to be addressing Mr. Rather's shirt collar.

Network officials reported today that most viewers (two out of every three calling the network's Washington office, a higher percentage in New York) approved the tone and content of the questioning, which was gentlemanly but firm. The network said that many callers also had kind words for the President.

The White House had asked that an "anchor man" such as Walter Cronkite conduct the interview instead of a correspondent, but Bill Small, the network's Washington bureau chief, had selected

Mr. Rather and refused to budge.

The President himself seemed pleased with the outcome. After the show, he chatted easily with the technicians around him. When an aide, Mr. Carruthers, rushed up and congratulated him on his handling of hard questions, he said: "I don't

want the soft ones."

Mr. Rather expressed regret at not having questioned Mr. Nixon on his attitudes on the India-Pakistan war. Mr. Nixon conceded he had been unprepared for the final question on women's liberation. But there will be other chances, since Mr. Nixon clearly likes the format.