

# General Alexander Haig— He's Nixon's New Number One

by Lloyd Shearer



Study in contrasts: Nixon with General Haig and below, with Bob Haldeman—his new and old chiefs of staff. Haig, friendly

and reasonable, expects to staff the White House with people who will help dispel the antagonism revealed by Watergate.



WASHINGTON, D.C.

**O**f all the moves Richard Nixon has made to restore confidence in his Watergate-tarnished Administration, none is more vital than his appointment of a new chief of staff.

To date the President has employed two such men to help him run the White House and set the tone, character, and spirit of his executive branch: Harry Robbins Haldeman (1969-73) and retired Gen. Alexander M. Haig, the incumbent.

Chief of staff Haldeman, who resigned in the midst of the Watergate scandal this past spring, was variously known during his White House tenure as "The Prussian," "Hans," and "The Brush."

Born, reared, and educated in Los Angeles, son of a wealthy and conservative family, Haldeman is a near-fanatical Nixonian who over the years developed a passionate and obsessive hatred of the press.

Thousands of words have been written of his background, his employment as manager of the Los Angeles branch of the J. Walter Thompson advertising agency, his campus activities at UCLA, his friendship with John Ehrlichman, and his incubation in front of the Ervin committee of a disease now referred to as "Haldeman's Amnesia."

## 'Do everything right'

The self-righteous philosophy which guided him and his appointees, many of whom still occupy top positions in the federal services, is best expressed in Haldeman's own Watergate testimony: "We did throughout the White House operate on what is known in some views as a zero defect system. We attempted to do everything right."

That attempt ended in disaster and scandal, and the subsequent replacement of Haldeman by Haig.

At age 48, Alexander Meigs Haig Jr., has an entirely different personality from his predecessor. He is friendly, trusting—"sweetly reasonable," according to his sister, Regina Meredith, a lawyer in Pennington, N.J., and a man who generates neither hatred nor fear.

As Henry Kissinger's deputy for more than four years, it was his job to supervise, check, coddle, stimulate, and control a variety of academic and State Department types, sensitive, proud,



tactfully in an atmosphere that can frequently create abrasiveness and impatience.

One of Kissinger's staff in national security affairs who was wiretapped by the FBI describes Haig as a "thoroughly decent human being."

"In my whole period of servitude under Henry and Al," he confides, "I never knew Haig to behave like a general. He was always courteous and often considerate. He operates on the proven belief that one catches more flies with honey than vinegar. Henry, on the other hand, frequently behaved like a slave master. If some young aide brought him a salami sandwich instead of hot pastrami, a favorite of his, Henry would bellow, 'Pastrami, you idiot—not salami.' I never heard Al Haig call anyone an idiot. He's too even-tempered for that."

### It's in his approach

General Haig's attractive wife of 23 years, the former Patricia Antoinette Fox, whose father was Gen. Douglas MacArthur's chief of staff in Japan, confirms that statement. "He has a good sense of balance," she says of her husband, "and a good sense of humor, a sort of funny streak. When I tell people that, they always ask for an example, and I never can come up with one. It isn't that he himself is funny. It's that he laughs easily and takes a light approach, not a crisis approach to problems."

"What I've always considered a funny quirk about him is his continuous attachment to wood. He's simply crazy about anything made of wood. When we're celebrating an anniversary or he's back from an overseas trip, he usually 'surprises' me with something wooden."

"I never realized how many salad bowls and snack servers he'd given me until we made this last move to a house a few months ago that we're renting on Foxhall Road. I came across a crate marked 'wood'. I couldn't imagine at first what it was. Then I opened the box and saw dozens of salad bowls. I simply laughed and crated it up again."

### 'I could understand'

General Haig, who was the Army's Vice Chief of Staff when President Nixon phoned him at Ft. Benning on May 4th to take over Bob Haldeman's job, is a mature man who does not equate dissent or criticism with treachery. He rejects the paranoid idea which holds that if you're not for us, you're against us, and if you're against us, you're the enemy. He could well understand, for example, why several members of Congress thought a military man should not also hold down the job as the President's chief of staff.

