

An Old China Hand

They had come to Peking's Tien An Men Square to see the sights and have their pictures taken against the awesome backdrop of the Gate of Heavenly Peace. Suddenly they were face to face with Richard Milhous Nixon. Some of the Chinese seemed shy; others, plainly frightened, backed away. But then curiosity took over and they surged around the former American President, waving, smiling, thrusting forward for a handshake. In an instant, Nixon warmed

and-40-minute audience with Chairman Mao—only ten minutes less than President Ford received last December. He was given an unprecedented briefing on China's internal political struggle, including a firsthand look at the "big-character" wall posters denouncing "capitalist roaders" within the Peking government. In Canton at the end of his trip, tens of thousands of people poured into the streets to give the fallen President a tumultuous welcome that rivaled

distinguished his Administration from an outlaw Presidency.

Americans reacted to Nixon's journey a lot less warmly than the Chinese. President Ford suggested that Nixon's presence in China had probably cost him votes in New Hampshire. White House aides were even more worried about the future political fallout from Nixon's re-emergence. "He's a time bomb ticking away over which we have no control," complained one. Ford announced publicly that neither he nor Secretary of State Henry Kissinger would debrief Nixon upon his return. "If he gets some information that he thinks is important, he can communicate it to the proper authorities," the President said. Added a White House aide: "Preferably by mail."

Perhaps the fiercest attack on Nixon came from an old conservative ally, Sen. Barry Goldwater. "If he wants to do this country a favor, he might stay there," Goldwater fumed.

Memories: The Chinese had no qualms about their guest. They put him up in the same guesthouse he used four years ago ("Wow, what memories this brings back," the ex-President marveled) and made sure that his nine-day stay was crammed with special events. Nixon's official program began with a relaxed and at times moving visit with Madame Teng Ying-chao, the widow of the late Premier Chou En-lai. "His legacy will long be remembered," Nixon said of the man who had helped him forge the new links between Washington and Peking. "Of all the leaders I met, he was one with a very great understanding of the whole world." Nixon then held the first of his private sessions with Acting Premier Hua and that night, at a state banquet in his honor, inadvertently launched a controversy.

In his formal toast, Nixon observed: "There are some who believe that the mere act of signing a statement of principles or a diplomatic conference will bring instant and lasting peace. This is naïve." Reuters and The New York Times both misread the comment as a criticism of Ford and Kissinger for their dealings with the Soviet Union, specifically the pact they negotiated last July in Helsinki. Nixon was stunned by that interpretation. "My God," he said, "I've used that statement more than a dozen times before. It could apply to the United Nations Charter or the Shanghai communiqué or any international document." Certainly the toast was well received in Peking, and in his reply Hua praised Nixon's "courageous action" that ended more than two decades of hostility between the two nations.

The scene that night at the Great Hall



Chairman Mao greets Nixon: A statesman's welcome for a disgraced President

to the first mass tribute he had received in the year and a half since he was driven from office. "I bring you good wishes from America," he said. "I hope some day you'll come to see us." That stretched the imagination—but no more so than the spectacle of Richard Nixon back in China.

Nixon's short march through Tien An Men was an extraordinary moment on an altogether extraordinary trip. A virtual hermit since his disgrace at home, he was greeted as though he was still a man of power and position. The ex-President spent no fewer than nine hours in private talks with China's chief of government, Acting Premier Hua Kuo-feng. He was granted a one-hour-

anything he had received in better days.

Only hours after Nixon left Peking for sight-seeing jaunts in Kweilin and Canton, hundreds of new political posters were slapped onto the walls. For the first time, they attacked Deputy Premier Teng Hsiao-ping by name, a development that could signal purges and perhaps a new Cultural Revolution. By playing host to Nixon in the midst of the upheaval, China seemed to be saying that its rapprochement with America would not be sidetracked. As for Nixon, the trip was an ideal opportunity to begin his own rehabilitation at the scene of his greatest triumph. Now that the value of U.S.-Soviet détente is being questioned, Nixon's opening to China is the most important event that

