

"Just two years ago, I was walking along this beach, and I realized that here in Southern California there were millions of people who wanted to go to the beach, and that when you go by Santa Monica, Long Beach, or any of the other great beaches that I used to go to as a youngster, that they are just too crowded these days, and there is a great need for more beaches where people can go.

"Consequently, I checked and found, and with the

cooperation of the Marine Corps, that they did not need the total of 18 miles of beach which they presently occupy. So we have worked out that this six miles will be declared excess, and that in the future, millions of particularly young people in California, and older ones as well, who enjoy the beach will have greater access to the property, which has been closed since World War II when the Marine Corps took it over, for obvious reasons."

— Richard Milhouse Nixon

THE TRESTLES, CHURCH, AND SAN ONOFRE TO BE ADDED TO THE NEW STATE PARK

In a sudden and unexpected move, President Nixon has added the Trestles as well as the San Onofre private beach club area to the new State Park. Only problem is, the state doesn't have the money to open the new areas.

STATE PARK POLITICS: THE PUBLIC INTEREST CAME LAST

Politics, not the public interest, played the largest role in the creation of the new San Onofre Bluffs State Beach.

An often-bitter struggle involving the highest levels of government has swirled around the long stretch of virgin beach.

Caught up in the battle have been President Nixon, Governor Ronald Reagan, Congressman Alphonzo Bell and John Schmitz, and high-ranking military brass from the Marine Corps and the Pentagon.

The new state park was a hidden issue in last fall's contentious political campaign between Senator John Tunney and the man he dumped from office, George Murphy.

Even one day before the park dedication ceremony, there was political in-fighting going on.

The story of the political maneuvering behind San Onofre Bluffs State Beach is an instructive lesson in the workings of our government.

The first spark for a public beach on Camp Pendleton came in the 1950's from the growing surfing fraternity. There are several good surf spots along the north coastline of the sprawling Marine base. Surfers naturally



Cabell at the Trestles back in the good ol' days. Photo: Severson.

sneaked onto the base to ride the waves.

The Marines, living up to their hard-nosed image, attempted to arrest the surfers for trespass, a felony on military property. Over the years, hundreds were nabbed by Marine patrols; thousands more, however, eluded capture, usually by paddling out into the surf and leaving angry and frustrated soldiers standing on the shore.

It became the Marine Corps' private little war.

A tremendous antagonism developed between the surfers and the Marines, especially at the Trestles beach, just south of the Western White House, where probably some of the best summer waves in California roll in over rocky reefs.

As the sport of surfing boomed in the 1960's, public pressures to open the Trestles beach increased. By 1969, the state parks department obtained a tentative agreement from the Marines to give up the Trestles beach (so named because of the railroad trestles crossing San Mateo Creek).

But President Nixon moved in next door. The Secret Service decreed that there could be no public beach so near. The Marines, still unable to drive out the invading surfers, were happy to let the Secret Service agents tackle the task.

President Nixon was at first unaware that his presence had cancelled a new park. When the situation was disclosed in January, 1970, he ordered aides to

try to find a replacement site on Camp Pendleton. From that point on, the state park became a fast-moving political football.

The Marine Corps adamantly opposed giving up any other stretch of their 18-mile coastline. Since the 125,000-acre training base was created from ranchland in 1941, the Marines have stoutly defended any attempt, by government or public, to turn even one acre to non-military use.

Even the Atomic Energy Commission, a federal agency that swings considerable weight, could not persuade the Marines to give up the site for the San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station until Congress passed an act specifically taking the coastline property.

Presidential aides, accustomed to wielding the influence of the office, were at first optimistic about getting quick Marine Corps action to open up another stretch of beach for a park. They announced the Marine Corps had agreed to give up 1.5 miles of coast. The Marines, however, had different ideas.

Four months later, in May, the state had progressed nowhere in trying to negotiate a lease. The Marines were digging in their heels.

In the meantime, Los Angeles Congressman Alphonzo Bell entered the picture. He helped take over the 35th District duties of Rep. James Utt, who died suddenly in February, 1970.

Bell, whose own congressional district includes more than 60 miles of coastline in Santa Monica Bay, stretching from Palos Verdes to Malibu, was understandably interested in the prospective new public beach. His own beaches were tremendously overcrowded, and this new area could help relieve the pressure.

His inquiries to the Marine Corps in Washington were rebuffed. Bell took up the challenge.

President Nixon returned to San Clemente last May for a short stay. At that time, deputy White House press secretary Gerald Warren assured that "the decision to open the beach up to the public has been made."