"I could understand the objections," he says, "but on the other hand, if you look at Title 10 of the U.S. Code, there's a provision for a chief of staff for the President. The difficulty of that position

and in the climate of the times, I felt it would have subjected both the Army and the President to a lot of controversy, so I felt the cleanest thing I could do was to make a choice: stay with the Army where my heart is or go with the President where my head told me to go, so I retired from the Army after 27 years. But even that generated a certain amount of criticism.

"Some people object to the fact that I now draw half of my Army retirement pay of \$12,000 a year, plus my salary of \$42,500 as the President's chief of staff. The truth is that in many respects I'm getting less than what I got as a four-star Army general, and that the move to the White House has probably cost my estate \$100,000.

"But as I say, I understand the criticism. I don't welcome it, but I understand it. When you're up front you become a prime target. The thing, however, is not to become uptight or neurotic or react with anger. A man needs all his strength in this job."

Since taking over as the President's chief aide, Haig finds himself working from 7:30 a.m. to 11 p.m. six or seven days a week, leaving precious little time to spend with his wife and three children.

"Fortunately," he says, "they, too, are understanding of the changes in my life style."

The Haigs have three children, Alex, 21, a senior at Georgetown; Brian, 20, a sophomore at West Point, and Barbara, 17, who attends a parochial high school in Washington. They all take a

when he comes home at night," says Mrs. Haig, "he's almost too pooped to talk. Lots of times, however, young Alex and Barbara sit up until after midnight just to talk to their father. And then he really communicates. Of course, Brian, who's up at West Point, misses out on these talks, but he telephones home every weekend for an updating. Actually, we try to share as many experiences with the children as we can. They've flown out to San Clemente with us, and they attend the White House ceremonies when they can. But Al's hours are very, very long. He puts in a hard day."

### A day's work

General Haig's typical day begins when the White House limousine picks him up a little after 7 and delivers him in time to prepare for the senior staff meeting, which takes place at 8:30 a.m. It includes all the senior White House staff: Mel Laird, Anne Armstrong, George Shultz, Henry Kissinger, Ron Ziegler, William Timmons, Bryce Harlow, Peter Flanigan.

That's followed by his morning meeting with the President, usually between 9 and 10, sometimes longer.

"For me," he reports, "that's usually followed by a series of follow-up actions that come out of the President's meeting. There's interdepartmental work with the Cabinet, work with the White House staff. Then I usually have another meeting with the President later in the day. That meeting sometimes occurs shortly after lunch or

continues quite late in the day, 5 or 6 p.m. I generally have a pattern of two meetings a day with the President, one at the beginning and one at the end, and frequently there will be telephone calls in between and beyond that point. Thus far my pattern has been a very intense one because we've had to reorganize our staff and re-establish new patterns with new personalities.

"My deputy is John Bennett, a retired general whom I've known for a number of years. He's very well qualified, a broad-based guy. I knew him when I worked for Bob McNamara and Joe Califano over at the Pentagon. John's had considerable experience in political and military affairs and policy level work in defense. He taught English at West Point. We get along very well. He knows my views, but he's not a yes man.

"I've also brought over Muriel Hartley who's been with me ever since I'd been in the Pentagon. She's a superb secretary.

### Looking at the job

"The way I look at my job," Haig explains, "is to be sure the President sees all the people that are most important for him to see in the context of the important issues that he's addressing."

"When I arrived at the White House this past May on a temporary basis, I went down to Key Biscayne with the President, and I laid out to him the conceptual approach that I hoped would characterize the next three years of this Administration. I must say, my own ideas were very close to his.

