

Ehrlichman's Own President

By Thomas Collins

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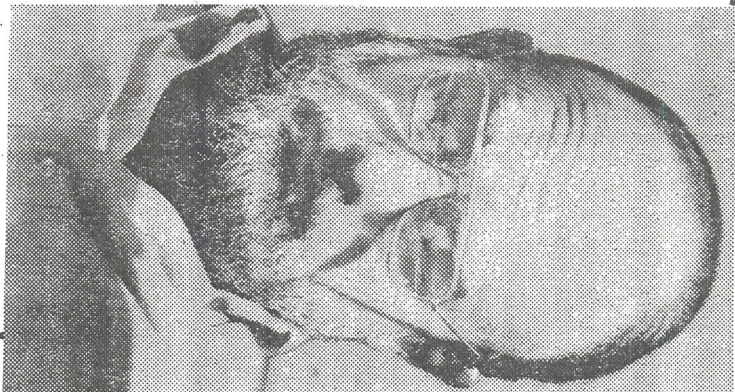
In his forthcoming novel "The Company," John Ehrlichman has drawn an unflattering portrait of a fictional president of the United States who appears to bear more than a passing resemblance to Ehrlichman's former boss, Richard Nixon.

One of the things that seems certain to be discussed about the book is how much of it is fiction and how much is fact. Is it, the real Nixon or is it an embroidered version created by a former aide for commercial purposes?

New York magazine, which excerpted parts of "The Company" in its current issue, does not leave much doubt that it thinks Ehrlichman's "President Richard Monckton" was drawn from life: the excerpts are illustrated with sketches of Nixon. The magazine also lists the names of the fictional characters along with the real-life individuals they supposedly represent.

In the book, "Richard Monckton" has many of the characteristics the country has come to associate with Mr. Nixon, including his discomfort at having to make small talk, his hypersensitivity to criticism and his need for solitude.

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JOHN EHRLICHMAN

Monckton's speech pattern, when talking with his aids, even has the ring of the White House tapes.

In addition, Monckton has a drinking problem that recalls Woodward and Bernstein's "The Final Days," in which the

Ehrlichman's fictional president has a need for pills as well as alcohol. A passage from the book recounts how Monckton "tired easily." It goes on: "Ironically, when he became very fatigued he found it impossible to sleep without pills, and at those times a normal dosage was not enough. Sleeping pills always made him feel dull the next day and, when he woke up, coffee alone wouldn't pick him up. So he had to have a drink or two to get things started. Unfortunately, he became intoxicated quickly, leading him to become hoarse, bitter, and belligerent."

In a catalogue announcing the book, which is to be published next month, Simon and Schuster described it as a "daring and headline-making 'roman à clef'" - a fictional book in which real people are thinly disguised. Ehrlichman could not be reached for comment. But a Simon and Schuster official said that "it's the first time anyone at the very heart" of the Nixon administration has written about it. "It has the real in it," he said.

The story carries Monckton from his elevation to the burglary of a Democratic headquarters. Ehrlichman has maintained that the plot is fiction, which leaves the reader to draw his or her own conclusions about Monckton and others in

the book. Among those passing under fictional names, in the view of New York magazine, are Henry Kissinger, H. R. Haldeman, Ehrlichman himself, J. Edgar Hoover, John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson, Hubert Humphrey, E. Howard Hunt and former Vice President Spiro Agnew, who is publishing his own novel this month, "The Canfield Decision," drawing heavily on his White House experiences.

In the novel, Monckton rails against hippies, the bureaucracy, Harvard liberals and Georgetown cocktail parties, and complains about everything from the way the salad is served at a state dinner to the lack of arrangements for television coverage for a planned walk across the street.

"Frank, can't we fill the street with out people, cheering?" he asks an aide. "Move the hippies a block away and fill in the block with our kids; get a couple of loud bands . . . Drown out those faggots."

Ehrlichman, who was Mr. Nixon's assistant for domestic affairs, is now living in Santa Fe, N.M. His conviction on Watergate-related charges is currently under appeal. Paramount has bought the movie rights for "The Company," but has not yet cast any of the parts.