

Nixon aide's job: keep brother Don out of soup

WASHINGTON—President Nixon has given aide John Ehrlichman a delicate personal assignment to keep the President's irrepressible brother, Donald, out of hot water.

Donald Nixon has a weakness for fattening foods and easy money. He tried to satisfy

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both appetites in the 1950s by borrowing \$205,000 from billionaire Howard Hughes to operate a restaurant chain, the Home of the Nixonburger, in Southern California.

Two months after the loan was made, some of Hughes' top assistants sat down with Donald to survey the chaos of his accounts. Noah Dietrich, who then directed the day-to-day operations of Hughes' empire, complained that Donald had gone through the money without paying off important creditors.

But it was too late. Donald's restaurants went bankrupt, and the Nixonburger was lost to mankind.

The story of the \$205,000 loan leaked out during Richard Nixon's 1960 campaign for the Presidency, causing him political pain. After he finally reached the White House eight years later, he asked Ehrlichman to oversee Donald's activities and to prevent, if at all possible, any new embarrassments.

At one time, Donald incorporated himself and began selling shares to citizens who might have an interest in his blood line. Ehrlichman explained gently to Donald that such ventures could embarrass his brother and that, for his brother's sake, he should avoid deals that might reflect unfavorably on the President.

Not long afterward, Donald began dickering with John Hill, a Boston manufacturer of playground equipment, who wanted the government to consider installing his products in urban riot areas. Hill told us Donald merely wanted to be the company's West Coast representative, and did not want to put in the fix for federal money. But Ehrlichman quietly vetoed the project, and the President's brother wrote to Hill saying he was no longer interested in the company.

No longer an adviser

Donald also made contact with Elmer Stone, a lawyer for the Ryan Aeronautical Company. But in deference to his brother, Donald took Stone through the guarded White House gates to see Ehrlichman. Afterward, a spokesman for Ryan Aeronautical

explained that the pair had just dropped by to let it be known that Stone was no longer acting as Donald's legal adviser.

When Donald finally joined the Marriott Corporation in January 1970, Ehrlichman summoned J. Willard Marriott and his son Bill to the White House for an audience with the President. Marriott had been chairman of the Nixon inaugural and is trusted by the President.

Delicately, the President asked the Marriotts to keep his brother out of trouble. "I want to be sure that Don has no dealings with the federal government," said the President. "I want to be sure that Don is never asked to do anything that would embarrass this office."

Then the President added as an afterthought: "Don is the best salesman in the Nixon family."

The Marriotts agreed to watch over Donald, and they have scrupulously kept him away from Washington. There has been only one awkward incident. Donald flew to Greece as one of the three-man team that offered Marriott's airline-catering service to Aristotle Onassis's Olympic Airlines.

Greeks bearing gifts

The Greeks, whose military government is unpopular in the United States, rolled out the red carpet for the President's brother. Tom Pappas, a big Republican money raiser with oil interests in Greece, threw a lavish dinner for Donald in Athens and invited members of the Greek military junta. And Onassis, the husband of the widow of the man who defeated Richard Nixon for President in 1960, sent long-stemmed roses to Donald's hotel room.

Washington whispers that Donald used his White House influence to get catering contracts for Marriott with American Airlines and TWA, we have established, are strictly untrue.

Ehrlichman also gave Donald's son, Donald, Jr., a lecture before the boy went to Switzerland last summer to work for International Controls. The company has now transferred young Nixon to the Bahamas.

His father, talking to a few visitors, including my associate George Clifford, confided that Donald, Jr., was something of a disappointment to the family. He had been off in the mountains associating with hippies before the overseas job was arranged.