



LEAD SAN DIEGO

A catalyst for leadership

HERBERT G. KLEIN 1918-2009

Photographing the homeward-bound aircraft, an American on a diplomatic mission to North Vietnam imagined the passengers' emotions. "It was as if I could hear them shouting for joy," noted Klein, then the White House communications

Herbert George Klein, whose dedication to journalism and Richard Nixon gave him a seat to some of 20th century America's highest lowest moments, died yesterday morning. After suffering cardiac arrest, Mr. Klein, 91, was from his La Jolla condominium to Scripps Memorial Hospital La Jolla. Efforts to revive him unsuccessful.

News of his death brought tributes from political media colleagues.

"He was very much like an older brother to me," said Pete Wilson, who moved to San Diego in 1963 on Mr. Klein's suggestion. As San Diego mayor, U.S. senator and California governor, Wilson often sought Mr. Klein's advice: "He was a mentor to me and a lot of people."

Mayor Jerry Sanders also consulted with Mr. Klein. "Like many who benefited from his wise counsel, I will miss Herb," Sanders said, "but I'll always remember the selflessness and optimism that guided him throughout his public life."

Tom Johnson, former *Los Angeles Times* publisher, praised Mr. Klein's "decency, humanity, humility, thoughtfulness and a determination to put the national interest ahead of narrow partisan interests."

Johnson speculated that the Watergate scandal would not have occurred "if President Nixon had kept Herb close by his side as his most trusted adviser."

Karin Winner, editor of *The San Diego Union-Tribune*, was a friend of Mr. Klein's and a fellow University of Southern California graduate. "I really don't think he had any enemies, just people who might disagree with him on an issue or two, but even they would seek him out at a social function to ask advice or get his reaction to a new idea. He truly was dedicated to building brighter tomorrows.

"My tomorrows won't be the same without him."

Mr. Klein's 51 years with Copley Newspapers, ending in 2003 after 23 years as editor in chief, made him a familiar figure in San Diego County. Nationally, though, Mr. Klein was best known for his long association with Nixon, starting as a reporter covering the novice Republican candidate's 1946 congressional campaign and ending 27 years later in the West Wing.

The first White House director of communications, Mr. Klein left in July 1973, 13 months before the Watergate scandal forced the president's resignation. In later years, Mr. Klein criticized what he called Nixon's "Achilles' heel — political chicanery at a level which should not have been dignified by the presidency."



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But he could never bring himself to denounce his former boss.

Nixon, Mr. Klein wrote, “has disappointed me on occasions, and he has let me down. But he also has provided the opportunity for irreplaceable, memorable moments for me.”

Those moments spanned the globe. Mr. Klein accompanied Vice President Nixon to Moscow in 1959 for meetings with Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev; as Nixon’s representative in 1960, he negotiated terms with Pierre Salinger, Sen. John F. Kennedy’s spokesman, for the first televised debates between presidential candidates; and traveled in the 1970s at the president’s behest to Beijing and Hanoi.

He was castigated in 1971 by Fidel Castro in one of the Cuban dictator’s speeches. And, as recently as April 11, 2003, he appeared in *The New York Times* crossword puzzle — 53 down: “Nixon confidant Herb -----.”

In the bruising arena of national politics, Mr. Klein was known for his warmth and charm. Tom Brokaw, the former NBC anchorman, met Mr. Klein while covering California politics in the 1960s. In a videotape made for Mr. Klein’s 90th birthday last year, Brokaw said Nixon’s press secretary during those campaigns was “one of the nicest people we could possibly ever have to deal with.”

Being Nixon’s liaison to the media, though, was never easy.

“Imagine having to meet the press and put a good face on Richard Nixon,” said Diver, who worked as Mr. Klein’s personal assistant in the White House. “This president who hated the press.”

In fact, Mr. Klein’s 1980 memoir was entitled “Making It Perfectly Clear: An Account of Nixon’s Love-Hate Relationship with the Media.”

Mr. Klein was born in Los Angeles on April 1, 1918. As a boy, he dreamed of a sportswriting career; as a journalism major at USC, he became the *Daily* sports editor.



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He graduated from the Los Angeles campus in 1940 but never really left. He served on USC’s board of trustees and was named Alumnus of the Year in 1971. In 2006, the university established a journalism scholarship in his name and inaugurated the annual Herbert G. Klein Lecture on Civic and Community Leadership.

While several family members had preceded Mr. Klein to USC, his bond to the school may have been cemented in an international relations class. That’s where he met Marjorie Galbraith, who became his wife of more than 66 years. They were married in 1941 in a ceremony conducted by his grandfather, a minister in the German Evangelical Church.

When World War II broke out, Mr. Klein quit a reporting job at the Alhambra *Post-Advocate* and joined the Navy. He was assigned to San Diego, where he spent three years as a public affairs officer. At the war’s end, he returned to journalism. As a special correspondent for Copley Newspapers, he covered Nixon’s 1946 campaign and became intrigued by the fellow Navy veteran.

In 1950, Mr. Klein moved to San Diego, where he wrote news stories, features and editorials for the *Evening Tribune*. In 1953, he was transferred to the Copley chain’s flagship paper, *The San Diego Union*, as chief editorial writer. He rose through the ranks to editorial page editor, associate editor and, by 1959, editor.

These jobs were interrupted by several leaves of absence to work for Nixon, whom Publisher James S. Copley supported. On occasion, critics maintained that this arrangement blurred the line between objective newsman and political operative.