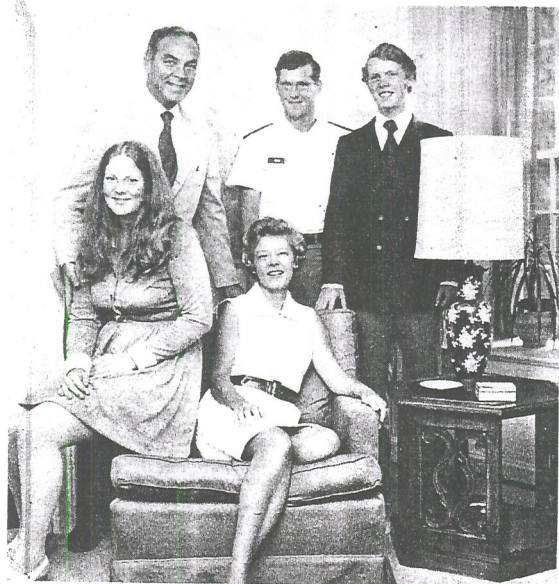
"Those ideas are: One, that we want a greater degree of openness in the White House, in the whole spectrum of White House activity. We want a greater rapport with Congress. We recognize that you have to have a strong bipartisan sense of responsibility for conducting the government's business, and if you depart from that, you're in trouble.

"Two, we recognize a very strong degree of alienation from the press. We want to improve that. We intend to improve that, although we're not naive about the magnitude of the task. We recognize that it's not a task that's going to be solved in a week or two of smiles and openness and accessibility. It's going to take a long period of give and take. Quite frankly, I think we've made that beginning.

### The facilitators

"Three, in the context of openness, and this is more organizational, we want to lower the profile of the White House staff, to change their own conception of the role they should play, to change it from one of imprimatur of national policy to facilitators. I hope that every senior staff officer will look upon himself as a facilitator of communication between the agency chiefs and the President, and that the Cabinet officer himself will look upon a White House staffer as a friend in court who can make his job easier.

*continued*



Family portrait: Mrs. Haig in chair; daughter Barbara, 17; General Haig behind her; Brian, 20, sophomore at West Point, and Alex, 21, Georgetown senior.



## GENERAL HAIG CONTINUED

"I hope that the White House staffers will remain low in profile and hyperactive in the context of improving communication with the President and the constitutional implementers of national policy, the Cabinet and the agency chiefs.

"Another thing the President and I discussed at Key Biscayne very seriously was the character of the personnel appointments within the Administration. And in that area we've sought to establish criteria. First, is the quality of the appointment. There have been times in past history and in any administration that these things get out of whack. Political loyalty or political reasons or minority appointments, any host of things comes first. And that's wrong.

### Quality, not partisanship

"With us we now want quality, and I think in the appointments that have been made of late, Clarence Kelley in the FBI, Bill Colby in the CIA, Ray Garrett in the SEC, Mel Laird, Bryce Harlow, and of course, Henry [Kissinger] as Secretary of State, one of the most genuinely brilliant minds I've ever encountered—I believe we've made quality and not political partisanship the basic criterion of personnel selection.

"We've opened," Haig asserts, "the top-level doors to the professionals in government, the professional bureaucrats, the civil servants, so that men know when they come into government as young people that all doors are open to them based on performance. That sort of policy not only improves the overall excellence of the civil servant, but I believe it insures our historic perspective at top levels of policy making."

Haig will not say why such policies as he describes were not implemented in the first Nixon Administration—he is far too adroit and diplomatic to be drawn into any discussion of Bob Haldeman's practices—but he is determined that during his tenure as the President's chief of staff, the President will not remain in isolation, splendid or otherwise.

### Since age 13

For some unfathomable reason, Alexander Haig, since the age of 13, has obsessively wanted to be a professional soldier and a West Point graduate.

"Frankly," says his mother, Regina Haig, a sprightly 82-year-old ex-school-teacher who still walks five miles a day in Pennington, N.J., "there was nothing soldierly about Alec as a boy.

