

Nixon's Year in Exile

By Thomas M. Brown
New York Times

San Clemente

He is no longer in power, but still the tourists come, seeking a glimpse of him in disgrace. At just about any time on most afternoons, a half-dozen vehicles will be parked along Avenida del Presidente (some vandalized street signs read Avenida del ex-Presidente). The tourists stretch their legs beside the high wall around La Casa Pacifica and nod sheepishly at one another. They don't see much — the wall and, above it, the tops of palms. Soon they are impatient and leave.

Behind the wall, friends say, Richard M. Nixon is impatient, too. He is impatient at the state of his health, which is much improved since his brush with death

nine months ago, but still troublesome. Then there is the matter of his finances, which afford him far less than the millionaire's security he enjoyed before receiving a bill for \$476,000 in back taxes and interest.

There is also his confinement to the rambling white villa with the red tile roof and the small office complex at the adjacent Coast Guard station, so limiting after his foreign-policy adventures in Peking and Moscow.

And above all, perhaps, there is impatience with his current small role in the nation's life after years in high office. He is obsessed with a desire for the historical rehabilitation of his administration.

So, in castlelike seclusion on the balmy Southern California coast, Mr. Nixon nurtures his health, works nearly every weekday on the book he hopes will help restore both his finances and his esteem in the eyes of his countrymen, and quietly prepares for a return to what he hopes will be at least a semi-public life.

No longer is there talk by those who have seen him recently of bleak and unrelieved depression, nor of nearly constant physical pain and haggard mien — as there was during the first six months after his resignation last August 9. No one describes him, as his former press secretary, Ronald Ziegler, did on January

12, as "certainly a beaten man."

On almost every weekday morning, Mr. Nixon leaves La Casa Pacifica and walks the 300

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yards down the driveway, past unkempt, sun-yellowed lawns, through the south gate onto the Coast Guard's San Mateo Point Loran Navigational Aid Station to the two single-story yellow-and-brown office buildings that were the heart of the so-called Western White House during his presidency.

He is thinner now than most would remember him and, on a bland, restricted diet, has trouble maintaining a weight already ten pounds below his normal 164.

His nose seems more prominent now and his jowls more pendulous. But he walks briskly, usually without evidence of a limp, often with his arms folded tightly across his chest or with hands thrust into his pockets, a frown on his face.

Even here, in private, he dresses formally — dark suits, white shirts, muted ties, black shoes. Some days his lingering phlebitis bothers him and he rides in an electric golf cart. Always, he is shadowed by Secret Service agents, who will guard him for the rest of his life.

In the mornings, Mr. Nixon reads a number of newspapers, including the New York Times and the Washington Post. About once a week he receives from the White House intelligence and National Security Council briefing materials, which he peruses closely. He tries to devote about six hours a day to his book, dictating most of it from longhand notes.

He is said to see the book as his major opportunity to tell his side of Watergate and therefore of potentially critical importance in hastening the "historical perspective" of his presidency that he believes eventually will largely absolve him of the scandal.

Mr. Nixon is now able to stay on his feet for as long as two hours. When at work or chatting with visitors, he usually rests his left foot on a hassock and periodically massages his left leg, which is still swollen and subject to recurring pain.

After work, Mr. Nixon re-

turns home, usually on foot, and takes a dip in his swimming pool. He often telephones friends, associates and former staff members to make small talk, to reminisce, to seek advice or to discuss business.

In the evening, he and Mrs. Nixon usually dine alone or with their daughters, Julie Eisenhower and Tricia Cox, who are frequent visitors.

With increasing frequency, however, the Nixons have been entertaining friends. Visitors in the last few months have included banker C. G. Rebozo, industrialist Robert H. Abplanalp, former Attorney General John Mitchell, former press secretary Ziegler, Billy Graham, Frank Sinatra and the Iranian ambassador, Ardeshir Zahedi.

When they are alone, the Nixons frequently watch television. Mr. Nixon usually retires early. He tells friends he still sleeps up to 12 hours a night.

How Mr. Nixon now interprets the web of scandals that drove him from office and how he plans to deal with them in his new book is closely held knowledge. Friends who have discussed Watergate with him decline to disclose his views, but many indicate that the statement he made last September still reflects his thinking.

In that statement, Mr. Nixon said he had been "wrong in not acting more decisively and more forthrightly in dealing with Watergate."

He added, "I know that many fairminded people believe that my motivation and actions in the Watergate affair were intentionally self-serving and illegal. I now understand how my own mistakes have contributed to that belief and seemed to support it."

The contradiction between the statement and the evidence may be explained in part by Mr. Nixon's apparent belief before his resignation that he was being unfairly pilloried for acts that were no worse than those of preceding administrations.