“Ostensibly a working news reporter, Klein would be remembered for his extra-professional contribution to the campaign,” Nixon biographer Roger Morris wrote about the 1946 contest.

Mr. Klein insisted later, though, that when he took leaves from his editor's job to work in politics, he always told newspaper staff members "that the only way to get in trouble with me during the campaign was to favor the Republicans or the Nixon campaign" in print.

He served as Nixon's press secretary in the 1960 presidential, 1962 gubernatorial and 1968 presidential campaigns. Nixon's election in that last contest did not bring Mr. Klein the job he had expected, presidential press secretary. That post went to Ron Ziegler, a protege of Nixon lieutenant H.R. "Bob" Haldeman, while Mr. Klein became director of communications for the White House.

This newly created office carried Cabinet rank, and news executives initially expressed hope that it would ensure a less-secretive White House.

Those hopes were short-lived. "As time went on," Sam Ragan, then-editor of the *Raleigh News & Observer*, noted in a book on the Nixon administration, "the visibility of Herb Klein became less and less and the White House itself became at times impenetrable."

While Mr. Klein was responsible for overseeing the entire departmental and agency public relations system, Haldeman ensured that White House press operations went through his team.

When the president removed three television sets from the Oval Office, Mr. Klein had them installed in his office. He monitored the media and often appeared on "Meet the Press," the "Today" show and other broadcasts as the administration's spokesman.

These were busy years — the National Archives maintains custody of 6,600 pages from Mr. Klein's White House files — and tense ones, marked by the Vietnam War; the release of the classified Pentagon Papers, which detailed war strategy; and student protests against the war.

In this atmosphere, some Nixon hard-liners considered Mr. Klein too open with journalists. "By their standards," said Stephen Hess, a former Nixon staffer and presidential scholar at the Brookings Institution, "he was a loose cannon — which meant he talked to reporters."

This attitude, Hess said, hastened Mr. Klein's departure from Washington. In July 1973, with the Watergate scandal building, he resigned to join Metromedia Inc., a national non-network broadcasting group.

In August 1974, Nixon became the first American president to resign. While Mr. Klein was not implicated in the scandal, he was wounded when transcripts of the president's secret tape recordings included unflattering references to him.

"He just doesn't have his head screwed on," Nixon told Haldeman on June 23, 1972. "People love him, but damn is he unorganized."

Years later, Mr. Klein said, Nixon apologized "in his awkward way."

In 1980, Mr. Klein rejoined Copley Newspapers as editor in chief. From his office in Mission Valley, he helped guide the chain's editorial positions, while maintaining contacts in politics and sports.

A football fanatic, Mr. Klein attended more than 35 Super Bowls in his lifetime, including the first game, in 1967. In 1984, while in Tampa for Super Bowl XVIII, he urged several friends — including Jack Kemp, the former NFL quarterback then serving as a congressman from Buffalo — to back San Diego's bid to host the game.

For months, "we made presentations to the NFL team owners," said Leon Parma, a businessman who was part of the Super Bowl committee with Mr. Klein, his close friend. "Herb Klein was the one known by all the owners."

The committee succeeded, bringing the Super Bowl to San Diego in 1988, 1998 and 2003.

Mr. Klein also worked hard for the Holiday Bowl, serving as chairman and president for the annual postseason college football game. In recognition of his efforts on behalf of professional and collegiate football, a bronze bust of Mr. Klein was unveiled at Qualcomm Stadium in 2001. In May, he was inducted into the Pacific Life Holiday Bowl Hall of Fame.

He served on the board of the San Diego International Sports Council, the San Diego Regional Economic Development Corp. and on the executive committee of the Greater San Diego Chamber of Commerce. Until his death, he was a national fellow with the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research.

Even after Platinum Equity Group purchased the *Union-Tribune* in May, Mr. Klein maintained contact with newsroom colleagues. As late as Monday, Mr. Klein was reporting to a downtown office, where he spent hours on the phone with friends and elected officials. Wilson, the former governor, noted that Mr. Klein had recently asked him to help negotiate a consulting contract.

“OK,” Wilson said, “what do you want the terms of the contract to be?”

“Three years,” the nonagenarian consultant said.

“There are few people who have gotten more out of life, or given more to it and to other people, than Herb Klein,” Wilson said yesterday.

Parma also made note of his friend's dedication to those around him.



“Herb Klein mentored, nurtured and affected the lives of innumerable persons from presidents to students and young people just starting their careers,” Parma said. “He did this unselfishly and with enthusiasm.”

While Mr. Klein had battled pneumonia last year, friends said he never stopped enlisting new projects. For the last two years, he appeared every Wednesday night on KUSI/Channel 51, holding forth on current events. The night before his death, he went on air to argue on behalf of a new downtown central library.

His plans also included an August wedding to Barbara Costantino of Louisville, Ky.

This late-in-life romance followed the death of Mr. Klein's wife, Marjorie, on Feb. 4, 2008. He was visibly shaken by her passing, but friends recalled that he rallied for her memorial service.

“He handled it like he handled everything,” said Mel Katz, co-owner of the local Manpower employment agency. “He was totally in charge. He even orchestrated my part of that memorial service.”

More heartbreak occurred a few months later. Exactly one year before his own death, Mr. Klein lost his daughter, Joanne L. Mayne. An executive with the USC School of Dentistry, she died in her South Pasadena home at age 62.

Mr. Klein is survived by a brother, Kenneth; daughter Patricia Root; three grandsons, Tom Howell, Michael Mayne and Christopher Mayne; and three great-grandsons, Nick Howell, Zachary Mayne and Joshua Mayne.