

The High Cost Of Operating Camp David

By Maxine Cheshire

Almost \$2.4 million has been spent on Camp David since President Nixon took office five years ago—more than the facility cost under all three of his most recent predecessors combined.

Although no breakdown on the 1969-73 expenditures has yet been made available by the Defense Department, \$150,000 went for a swimming pool built beside the presidential lodge in the summer of 1969.

Previous presidents used an existing pool, located a quarter-mile away and reached by golf cart. This facility has been turned over to military personnel who operate the mountain retreat at Thurmont, Md.

The cost of the new pool and other construction which has been in progress at Camp David throughout the Nixon administration is included in "operation and maintenance" figures which the Defense Department furnished to Congress last week.

Pentagon spokesmen told a Government Operations Subcommittee that Camp David has cost taxpayers for "regularly recurring maintenance and operation" \$2,383,977 since President Nixon took office in 1969.

The total costs under previous Presidents were:

Johnson—\$961,600
Kennedy—\$878,500
Eisenhower—\$276,000

The Defense Department has promised to supply Congress with a detailed breakdown, indicating how much of the money spent in the last five years went specifically for new construction. The report is not expected to be ready for two weeks.

The annual costs of running Camp David have almost quadrupled since the beginning of the Nixon administration, the Defense Department conceded in testimony last week. But part of that increase can be attributed to "built-in inflation" and the need for increasingly sophisticated security devices.

A staff member for the subcommittee said this week that "we can only assume" that construction costs are included in the overall figure.

"We know building has been going on and it doesn't show up anywhere else," he said.

The new swimming pool, a figure-eight design with interlocking circles which measure 40 feet and 25 feet in diameter, was kept a secret until earlier this year.

It was built by Clearwater Pools of Davidsonville, Md. The general contractor was the E. D. Plummer Construction Co. of Chambersburg, Pa.

Both firms had signed "security agreements" with the Navy, which operates Camp David, to keep the work and its cost secret because the presidential hideaway is a "classified site."

However, some details have been confirmed.

See VIP, E4, Col. 4

VIP, From E1

One reason the pool cost so much was its location, according to the superintendent on the job at the time, John Hughes. The President wanted it right outside his door. But the presidential lodge is located on a hillside, atop an underground bomb shelter. The Navy could permit no blasting or earth-moving.

So the pool was set above ground, like a giant bathtub built of wood and steel and concrete. Then a concrete slab was suspended around it like a deck. Because the terrain slopes away there, the camouflaged terrace makes the pool appear to be in the ground and a few steps down from the house. Actually, there is room below for maintenance men to service the filtering and heating systems.

The pool shell cost \$45,000, according to Stanley Day, who owns Clearwater Pools. He estimates that the remaining work, completed by the E. D. Plummer Co., cost "in excess" of \$100,000. Included was an oak-and-stone bath house that contains a sauna.

E. D. Plummer refers all questions on cost to the Navy.

There has been extensive construction work going on at Camp David since President Nixon took office. Most of it was done by the E. D. Plummer Co. as low bidder on government contracts.

Two new cottages, named "Birch" and "Dogwood," have been built.

"Birch" has three rooms and is used by President Nixon as an office. It was designed with an air-conditioning system that makes it possible for him to keep a log fire burning, even in summer.

"Dogwood," built on the site of an existing cottage by that name which was torn down, was reportedly designed for use by President Nixon's daughters and their husbands.

E. D. Plummer confirms that there has also been "considerable" remodeling of the presidential lodge, which is named "Laurel," but refuses to give details.

President Nixon, who eliminated the swimming pool at the White House to make room for new press facilities, uses the new one at Camp David frequently and has swum there as late as December.

His New Office

Spiro T. Agnew moved yesterday into new offices at 716 Jackson Place, across Lafayette Square from the White House.

The building, a renovated three-story town house, was previously set aside as office space for former Presidents to use when they visited Washington. The space has been unused since the death of Lyndon B. Johnson.

A White House spokesman said yesterday that Agnew, accompanied by "four or five" members of his staff, would occupy the offices for an indefinite time while he organizes his papers for the archives.