

"Off to a Helluva Start"

The accession of Gerald R. Ford to the presidency has brought few palpable changes so far to the lives of most Americans. But to the press, the turnover in the Oval Office already seems like the dawn of a new era, free of the rancor of the Nixon years.

Among the first to experience and express the new mood are the 40 or so members of the permanent White House press corps. "It feels like someone threw open the window of the White House to let in light and air," says Peter Lisagor of the *Chicago Daily News*. "Ford is not the insecure man that Nixon was. He has never been traumatized by the press, and he doesn't treat the press as an enemy." Says NBC's Tom Brokaw: "It's like New Year's Day."

The new President has moved swiftly to get and keep newsmen on his side. His address to Congress last week contained this assurance: "I believe in the First Amendment and the absolute necessity of a free press." In his first official act, the President announced the appointment of Jerald F. terHorst, 52, a popular old hand in the White House press corps, as his press secretary. After fencing for 5½ years with an often surly Ronald Ziegler and his agreeable but seldom more informative deputy, Gerald Warren, many reporters have greeted terHorst's appointment with undisguised pleasure. "To Ziegler, information was something to be packaged and merchandized for his client," says Lisagor. "The feeling is that terHorst will treat information as an objective commodity." To Peter Kumpa, Washington bureau chief of the *Baltimore Sun*, terHorst is "sensible and moderate, a thorough professional."

Extra Space. A short (5 ft. 7½ in.), pipe-smoking Michigander of Dutch extraction, terHorst was taken off the city hall beat at his home-town *Grand Rapids Press* to cover Ford's first congressional campaign in 1948. The paper had endorsed Ford against the incumbent, and terHorst's assignment, as he tells it, was "being sure that the Ford story was well covered." Ford won by a 2-to-1 margin, and the President now amiably refers to terHorst as a man who "connived to get me a little extra space in the *Grand Rapids Press*."

The reporter maintained Ford's friendship and the friendly coverage when he joined the *Detroit News's* Washington staff in 1957 and became bureau chief four years later. The friendship is good-humored. TerHorst helps write some of the better ditties crooned at Washington's annual Gridiron Club dinner, and one recent effort included this spoof of Gerald Ford's close ties to business, sung to the tune of *America the Beautiful*: "Oh beautiful for Tel and

Tel ... for Pontiac and Cadillac, and good ole Jerry Ford." TerHorst had written two-thirds of an unofficial Ford biography when he was tapped for his new job, and says he still hopes to complete the book this year.

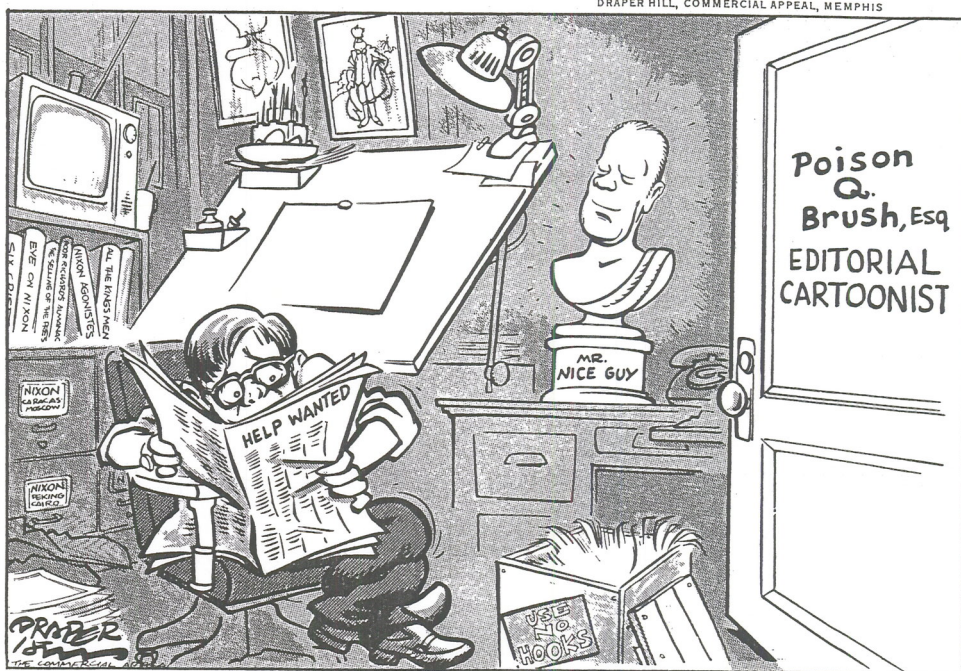
He may have trouble finding the time. Ford is a professed admirer of the open-door policies of Eisenhower Press Secretary James Hagerty, and terHorst has pledged to give reporters better access to the President than they enjoyed in the Nixon White House. "President Ford is a believer in press conferences, and so am I," terHorst said last week. He did not say how many or when (aides have suggested that one every couple of weeks or so would be reasonable), but Ford can hardly fail to improve upon Nixon's dismal record of 37 press conferences during 67 months in office.

The daily news summary, a staff-

voiced laughter by replying in fractured Dutch. When he confessed that he simply did not know the answer to one question, instead of trying to evade it, a few reporters burst into applause.

Evasion may not be necessary. Ford has long been one of the friendliest news sources in Washington. "He was always available," recalls Marjorie Hunter of the *New York Times*. "I'd call him on the House floor and he'd always come and answer questions. It's been the same during the last few months." As Vice President, Ford would stroll into the back of the plane on his frequent travels, double-olived martini in hand, and spend hours jawing with the reporters who regularly covered him. The camaraderie was strained only once, when a newcomer printed a remark about Watergate that Ford considered off the record, forcing other reporters to follow

DRAPER HILL, COMMERCIAL APPEAL, MEMPHIS



written digest of the day's major events, will continue to be issued. The summary, which Nixon liked to read instead of newspapers and magazines, became a symbol of his self-imposed isolation. However, terHorst says that Ford supplements the summary by reading at least ten newspapers: the *Washington Post* and *Star-News*, the *New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Detroit News* and *Free Press*, the *Grand Rapids Press*, the *Baltimore Sun* and the *Christian Science Monitor*. Also on his list are *TIME*, *Newsweek* and *U.S. News and World Report*.

TerHorst's own performances so far at White House briefings have been relaxed, businesslike and occasionally jovial. When a Dutch correspondent asked last week if the press secretary's forebears came from Holland, terHorst pro-

suit. "After that, his relationship with us became very professional," recalls CBS's Phil Jones. "But he has a thick skin. He's proud that he has lots of adversaries in Congress but no enemies. The same goes for the press."

Still, a number of newsmen wonder about the future. As President, of course, Ford will hardly have the time to cultivate journalists as he once did. Says Lisagor: "I can't picture him becoming a devious man, a trickster, but he may become more inaccessible." Says John Osborne of the *New Republic*: "I'm waiting and seeing." But one journalist has high expectations. Says Pierre Salinger, press secretary to President Kennedy and now a roving editor for France's *L'Express*: "The intent is there. The competence is there. I think the thing is off to a helluva start."