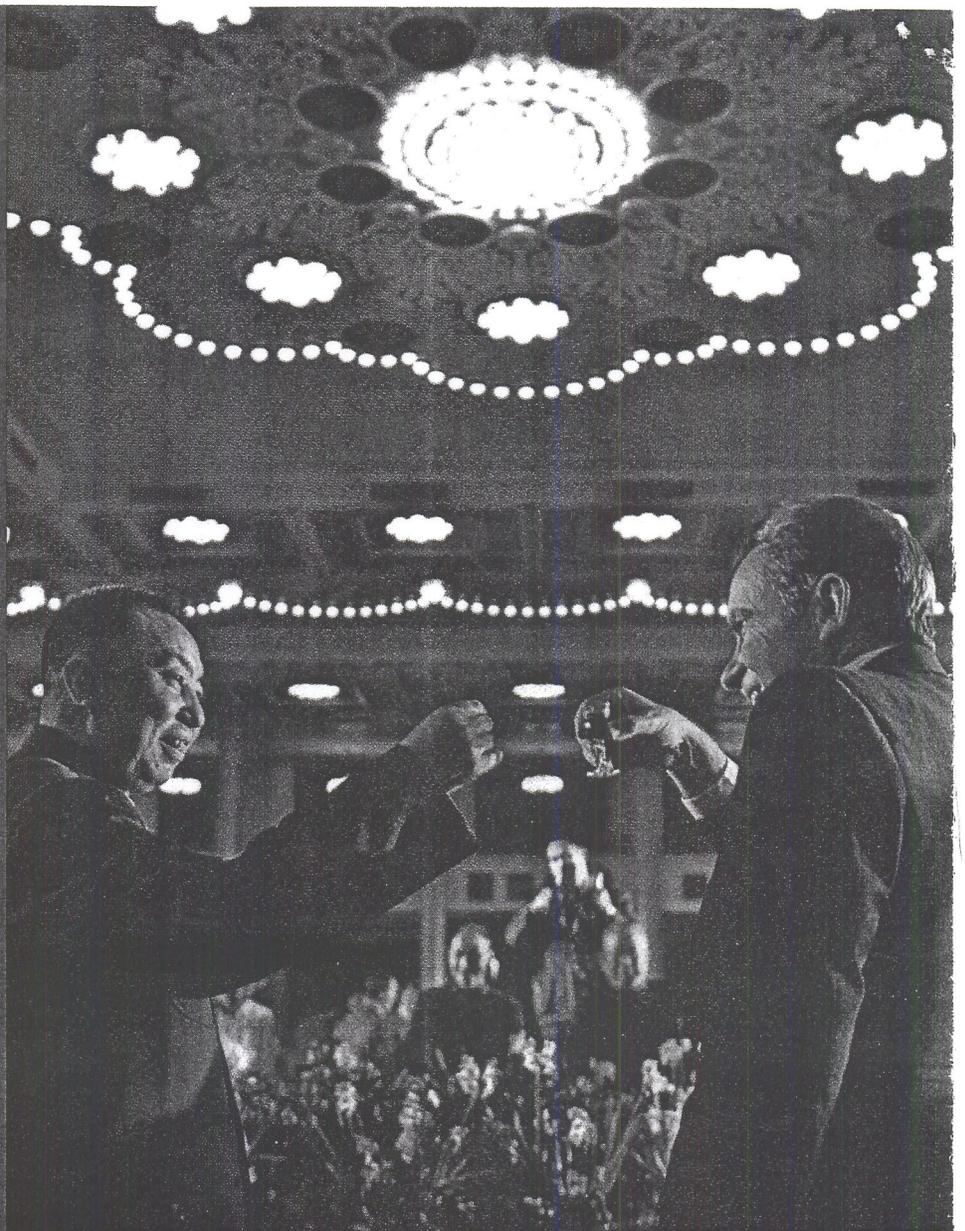
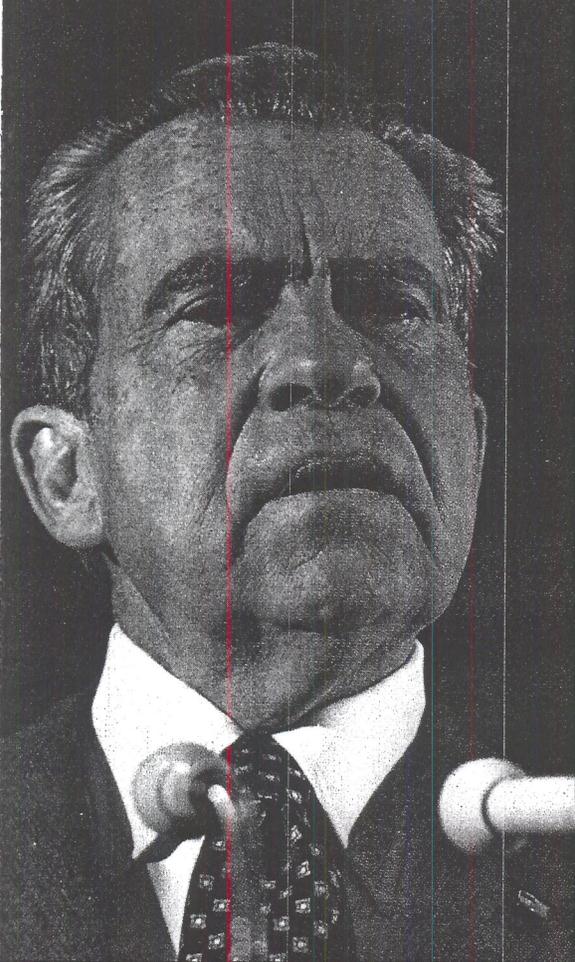


Photos by Wally McNamee—Newsweek

Nixon shakes hands with a friendly crowd in Tien An Men Square, then inspects radical wall posters



Nixon delivers a toast, then pauses to clink glasses with Acting Premier Hua. At a Peking school, Pat Nixon watches acrobats balancing urns.



