



President Nixon and Senator John C. Stennis viewing Mississippi flood conditions from Presidential jet on their way to a naval air station near Meridian, where Senator Stennis was honored. Associated Press

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## Nixon Cheered in Mississippi at 'John Stennis Day' Fete

By JOHN HERBERS

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MERIDIAN, Miss., April 27— President Nixon took a respite from his Watergate troubles today and flew to an air naval station near here where he was cheered by a crowd of several thousand and encouraged by Senator John C. Stennis to "tough it out."

On the way to the naval base, where he was the speaker for "John Stennis Day," Mr. Nixon flew at low altitude over the flooded farms in the Yazoo River Basin and later announced that he was expanding the already vast area eligible for flood control relief.

It was the first speaking appearance the President made since his April 17 statement acknowledging that new evidence had been uncovered in the Watergate scandal.

Because he was on a military base in the Deep South, where his popularity had been growing, the warm reception he received was not unexpected.

### Nixon Appears Touched

But Mr. Nixon appeared touched, nevertheless, as the crowds joyously waved American flags and Senator Stennis, who grew up in the red hills just north of here, heaped praise on the President and "Miss Pat," as he called Mrs. Nixon.

Speaking for himself and his constituents, the Mississippi Democrat, who is chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said:

"Mr. President, we admire you for what you are. You do not panic when the going gets rough. I believe you have what it takes to tough it out. We admire that."

Although the Senator did not mention the scandal over the break-in at Democratic headquarters last June 17, the

crowd seemed to understand and there was some applause. Almost unnoticed in the crowd were two of the President's embattled assistants, H. R. Haldeman and John D. Ehrlichman, both under investigation in the Watergate affair, who accompanied the President from Washington.

Mr. Haldeman, as he has done frequently on such occasions, stood among the spectators and took pictures of admirers crowding around his boss. Neither he nor Mr. Ehrlichman accompanied the President on the platform.

### Faculty Dedicated

The crowd, including scores of children who had come in yellow school buses, was assembled on both sides of an asphalt road where a platform had been set up for dedication of a new training facility on the air base.

In the background were pines and green grass. A cool wind was blowing, and the sun was bright. It was in part a celebration for the remarkable recovery that Senator Stennis had made from gunshot wounds received last January in a hold-up outside his Washington home.

The President, after lavishly praising the Senator, his recovery and his support of the Nixon military policies, spoke of hard decisions he, the President, had made in the past.

"There were times when I made these decisions when I felt I was pretty much alone, Washington was concerned, he said. "However, out in the country that wasn't the case." He continued:

"What I am suggesting is this. "A President can make a hard decision, but a President is not able to carry out that decision, unless, in the final

analysis, he has the support of the people, and in this case, whether it was the decision which I thought was essential on May 8 to mine Haiphong and bomb North Vietnam which triggered the first negotiation, or whether it was the decision, the much more difficult one, at Christmas time, to renew the bombing of North Vietnam with B-52's, another very difficult decision whatever the case was, I understood why many disagreed.

"I understood why many did not understand. I understand why many people said, 'Get us peace, get it any way you can. Get out of Vietnam if they would just give our prisoners of war back,' and may I say that was a very attractive argument at times, because I thought about those P.O.W.'s and their wives, most of whom or many of whom I had spoken before, and many of whom I had met, and I wanted them back.

"But what made me realize I had made the right decision was when one of them came into see me a few weeks ago and said, 'The slogan of our P.O.W. camp was "Home With Honor," and they were home with honor and that is what matters.

### Disaster Relief Widened

"Why does honor matter? It matters because Senator Stennis has pointed out that the United States, whether we want it or not has responsibility to be the leader in the world for peace and freedom."

The President and Senator Stennis viewed the flooded farm country together on the way from Washington. The

President announced that he was adding the states of Louisiana and Arkansas to the area declared under major disaster and thus entitled to full Federal flood control relief. This includes low-interest loans, restoration of public facilities and other assistance. Previously he had designated Missouri, Illinois and Mississippi in this category.

"Preliminary estimates covering all eight states hit by the floods, including Iowa, Illinois, Missouri, Kentucky, Tennessee, Arkansas, Mississippi and Louisiana, indicate that some \$147.5-million in property damage has already occurred," the President said in a statement. "Agricultural areas are particularly hard hit. The situation is expected to remain serious through mid-June, particularly in Louisiana and here in Mississippi."

The President said he wanted to assure all the people who live in the stricken areas that full Federal assistance would be provided as long as needed.

"Because farmers have often borne the brunt of the damage," he said, "I have asked Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz to make a special inspection tour of the Mississippi Valley from Moline, Ill., south to Greenville, Miss., during his trip to the Midwest next week. He will report his findings to me upon his return to Washington."

Mr. Nixon said he had also directed the office of Emergency Preparedness to continue working closely with the Governors of all the flood-affected states to keep him personally informed of the developments.