The Marines hadn't reached that decision, however. They refused to allow planners from the state parks department to enter Camp Pendleton to inspect the beach that the White House had ordered opened.

At the same time, for reasons still unclear, the Marines gave the San Onofre Surfing Club, a group of one thousand private citizens, an additional 1,000 feet of beach to tack onto the 2,500 they already had north of the nuclear plant.

The club, described by Rep. Bell as a private spa for "a small group of Marine brass and socially prominent Californians," has operated with an exclusive no-cost lease on the Camp Pendleton beach for more than 22 years. Membership is closed except to the one thousand, many of whom are very influential, as we shall see.

Otis Chandler, publisher of the Los Angeles Times, which owns the Costa Mesa Daily Pilot, is a powerful member. His newspapers, with more than 1,000,000 daily circulation, have never explained the existence of the San Onofre Surfing Club on the federal installation.

By July of last year, the negotiations between the state and the Marines had collapsed. The Marines were insisting the lease provide that the state would have to abandon the beach as soon as President Nixon left office. With that prospect, the state could not have committed any capital investment to the park. The state also asked for more beach—a total of 4.5 miles.



New State Park beach, point in the background to Trestles, behind that, the Western White House. Photo: Van Note.

When President Nixon again returned to the Western White House in late July, the Marines were pressured, but only begrudgingly, into agreeing to a 25-year lease. But they balked at giving up any more than the narrow 1.5 miles of sand immediately south of the nuclear plant. The state said it was infeasible to develop such a small park.

By mid-summer, the political campaign for the November general election was in full swing. On the evening of July 27, both Governor Reagan and Senator Murphy arrived at the Nixon home for dinner and political strategy.

The Republican governor and the senator both pressed Mr. Nixon, over the dinner table, to aid in the park struggle. It would be an ideal vote-getting issue for George Murphy, who was locked in a tight and bitter campaign with John Tunney.

The President agreed, and asked Reagan to send him a report on the status of the negotiations, with recommendations by way of Murphy.

Reagan instructed the state parks department to channel all



Peter Van Dyke used to hide his boat in the jungle—until someone set the jungle on fire. Photo: Rich Sijon.

future developments on the San Onofre park to Murphy, who would make the politically popular announcements.

(But in the ensuing weeks, Murphy's campaign staff failed to take advantage of the plan. Congressman Bell, with a personal interest in the affair, did the real work.)

By the end of August, after a Republican poll showed Murphy falling behind Tunney, the Reagan camp, which had stepped in to bolster the sagging Murphy campaign, prepared to launch the senator into the public eye as conservationist and beach lover. He was to announce bold actions to open the Camp Pendleton beach.

John Tunney's campaign strategists caught wind of the plan, however. The day before the Murphy beach campaign was to begin, Tunney, speaking in San Francisco, warned that he would challenge Murphy's role and expose the ploy. It was Alphonzo Bell, not Murphy, who had been fighting for the park, Tunney said.

Murphy never uttered a word after Tunney's warning.

On August 19, with the Marines

steadfastly refusing the state's request for the 4.5 miles of beach south of the nuclear plant, the parks department decided to offer a compromise proposal—3.5 miles.

Alphonzo Bell called a press conference in Los Angeles that day. Seeking action, he prodded the Marine Corps before the television cameras:

"The thought that the prime beach frontage at Camp Pendleton should be fenced off to the public so that the Marines can use the land for maneuvers a few days each year—if that—is preposterous," he exclaimed.

"This situation is even more infuriating when it is realized that the Marines have authorized use of part of this land for a private, closed-membership, surfing club."

Bell's barbed comments sent the San Onofre Surfing Club and its influential members running for cover. They realized their privileged position was untenable under public scrutiny.

But just six days later, on August 25, the surfing club attempted an adroit political move to save their necks: enlist President Nixon on their side.

Selected for the task was one of Mr. Nixon's top political backers, Robert Mardian of Pasadena. He is a staunch member of the San Onofre Surfing Club and keeps a summer home in nearby San Clemente.

Mardian, a conservative lawyer, was serving at the time as director of the President's Cabinet Committee on Education. He now heads the internal security office under Justice Department Chief John Mitchell.

Mardian used his influence in the Nixon Administration to persuade top presidential aide H. R. Haldeman that it would be a good local community relations move for Mr. Nixon to accept an honorary membership to the surfing club.

So on the afternoon of last August 25, President Nixon dutifully emerged from his office into the bright summer sun to greet a contingent of surfers from the club. Mardian, smiling happily, was there. So was Rolf Aurness, newly crowned world surfing champion, whose father, actor James Arness, is a club member

and has a summer home just one block from the Western White House.

