

The final days

Nixon charges unfair -- Ford

By W.E. Barnes
Examiner Political Writer

FRESNO — President Ford yesterday defended former President Nixon against new charges in an upcoming book by Watergate reporters Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward.

The book charges that Nixon drank heavily and "appeared suicidal" during his last days in office. Ford labeled the allegations "unfair and untimely."

"I wish that kind of reporting didn't exist," the President said during the taping of an interview for network television news.

"I saw former President Nixon a few times prior to the day that I became President," Ford told KABC correspondent Jerry Dunphy. "And I saw him at one of the last moments before I became President."

"I never saw any instances where he was endangering his own life, or any incident or attitude that he was a danger to the country," Ford said.

Asked if he would call such reporting character assassination, Ford said, "I wouldn't call it very kind."

"I have good relations with the press," he said. "I'm not going to attack them. That's their judgment. If they want to indulge in it, I think the public will be the final person to judge whether that kind of reporting is good or bad.

"I would hope that after I leave the White House, there won't be any of these unfortunate revelations. Betty runs the East Wing, and I think I run the West Wing. I don't think we have the kind of people (on the staff) who will indulge in what we've read in some of the more recent stories about Mr. Nixon."

After leaving Los Angeles the President flew here to address the State GOP Central Committee Convention.

At an airport press conference the President was questioned again about the Woodward Bernstein book.

He replied:

"I have not read the book. I can only say in my personal experiences in those last few days I saw no evidence of it."