

Nixon Tells of His Job: A Life Without Relaxing

By SAUL PETT
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON, Jan. 13—

"It's important to live like a Spartan," President Nixon was saying, "to have moderate eating and drinking habits.

"That's not to say I don't enjoy a good time," he went on. "But the worst thing you can do is to relax, to let up."

The President described his view of his job and of himself in an interview Dec. 20 in his Oval office. He continued:

"One must have physical and mental discipline here. This office as presently furnished probably would drive President Johnson up the wall. He liked things going on. He kept three TV sets here. I have none here or in my bedroom.

"I find to handle crises the most important qualities one needs are balance, objectivity, an ability to act coolly."

The President's mood seemed to be one of confidence and, as his points developed, rising stimulation, perhaps even exhilaration.

He spoke of some of the "tough decisions" he has made, mentioning the movement into Cambodia and the decision last May 8 to bomb North Vietnam and mine Haiphong Harbor on the eve of his trip to Moscow.

'The Coolest Person'

"People," he said, "probably think the President was jumping up and down, barking orders, at those times. Actually, I have a reputation for being the coolest person in the room. In a way I am. I have trained myself to be that. The great decisions in this office require calm.

"I could go up the wall watching TV commentators. I don't. I get my news from the news summary the staff prepares every day and it's great; it gives all sides.

"I never watch TV commentators or the news shows when they are about me. That's because I don't want decisions influenced by personal emotional reactions."

"The major weakness of inexperienced people," the President said, "is that they take things personally, especially in politics, and that can destroy you.

"Years ago when I was a young Congressman, things got under my skin. Herblock the cartoonist got to me. But now when I walk into this office I am cool and calm. I read the news summary and get both sides. That's important because there are so many emotional issues these days, such as the war and busing and welfare.

"But I never allow myself to get emotional. Now, there are Congressmen and Senators who cut me up—Fulbright, for example. But when he comes here, we're the best of friends, at least I feel I am.

next four years, having gone through a few crises in the White House, having weathered them and learned how to handle them coolly and not subjectively.

"I probably am more objective—I don't mean this as self-serving—than most leaders. When you're too subjective, you tend to make mistakes."

He was asked if it was "possible to relax at all in this job after four years?"

The President thought a moment, and then said:

"In speeches or press conferences or interviews you have to be up and sharp. You can't be relaxed. The Redskins were relaxed in their last game of the regular season and they were flat and they got clobbered.

But Not Up-Tight

"You must be up for the great events. Up but not uptight.

"Having done it so often, I perhaps have a finer honed sense of this. But you can overdo it, overtrain and leave your fight in the dressing room."

He cited as an example a law school exam for which he had overstudied at Duke University, one he apparently did not score well in. But then, if you are relaxed at a news conference, he said, "you can muff one."

Mr. Nixon returned to his larger theme.

"When I came into office, I'd been through enough—those shattering defeats in 1960 and 1962, and then those eight years in the wilderness, the way De Gaulle and Churchill were.

"The result was I was able to confront tough problems without flapping. I don't flap easily. An individual tends to go to pieces when he's inexperienced.

"Now, there are just not many kinds of tough problems I haven't had to face one way or another. In that respect, the fact that my political career required a comeback may have been a blessing."

Taking Chances

The President was asked if he felt a sense of relief at being free from re-election pressures. He replied:

"Well, campaigning is a great experience, win or lose. People should not be afraid to step up to it. You know, there are people in the House and the Administration who are 40 or 45 who should run for higher posts, but they get too cautious, they want to stick to the safe jobs. You can't be afraid to take chances in politics. But not foolish chances.

"This game affects the life of the nation and the world. For that reason, an individual, whether he's a President or a member of Congress or the Senate or the Cabinet, must always play the game of politics and statesmanship right up to the hilt.

For the Long Run

"Now, it's not true that I don't feel emotional or pay attention to what others feel. But the most important thing I can do is make decisions for the long run.

"Vietnam, for example. Now, we're having a difficult time. Things don't seem as bright as they did. So, we've had to continue the May 8 policy [to bomb the North]."

The President continued his discussion of crisis handling, a subject he has found compelling for years.

"I'll probably do better in the

"As to a sense of relief over not having to face another election, well, I still have a responsibility to help my party and others who share my views. I will meet that.

"There is some relief not to have to do something solely for political purposes. You still have to lead, to travel to the country and get the support of the people. But taking the personal factor out is, indeed, one of the major dividends of not having to run again."

DO NOT FORGET THE NEEDIEST!