

Glimpses of Citizen Nixon

By Thomas Collins
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San Clemente

In the 14 months since former President Nixon retired to San Clemente, the only news that the press has been able to obtain about him, so to speak, is that which it has been able to steal.

Photographers have stalked him on the beaches of his estate and reporters have badgered friends for tidbits about his life-style, but he has remained an elusive prey. There have been no press conferences and no general interviews.

Suddenly, however, in recent weeks, he was back on the front pages, in the news magazines and on television again, partly by his own devising, and raising speculation about a comeback.

Time magazine recently ran two pages of exclusive color photos provided by Mr. Nixon via his former White House photographer, Ollie Atkins. Newsweek ran a cover story about him, using as its centerpiece its own exclusive photo — an anniversary portrait taken last June by Mr. Nixon's valet, Manolo Sanchez.

CBS' Dan Rather reported last week that "the resurrection of Richard Nixon is under way again" through "a carefully calculated public relations and publicity campaign." And New York Times columnist William Safire, a

former speechwriter for Mr. Nixon, speculated that a "second comeback" is in the works — but attributed it more to the need of the press for something to write about than to any machinations on the part of the former president.

Mr. Nixon, himself, however, appeared to be fanning the speculation when he made a rare public appearance earlier this month at the Teamsters' Union California resort, the La Costa Country Club. The television cameras of CBS and NBC were allowed close enough to take informal shots of Mr. Nixon practicing his golf swing and chatting with Teamster acquaintances; the New York Times ran a story pointing out that among the players taking part in the charity golf tournament were a few linked to organized crime, and noting how old Mr. Nixon looked.

How contrived it was and whether, in fact, it is part of a calculated campaign was difficult to pin down. "What he has in mind, I honestly don't know," said Time magazine's managing editor, Henry Grunwald, referring to Time's obtaining the Atkins photos.

"It was hard to speculate on his motives when he was president and it's even more difficult now."

Edward Kosner, the editor of Newsweek, said that he saw nothing "orchestrated" in Mr. Nixon's recent appearance and, at the same time, nothing generated artificially by the news media. "I think what you're seeing is the normal reaction of the press when they suspect someone is of public interest," he said, and Mr. Nixon is "responding properly to that interest — so far as we can tell."

The Newsweek cover story, which quotes Nixon intimates as saying that he plans to quicken his emergence from exile in the weeks and months to come, had been in the works since August, Kosher said. He said that the cover photo of Mr. Nixon and his wife, Pat, was obtained from an "intermediary" in the Nixon circle, for which Sanchez, Mr. Nixon's valet, was reimbursed in

the vicinity of a couple of thousand dollars.

Exclusive photos command a high price from news magazines. Newsweek paid several thousand dollars to amateur photographer Susan Harris for her picture of Lynette Fromme, the accused attacker of President Ford, which ran on its cover several weeks ago. Time magazine paid Ollie Atkins about the same amount for its exclusive use of the Nixon photos.

The Atkins pictures actually were the first sign that a shift might be taking place in the media maneuverings at San Clemente. Atkins, who has known Mr. Nixon for about 30 years, received a call from Mr. Nixon's chief aide, Colonel Jack Brennan (ret.), shortly before Labor Day, asking him to come to dinner at San Clemente. He flew out at his own expense, spent three days at the estate and shot about 14 rolls of film, which are being distributed worldwide by Time-Life.

In the photos, Mr. Nixon is seen beaming at the camera, with

his wife at his side; dictating his memoirs in the library at San Clemente; checking over the manuscript, playing the piano and riding in a golf cart.

Mainly, the photos appear to put to rest any question about his recuperation from the phlebitis that almost took his life a year ago. And in contrast to the Times' report on his appearance at the La Costa Country Club, Mr. Nixon in the photos looks fit and more relaxed than the nation had seen him look since before Watergate.

The photos also showed that Mr. Nixon is determined as ever to control the kind of media attention that he receives.

If Mr. Nixon is in fact planning a comeback, one of his problems will be how much wrongdoing on his part to admit in the Watergate affair. Too much and he might alienate the public; not enough and his critics will be yapping at his heels. Whatever he plans, his old nemeses, the news media, will be watching him carefully.



The Nixons smiled
from a magazine cover



MR. NIXON AT LA COSTA
He appeared at a charity golf tournament