In addition, there are indications that he believes he was served poorly by key staff members who were themselves involved in the scandal and who therefore kept the seriousness of the situation from him. Certainly, many of his friends subscribe to

this theory.

Herbert G. Klein, former White House director of communications and a political associate and friend of Mr. Nixon since 1946, has said that H. R. Haldeman, John Ehrlichman, Charles Colson and others "distorted" Mr. Nixon's sense of values and that "at some point that cannot be definitely pinpointed . . . deceit began to replace truth. Doors were closed instead of opened. Dishonesty came to the Nixon administration and it was the beginning of the end."

Haldeman and Ehrlichman, he contends, "began to hide facts from the President on matters both large and small."

Those familiar with the Nixon book confirm that the former President plans to deal not just with his White House years, but with his entire life in politics, and that he intends the section on Watergate to be more than an apologia. Mr. Nixon's agent, Irving Lazar, said earlier this year, "He's going to level . . . he doesn't want to be a flop. He doesn't want it to be a subject of derision."

Mr. Nixon reputedly has already received considerably more than \$200,000, and perhaps as much as \$500,000, in advances on the book. Estimates of his possible income from the memoirs range from \$2 million to \$2.5 million, which could go a long way toward remedying the cash flow problem the former President has experienced. So could the fees of up to \$500,000 he is said to have been offered for his participation in a television special on his presidency.

Friends say most of the advance money for the book has been spent on staff and other expenses and that Mr. Nixon probably will not consider a television special until late this year at the earliest. As a result, he still has trouble making ends meet.

Payment of some of his back taxes (he still owes \$148,000 for the year 1969) wiped out most of Mr. Nixon's ready cash and his bank account was further depleted by \$33,000 in medical expenses. His share of a final mortgage payment on the San Clemente property, \$226,440, was paid January 14 by an undisclosed party and must eventually be repaid.

The \$200,000 authorized by Congress for transition expenses is long since spent. The General Services Administration suggested a congressional appropriation of \$263,000 for Mr. Nixon for the fiscal year that began July 1, including his \$60,000 presidential

pension, but the House of Representatives last month cut the figure by nearly \$82,000 before passing the measure along to the Senate.

Whatever appropriation is finally agreed upon by the House and the Senate, most of it will be eaten up by staff salaries and expenses associated with trying to answer the two million pieces of mail Mr. Nixon has received since his resignation.

Nonetheless, it is specious to describe Mr. Nixon as broke, as his partisans are wont to do. He has substantial equity in the San Clemente property. And he owns two houses at Key Biscayne, Fla., that have an estimated market value of \$450,000-\$500,000, about double what he paid for them in 1968. Rebozo is reputedly trying to arrange some method of converting them to public or quasi-public ownership, with Mr. Nixon receiving a half-million dollars for the transfer.

In addition, a Nixon "justice fund" operated by Rabbi Baruch Korff's United States Citizens

Congress is paying the legal expenses associated with Nixon's battle to secure ownership of his presidential papers.

Korff said last month that the fund so far has paid \$200,000 of the more than \$350,000 in expenses and had drummed up another \$25,000 through a special mailing to 4000 Nixon sympathizers, which drew 1100 donations.

As his health began to return this year, Mr. Nixon's interest in foreign affairs revived. Among other things, Mr. Nixon has called President Ford on a few occasions to discuss foreign developments with him. The most recent such call, a White House spokesman said, was to congratulate Mr. Ford on his handling of the Mayaguez incident.

Mr. Ford "rarely" calls Nixon, the last such occasion having been on the former President's 62d birthday on January 9, the

spokesman said.

Mr. Nixon has also discussed with friends the possibility of playing some more active role in the nation's life in the future. He told Senator Barry Goldwater that he would like to work for the Republican party — not as a candidate but as a party spokesman. He told another acquaintance that he could perform usefully for the nation as ambassador to China. The former suggestion was greeted with hostility, the latter with derision.

Virtually everyone who has been in recent contact with Mr. Nixon remarks on his desire to travel abroad. The motivation in part is a desire to revisit the scenes of the diplomatic achievements that he is said to be convinced will cement his place in history, Watergate notwithstanding, and in part to break out of his confinement at San Clemente. Friends look for a leisurely Nixon trip abroad early next year.

Meanwhile, Mr. Nixon has been making his first cautious forays outside the San Clemente compound. On April 19 he met at Walter Annenberg's estate at Rancho Mirage with the University of Southern California regents and their wives to announce an agreement to locate a Nixon presidential library on the Los Angeles campus, contingent on successful resolution of the presidential papers suit.

"He seemed to enjoy getting out and seeing people and being the center of attention," said Kari Granville, editor of the USC student newspaper and the only journalist present.

"He acted as though his place in history was guaranteed by foreign affairs," Miss Granville said. "It was almost as though he were still President. He didn't mention Gerald Ford at all."