Mr. Nixon shook hands with the surfers, had his picture taken with them, and accepted a plaque making him an honorary member of the exclusive club. He was also given a window decal that would get him past the Marine Corps sentries at Camp Pendleton. He went away thinking he had chalked up a few points with his neighbors.

But the public reaction was not so kind, particularly because the honorary memberships were awarded less than a week after Rep. Bell had blasted the small group of Marine brass and socially prominent Californians.

The President, who had been unaware of the controversy, soon received angry letters from area residents, criticizing his acceptance of the club membership. The surfing club's bold move to cloak itself in the presidential mantle ultimately backfired.

At the same time, hundreds of letters were pouring into the Western White House from surfers throughout the U. S. They were reacting to an editorial in SURFER Magazine reporting the Marine Corps' refusal to open the San Onofre beach, and the hypocrisy of the private surfing club.

SURFER urged readers to write the President and tell him "what it's like not to have a place to surf." That's what hundreds of surfers wrote to Mr. Nixon, as well as Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird.

Alongside this public pressure, Bell launched a quiet campaign in Washington. He enlisted most of the California congressmen in support. Most importantly, Bell persuaded Los Angeles Rep. Chet Holifield to join the battle against the Marine Corps. Holifield, a Democrat, held great power as chairman of the subcommittee on military operations of the House committee on government operations.

In early September, Holifield agreed privately to hold an official Congressional investigation into the Marine Corps' obstinance.

On September 11, Bell announced he was calling for the investigation and public hearings. "Neither the Marines nor the Defense Department have ap-

peared sufficiently responsive on this issue," he stated.

Only a public hearing on the long negotiations could "put enough public focus on the Marines' position to bring about a solution acceptable to the state and people of California," Bell said.

Bell's offensive sent shock waves through Camp Pendleton, and the Pentagon, and even into the White House.

The Marines and the military bureaucrats definitely did not want to answer questions from angry congressmen. And the White House did not want President Nixon dragged into the fray.

The phone lines between Camp Pendleton and the Pentagon began burning after Bell's statement. A strong directive came from the White House, ordering the Marines to come up with a plan acceptable to the state.

At that moment, to his misfortune, newly elected Congressman John Schmitz jumped into the controversy. He had been elected in June to serve the remainder of James Utt's term. Shortly after Schmitz took office, Bell, who had been handling some of the affairs of the 35th District after Utt's death, contacted Schmitz and offered to let Schmitz take over the battle for the Marine beach.

But Schmitz unaccountably told Bell to continue pursuing the issue. That was in June.

In late August, when the beach controversy was fast and furious, Schmitz decided he wanted to

take over handling the issue. Bell, however, told Schmitz that it was too late. Bell refused to step back.

Schmitz, who happens to be a Lt. Colonel in the Marine Corps Reserve, was infuriated by Bell's refusal. On September 16, he fired a blast at Bell, charging him with "grandstanding interference" in the affairs of the 35th District.

Schmitz claimed the fight to open the Pendleton beaches was "anti-military". He opposed the state park at San Onofre.

Bell responded enthusiastically, accusing Schmitz of misstating the facts. He said Schmitz' "long training in the John Birch Society clearly is serving him well."

The Orange County congressman was apparently unaware that the White House had entered the issue. The next day, September 17, the military caved in and agreed to give up 3.5 miles of beach. The Marines stated they did not need that stretch of beach for training.

That left Schmitz standing alone and embarrassed.

Commented Bell: "The (Marines') announcement is particularly gratifying in view of the charges yesterday by Congressman Schmitz that my involvement in this issue was 'making a solution more difficult.'"

The political in-fighting did not stop in September. Governor Reagan's office, where Bell is regarded as a "too-liberal" Republican, has doggedly tried to keep Bell from taking any credit

for the new state park.

Reagan's office, in fact, almost succeeded in keeping Bell from speaking at the park's dedication.

Last year a group of wealthy and conservative backers of Governor Reagan attempted to dump Bell from his Los Angeles congressional seat. Oilman Henry Salvatori, head of Reagan's "Kitchen Cabinet," and Patrick Frawley, chairman of Technicolor and Schick, backed ultra-conservative attorney John LaFollette in a Republican primary bid against Bell.

LaFollette's \$200,000 attempt failed in June. Frawley was further angered in the fall senatorial campaign when Bell stole the spotlight from Senator George Murphy. One of the great issues of the Murphy-Tunney battle was Murphy's generous "consulting" contract with Frawley's Technicolor.