Photos by Wally McNamee—Newsweek



of the People was eerily reminiscent of the 1972 banquets. There were the same strolling toasts with mao tai liquor. The Chinese band again played "Home on the Range" and "America, the Beautiful." And Nixon sat in the same seat at the same table where he had dined as President. Only the huge American and Chinese flags that had adorned the stage four years ago were missing.

Healthier: Shortly before noon on Nixon's second day in China, Peking's director of protocol announced: "I have just received word that Chairman Mao would like to see you." The 82-year-old Chairman and the ex-President met for what the Chinese Government later called "a friendly conversation on a wide range of subjects." Mao seemed thinner than in recent photographs; he had trouble getting to his feet when Nixon arrived and explained that his legs had been bothering him. But one source told NEWSWEEK's John J. Lindsay that the Chairman looked much healthier than expected. His skin color was good, and he seemed to think and talk clearly.

Details of the talks were not released, but Nixon reportedly began by assuring Mao: "I bring you warmest regards from President Ford." Replied Mao: "Yes, we had good talks when he was here." As the meeting ended, the Chairman said: "Please extend my best regards to your President and Mrs. Ford."

That night, the Nixons were the guests of Mao's militantly radical wife, Chiang Ching, at a soiree featuring classical Chinese entertainment—and some heavily political songs, including one that called for the "liberation" of Taiwan. At the conclusion of the number, Madame Mao leapt to her feet to applaud. Pat Nixon joined her, but the ex-President coolly remained in his seat. Catching the diplomatic nuance, Mrs. Nixon quickly sat down—while her husband simultaneously rose to a half-crouch in what he later explained was not an endorsement of the song but "a gentleman's gesture to a lady."

Rhetoric: For the next two days, the deposed President was treated to some vintage Maoist thought. When he waded into the crowds in Tien An Men Square, he asked a young man who was holding his son: "What do you want him to be when he grows up?" The reply: "I want him to answer the call of Chairman Mao." Nixon received a larger dose of Chinese political rhetoric the following day on a visit to Tsinghua University, the center of the wall-poster campaign. He viewed the posters and sat in on an hour-long discussion on the power struggle—the most explicit briefing that any foreigner is known to have received.

At times during his Peking visit, Nixon's chronic lack of graceful small talk

led him into minor gaffes. Inspecting a farming exhibit, he joked undiplomatically that the U.S. would be willing to send technical assistance to China in exchange for some attractive peasant girls. When the similarity between a 5,000-year-old character and the letter "K" was brought to his attention during a museum visit, Nixon quipped lamely: "Oh, does Kissinger go that far back?"

On his last night in Peking, Nixon played host to 300 Chinese at a nine-course banquet, the first ever given in the Great Hall of the People by a private visitor. (Nixon offered to pay for the dinner—which cost an estimated \$5,000—but the Chinese wouldn't hear of it.) The next morning, he and Pat flew south to the mountain resort of Kweilin. They were met by a drizzling rain that

opments at a critical moment. The death of Chou En-lai last January appeared to be a more pivotal event than Western analysts believed at the time. The escalating attacks on Chou's chosen heir, Teng Hsiao-ping, coupled with Hua Kuo-feng's appointment as Acting Premier, were solid evidence that China's moderates were in grave trouble—and that, for the moment at least, the radicals were riding high. Teng himself was denounced in new wall posters as the "foremost capitalist roader" and accused of praising "the gangster Chiang Kai-shek." Most analysts detected Mao's own hand in the campaign, but it was still an open question last week how far the Chairman would allow the denunciations to go—or where they would lead.

Despite the distractions of the poster



Oliphant © 1976 Washington Star

'Take him home, please—he's beginning to make me nervous!'

continued all day. Nixon was in a dark mood. He stalked through a receiving line, brushed off American reporters who tried to ask him questions and ignored the crowds who lined the streets to see him.

Nixon's days in the south of China were devoted to little more than tourism: a trek through spectacular limestone caves outside Kweilin, a six-hour boat trip down the Li Kiang River and visits to a commune and hot springs outside Canton. As he prepared to leave for home over the weekend—traveling again on a Boeing 707 provided by the Chinese Government—he had seen as much, and probably more, of modern China as any American visitor. He had talked with China's top leaders and with provincial, city and university officials. It was apparent that the Chinese were eager to hear his views—and even more eager for him to hear theirs.

Nixon's trip gave the United States a close-up view of Chinese political devel-

opment, the warmth of China's welcome was fresh evidence that Peking wanted continued, and perhaps expanded, ties with Washington. The Ford Administration seemed ready to respond. Ford was expected to give the U.S. Liaison Office in Peking a prestigious new chief: banker Thomas S. Gates Jr., a respected Defense Secretary under Dwight Eisenhower. Gates, 69, publicly called for improved relations between the U.S. and China as long ago as 1965. It appeared highly doubtful that Richard Nixon had any further role to play between Washington and Peking, but he had been a conspicuous bearer of good tidings from China. Throughout his political career, Nixon has been criticized as a manipulator of men and events. The Chinese had shown, in their turn, that they could find a role for even a dishonored ex-President.

—RICHARD STEELE with JOHN J. LINDSAY with the Nixon party in China, THOMAS M. DeFRANK in Washington and bureau reports