"When we lived in Cynwyd (a suburb of Philadelphia) where he grew up, he always wanted to paint the neighbors' garages or play his set of drums and the guitar. Our house was usually filled with his friends, Jim White, Al Conway, and other names I can't remember. Alec was always so open and



Haig (right) and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger in a relaxed mood at San Clemente. The men have a basic rapport and compatibility of views developed over the four years that Haig served as Kissinger's National Security deputy.

friendly. So good with people.

"His father, after whom he's named, was a lawyer, but he died of cancer when Alec was 10. I thought for a while that Alec might follow in his father's footsteps. But he didn't. His sister, however, did. She's named after me. Her name is also Regina, and she attended the University of Pennsylvania just as her father did and got her law degree there. She practices in Trenton. I also have another son, Frank. He's 44, four years younger than Alec. He's a Jesuit priest, and he now teaches physics at the University of Loyola in Baltimore.

"I never tried to interfere with the careers of any of my three children. I remember that Alec turned down several appointments to the Naval Academy at Annapolis after he was graduated from Lower Merion High School. At the time I wondered why. But he was stubborn and insistent upon going to West Point. After a year at Notre Dame and I don't know how many prayers on my part, his appointment to the Military Academy came through. He was overjoyed."

### The accelerated course

In 1944, Cadet Haig was given the choice of pursuing the regular or accelerated wartime course through the Military Academy. He chose the three-year stint and was graduated in 1947, ranked 214 in a class of 310.

Shipped to Japan, he played quarterback on the 1st Cavalry Division football team, where he was observed by Patricia Fox, daughter of Gen. Pat Fox.

"I noticed him," she admits, "long

before he noticed me. Back then, those of us girls whose families were already based on Japan were always eager to look over the new crop of freshly arrived second lieutenants. The first time I saw Al he was playing football. What impressed me was the way he moved. He was so lively, so vigorous. But we actually didn't meet until a few weeks later. Al was an aide to Gen. Edward Almond, and he came with another aide to the piano recital that my music teacher, Lydia Shapiro, was giving. I was playing, and he stayed to the end to compliment me, and that's how we met and started dating. It was in the fall of 1949.

"Our courtship was gay and prosaic. There were so many other young people in Tokyo during the occupation. We had a lovely time, and everything went smoothly with us except that my mother was so overwhelmingly approving of Al that I was ready to rebel, but I didn't."

### Just married, but

The couple were married on May 24, 1950, honeymooned for two weeks at the Kawana Hotel, two hours out of Tokyo. On June 25, the North Koreans invaded South Korea. Haig was shipped to Korea, where he fought and subsequently came down with hepatitis.

During the next 20-odd years, Captain Haig served at West Point as company tactical officer, at Annapolis as company tactical officer. He pulled duty in Germany near Hanau and Heidelberg. He served stretches at both the Army and Naval war colleges. He commanded troops in Vietnam. He be-

came deputy commandant at the Point where, his wife believes, "we were the happiest. It was so lovely for us and the children."

In 1968, when Henry Kissinger was putting together a staff for the National Security Council, Haig was recommended by Gen. Andrew Goodpaster as Kissinger's assistant. Kissinger now says jokingly, "I interviewed Al, and since the job duties of the position were not well-defined, I knew at once he was my man."

In truth, the Kissinger-Haig rapport grew slowly through the years. Haig listened and learned, studied Kissinger's ways. A less volatile man than his boss, he established a more humane relationship with the staff.

### Growing rapport, rapid rise

Kissinger, in turn, recognized Haig as a brilliant, indefatigable workhorse whose basic views were compatible with his. Soon Haig was flying over to Vietnam every few months to honestly assess the war situation for both Kissinger and the President. Promotions followed, and Haig found himself jumped over dozens of other generals to become the Army's Vice Chief of Staff.

Then came Watergate, and on May 4, the phone call from President Nixon asking him to take over for Bob Haldeman.

"What could I say?" asks Haig. "What can any American say when the Commander in Chief makes such a request? I said 'Yes, Mr. President,' and here I am."