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Hanging Tough at Storm King

At San Clemente, the heavy surf pounding below Richard Nixon's cliff-top redoubt was shrouded by the early morning fog last week, and inside his secluded den the President was perhaps more solitary than ever before. With a swivel of his big chair, he could have seen for himself what his former aide, John Dean, was saying before the Senate Watergate committee. But the television screen remained blank.

Nixon sent word through White House Spokesman Gerald Warren (see THE PRESS) that he had not watched Dean at all—either in the live hearings or in snatches on the network news programs. There is, of course, no way to be certain of this fact, reported TIME Correspondent Bonnie Angelo, since the President was alone every morning in the den (elegantly furnished at Government expense), and did not drive over to the adjoining presidential office in the Western White House compound until 9:30 or 10. But the story rings true; it is hard to imagine Richard Nixon listening to himself under attack.

The President's mood, said Warren, was "very good"; he discussed the business at hand "with determination." But after the upbeat and invigorating week of the Brezhnev summit, Nixon found himself hemmed in by Dean's relentless Watergate testimony on one hand and on the other by a recalcitrant Congress determined to force him to stop bombing Cambodia.

With his old lieutenants gone, Nixon had to deal with a new staff that has not yet shaken down into a smoothly functioning team. As the week passed, it became increasingly clear that the President has replaced the old "Berlin Wall" of Haldeman and Ehrlichman with a new wall of Alexander Haig and Ronald Ziegler. Deputy Press Secretary Warren, who has taken over many of Ziegler's customary duties while Ziegler spends his time working with the President on unspecified matters, reported that Nixon had not so much as talked

on the telephone with his counsels in charge of the Watergate problem, J. Fred Buzhardt and Leonard Garment. That doubtless contributed to the confusion over the nature and authorization of Buzhardt's shrill statement sent to the Ervin committee.

As usual, the President was sealed off from any firsthand range of opinion and advice. But in this case the elaborate exercise in isolation was perhaps part of a deliberate attempt to put as much distance as possible between the presidency and the Watergate revelations. The complicated filtering process was almost bizarre. Every day three White House aides back in Washington monitored the hearings. Then the verbatim transcripts were transmitted to the Western White House. From these, Haig, who reportedly had not watched the hearings either, boiled down a summary for the President.

Critics asserted that this was just the kind of delegation of judgment, instinct and action that got the man into his current troubles. Indeed, in what could be gleaned of the President's behavior at San Clemente, there was little evidence of a new, post-Watergate Nixon emerging. Some days he walked on the beach with his friend Bebe Rebozo after the fog had burned off, or relaxed on a white-cushioned lounge. The grounds of the estate are abloom with summer flowers—marigolds and petunias around the pool, gardenias scenting the air and Pat Nixon's beloved roses blossoming here and there. Everything is languid, manicured perfection. Yet the Secret Service code name for the presidential villa, "Storm King," seemed to carry a more accurate description of the retreat of the embattled President as he struck out at Congress with his back against the bougainvillea-covered wall.

When the House of Representatives voted to cut off funds in order to stop the U.S. bombing in Cambodia, Nixon reacted swiftly. He vetoed the Second Supplemental Appropriations Bill of 1973, with its Cambodia rider, within hours after he received it. The House then failed to muster the necessary two-thirds majority to override his veto, and Nixon won the skirmish.

Publicly he was "gratified," and privately he was considerably more elated than that. A total halt in U.S. air operations in Cambodia, he said, would "seriously undercut ongoing diplomatic efforts to achieve a cease-fire in Cambodia," and added: "It would be nothing short of tragic," if the military effort in Indochina, "bought with the blood of so many Asians and Americans, were to be undone now by congressional action." But he knew that the exchange had been merely the first encounter in what could become a running battle with Congress. Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield threatened to attach the same rider to other money bills "again, again and again until the will of the people prevails." At week's end the President reached a

compromise with Congress by pledging to halt U.S. military activities in Indochina by August 15 or seek specific congressional approval for continuing them beyond that date.

There were few visitors to intrude on the privacy of the Casa Pacifica.

French Foreign Minister Michel Jobert dropped by, to be assured by Nixon that the President had made no agreements with Brezhnev behind the backs of his European allies. Colorado Gov. John Love was introduced to the press as the President's new energy czar. Presidential Domestic Counsellor Melvin Laird arrived from Washington after causing a little dissension within the inner circle by telling a reporter that Ron Ziegler has lost his credibility with the public and thus has been promoted out of sight; Ziegler was understandably furious and crowed that he had twice been reassured that he was not on his way to oblivion. Somewhere, behind the high walls or beside the pool with its \$8,395 bulletproof glass screen, was the President, hanging tough in his solitude as the Watergate testimony continued.

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