

Ford Visits Nixon, Finds

Him 'Alert But Very Ill'

8-Minute Talk in Hospital

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President Ford broke his campaign swing to visit former President Nixon here yesterday and later said Mr. Nixon, while "very alert" was obviously "very, very ill."

Mr. Ford left the Century Plaza Hotel in Los Angeles shortly after 9:30 a.m. for a brief helicopter trip to Long Beach Memorial Medical Center.

White House press secretary Ron Nessen had announced to the press corps at the hotel shortly after 8 a.m. that Mr. Nixon's physician, Dr. John Lungren, had called the traveling White House office at 7:35 a.m. and said "the former President is in the best condition since his operation. A visit from President Ford would be a tremendous boost to his morale."

Mr. Ford met Mrs. Nixon at the hospital, in what was described as "a very emotional and fervent, but not tearful" greeting.

The President hugged Mrs. Nixon, then kissed her.

He talked with Mrs. Nixon and the former President's daughters, Julie Eisenhower and Tricia Cox, for about five minutes.

Then he went to Room 706 to visit Mr. Nixon. The present and past presidents talked alone for eight minutes.

Nessen, who looked into the room, said later the visit was "essentially a surprise" to Mr. Nixon, who was told about it only about three

minutes before Mr. Ford arrived.

When the President came into the room, Mr. Nixon was in a bed, wearing a white hospital gown. The bed was slightly elevated.

On a shelf above the bed were monitors attached to Mr. Nixon, and bottles for

Back Page Col. 1

From Page 1

intravenous medication and feeding.

A tube that had been through Mr. Nixon's nose into his stomach to drain off excessive fluids had been removed three hours before Mr. Ford's arrival.

Lungren said it was no longer needed.

The doctor said he had approved Mr. Ford's visit because he thought it would boost Mr. Nixon's morale.

The President, in California to stump for Republican candidates, particularly gubernatorial nominee Houston I. Flournoy, had spoken to Mrs. Nixon about the hospital visit.

Lungren said later that while Mr. Nixon is still listed as "critical," his condition "is slowly and steadily improving."

All internal bleeding has apparently stopped he said. The former President had gone into almost fatal shock for three hours on Tuesday, after phlebitis surgery triggered internal bleeding.

When Mr. Ford got up to leave Mr. Nixon's room, he took the former President's right hand in his right hand, and patted it with his left hand.

Mr. Ford then went down the hall to talk with Mrs. Nixon and her daughters for about two minutes.

Nessen said Mr. Nixon had no difficulty in speaking, but that "his voice was husky."

The press secretary added, "His hair was mussed, he was clearly drawn, and he had lost weight." But Nessen said he did not think the former President "appeared haggard."

Mr. Ford, at one point, asked, "Did you have a good night?" and Mr. Nixon replied, "None of the nights are too good."

At about 10:30 a.m., Mr. Ford emerged from the hospital, and over a public address system said in a subdued voice:

"I spent approximately eight minutes with the President. Obviously, he's a very, very sick man, but I think he's coming along very, very well."

He said the former President was interested in discussing the President's forthcoming overseas trip

and the journeys of Secretary of State Henry Kissinger.

"The President was very alert, he was very interested, but it was very obvious to me that he was very, very ill.

"But he showed a great deal of strength, mentally and physically."

Mr. Ford said he had talked with his wife, Betty, earlier in the day, and told Mr. Nixon, "all of our family are praying for his full and complete recovery."

Mr. Ford later campaigned in Fresno and last night in Portland, Ore.



PRESIDENT FORD AND RON ZIEGLER AT HOSPITAL
A handshake for Richard Nixon's former press secretary

AP Wirephoto