

Nixon Rational: Ford

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Washington Post Staff Writers

President Ford said yesterday that he saw no evidence in the last days of Richard M. Nixon's presidency that Nixon was drinking heavily, and he saw no "... incident or ... attitude where I thought he might do something that would endanger the country."

The President commented in California in response to reports that Nixon was drinking so heavily and behaving so erratically that his family and close associates feared for his state of mind.

Those reports are contained in a new book, "The Final Days," by Washington Post reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein.

At the airport in Fresno, where he was met by a small crowd, including a few people who held signs reading, "Ford is Nixon's revenge," the Presi-

dent was asked about reports that Nixon's aides feared he might commit suicide in the days before his resignation Aug. 9, 1974.

"I haven't read the book, but in those last few days my personal experience is that I saw no evidence of it," Mr. Ford replied.

Earlier in the day in Los Angeles he told a television interviewer, "I never saw an instance where he was in danger of his own life, nor did I ever see any incident or any attitude where I thought he might do something that would endanger the country. Those are personal observations and I can only comment in that regard."

The President was not asked about, and did not comment on, a report in the book that Nixon, unhappy about naming him as Vice President, once remarked "Here's the damn pen I signed

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Jerry Ford's nomination with."

Nixon did not respond to several telephone calls and a telegram sent to his San Clemente residence by The Washington Post asking for his comments on the allegations in the book.

Former Watergate special prosecutor James F. Neal said Friday in Nashville, where he lives, that there was considerable concern among the Watergate prosecution staff about Nixon's mental condition.

"On some of the tapes there were rambling discussions for hours on end that never got anywhere," Neal said.

"None of us really knew, but we had heard reports of his heavy drinking. And we could read on the tapes as early as April, 1973, that he was totally concerned with the Watergate case ... [he] wasn't concerned about anything but Watergate."

Neal said he was "one of those who was willing to do almost any kind of plea bar-

gaining, just to get him [Nixon] out of there."

Former special prosecutor Leon Jaworski said he would not comment except to emphasize that "I never discussed plea bargaining with anyone. The subject was never brought up, was never discussed."

Jaworski said he has written a book on Watergate, scheduled to be published this fall, that is "going to tell the entire story of my own relationships and observations and conversations and so on ... It will all come out."

Former White House communications director Herbert Klein, asked about the Woodward-Bernstein book's claim that Nixon made "nasty references about the inferior intelligence of blacks," said:

"I think sometimes in the vernacular he would use a term that would be uncomplimentary, but without meaning it to be that way." Pressed for specifics, he added, "I've heard a term like nigger." Klein resigned from the Nixon White House July 1, 1973.

Gen. Alexander M. Haig Jr., White House chief of

staff during Nixon's final days and one of the few people who remained close to the former President during that traumatic period, refused to comment on several statements in the book about him.

The book says that Haig referred to Nixon as "our drunken friend" feared he might commit suicide, and once called Nixon's doctors to order that all pills, including sleeping pills and tranquilizers, be kept from him.

A spokesman for Haig said the general "has never discussed Watergate nor his duties in the White House in a public forum in the past, and he does not intend to deviate from that policy now or in the future."

Haig is the supreme allied commander in Europe, stationed in Mons, Belgium.

Former Secretary of State William P. Rogers was unavailable for comment about a report in the book that he said, "Tell the President to f--- himself" after being told by Haig in the late spring of 1973 that Nixon wanted his resignation.