Governor Reagan, ironically, was a strong backer of Alphonzo Bell when Bell first ran for Congress in 1960. In fact, Reagan was a Democrat then and headed a group called "Democrats for Alphonzo Bell." The governor's home, in the Santa Monica Mountains, lies within Bell's district.

The Marine Corps, while bowing to the command of the White House, was still fuming over the loss of their beach. On October 1, the Marines renewed the annual lease for the 3,500 feet of beach used by the San Onofre Surfing Club.

State parks planners attempting to survey the 3.5-mile beach

Perfect Church... Forbidden fruit. Photo: Severson.

property inland.

The state gets the 655 acres of beach for the new San Onofre Bluffs State Beach. The 3,400 acres will be open for use by all public agencies.

So in the end, it was the nation's consummate politician, Richard M. Nixon, who stole the greater share of the glory.

"Just two years ago I was walking along this beach," Mr. Nixon explained, "and I realized that here in Southern California there were millions of people who wanted to go to the beach..."

—Craig Van Note

SOME POSSIBILITIES

were frequently barred from getting onto the base. The Marines pointed out that the final lease had not been closed. That lease had been sent to Washington from Sacramento. It sat on the desk of the Secretary of the Navy for months, unsigned.

Because the lease contract was unsigned, the Marine Corps pulled a stunning move: they demanded the state "cease and desist" all plans to open up the park for Easter.

The order reportedly came from Marine Corps Commandant Gen. Leonard Chapman. Camp Pendleton called the state parks department in Sacramento on the afternoon of March 23 and instructed the state to get off Camp Pendleton until the lease agreement was signed in Washington.

When President Nixon's staff learned of the Marine's vindictive action at the Western White House in late March, they came down hard on the Marine command.

Brig. Gen. J. D. Hughes, the top military aide to President Nixon, reportedly issued a strong order countermanding the Marines' action.

Finally, the entire beach hassle was laid in the lap of President Nixon and his top aides.

In a move that left everyone, including the wrangling politicians and bureaucrats, astounded, he decided to take away from the Marines a total of six miles of beach, including the San Onofre Surfing Club and Trestles, and 3,400 acres of choice valley

• William Penn Mott, Jr., State Director of Parks and Recreation, has stated his desire to create a surfing museum in conjunction with the new State Park. "We intend to implement our dream of developing a surfing museum, as well as a museum to interpret the ocean ecology and the land ecology. This is one of the outstanding surfing areas in the world, and we believe a museum interpreting the history of surfing and the development of surfing equipment will add an interesting new dimension to the potential of this area."

The existing Marine recreation buildings just north of the San Onofre beach club would really be fine for such a museum. The sport of surfing would greatly benefit by the creation of such a place where the heritage and history of surfing would be preserved and displayed.

• While ordering portions of Camp Pendleton released for public use, President Nixon remarked: "I should point out that this action, while it deals with property very close to my home in California, relates to the whole Nation, but I should also point out that what we are doing here has triggered my thoughts with regard to activities throughout the Nation. Over half of the land, for example, in the Western States is owned by and controlled by the Federal Government. This is apart from parklands. This is land which is used by and con-

trolled by the Federal Government, and denied to the public, as far as their use is concerned."

There are many good waves on military bases throughout the U.S., not to mention all-purpose recreation lands. In California, Pt. Mugu and Vandenburg Air Force Base come immediately to mind. It is time for us all to pick up the initiative and to congratulate and urge the President to continue in the direction of opening dormant military lands to public use.

• Conservationists fear Nixon's move may have adverse effects: "The Sierra Club and other California conservationists fear that the 3,400 acres of hills and valleys lying inland from the Western White House will become a slick asphalt playground.

"Real estate promoters have been eyeing the choice ocean view land for years and are now maneuvering to acquire at least a part of the 3,400 acres. At the San Clemente City Hall it was reported that at least a dozen developers were prepared to move in if neither the state nor San Diego County takes the entire tract for recreational development.

"The 6½ mile beach was given outright to the state to be retained in what Nixon called 'its natural virgin beauty,' but any part of the 3,400 acres not taken over by the state or county will be sold by the government to private interests.

"Hopes of real estate promoters were raised somewhat by presidential aide John Ehrlichman's statement that it was doubtful that either the state or county would be able to take over all 3,400 acres. State park officials acknowledged that budget limitations on recreational development funds might prevent acquisition of the entire tract.

"Orange County, whose southern boundary abuts the ceded land, wants a large part of it for a supersonic airport complex—the largest in the West.

"San Diego County, in which Camp Pendleton is situated, already has served warning that it will fight to preserve the area in its primitive state as a buffer against Los Angeles urban sprawl."