

PERSONALITY

Surviving in the Bull's-Eye

In ordinary times, Alexander Haig might have become Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff or a top Cabinet officer or perhaps a corporation president. He has in abundance the qualities that are needed: intelligence, limitless energy, patience, tact and unswerving devotion to duty and country. Yet in the year of Watergate, these very attributes have landed him in one of the world's toughest and least rewarding jobs: chief of staff of an embattled, imperiled White House, where almost every day brings another revelation, another shift in a defensive strategy that seems only to lose. For a 49-year-old former four-star general who likes to win, it is a cheerless prospect. In the view of many, Haig has nowhere to go but down, as his own reputation becomes ever more identified with that of the White House. In the end, he may never achieve the role in American life for which his gifts, character and ambition seemed to equip him.

No one knows better than Al Haig what he has gambled and how high are the stakes. Whatever his burden, he bears it with the same military stoicism he has always shown. When duty summons, he obeys, even if it is a crippled President who calls. "I intellectually concluded that I had no alternative but to come over here," he says of his decision to quit his post as Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and, subsequently, to resign from the Army. "It was a difficult decision in my stomach, but not in my head." He left the order of the military, where he knew what was expected of him, for the uncertainties of the political scene made all the more unpredictable by Watergate. Reflecting, he says: "I've commanded units in combat in which the ultimate sacrifice is demanded, and I suppose that has conditioned me to a degree."

And combat it has been, with scarcely a letup since he took over a year ago from the compromised H.R. Haldeman. "During this time of repeated shelling of the White House, Al has never lost his composure," says Leonard Garment, assistant to the President. "He has dealt with the problems of the wounded with both compassion and detachment." In contrast to the closed-door policy of Haldeman, Haig has made the White House more accessible and a more pleasant place in which to work; there is at least a modicum of grace under ferocious pressure. "It's fun to deal with Al," notes a White House aide who is otherwise not enjoying himself much. "You don't get very far knee jerking with him. He's got a helluva sense of humor, which he uses to break tension. And a willingness to laugh is a rarity at the White House."

Organization Man. Unfamiliar with his new political terrain, Haig has nonetheless provided Nixon with sound advice. It was he, primarily, who talked the President into handing over at least some of the tapes demanded by Special Prosecutor Leon Jaworski. But he has also made his slips. He seemed to be in contact with the occult when he announced that a "sinister force" had been responsible for the elimination of 18½ minutes of conversation from one of the tapes. He seriously underestimated the outraged public reaction when the President fired Archibald Cox from his job as special prosecutor last October. As Haig ruefully admitted afterward, the move was greeted by a "fire storm" of criticism.

Like other military men who have served as White House aides, Haig was chosen because he was something more than a general. Though he served in combat in Korea and Viet Nam and was decorated for heroism, he spent most of



PRESIDENT NIXON & HAIG
Composure under fire.

his career as a military organization man, a position in which he was unexcelled. He finished a lackluster 214th in a class of 310 at West Point, but he advanced rapidly through the Army and Navy war colleges and received a master's degree in international relations at Georgetown University. During the Kennedy Administration, he was named deputy to one of the Defense Department whiz kids, Joseph Califano, who later became President Johnson's domestic adviser. Califano, in turn, recommended Haig to Henry Kissinger as "one of the new breed of sophisticated Army officers."

When he became President Nixon's foreign-affairs adviser, Kissinger badly needed a sophisticated military mind to help him organize his staff, but not too sophisticated. That is, he did not want another intellectual who would give him an argument; he got plenty of that from the academicians who worked for him. Haig stayed discreetly in the background, channeling the flow of ideas, keeping people in line, while his boss concentrated on his grand policy design.

Haig cemented the relationship with Kissinger by solidly supporting all the controversial policies, including the mining of Haiphong harbor and the bombing of Hanoi in the last phases of the Viet Nam War. Noticing how Haig could take the flak without blinking, Nixon sent him on half a dozen diplomatic missions to Saigon. He also promoted him over 240 senior generals to the post of Army Vice Chief of Staff. When Haldeman and John Ehrlichman were forced to resign, it was not surprising that Nixon turned to Haig to give him the loyalty, efficiency and privacy he so desperately craved.

Haig has apparently more than met the President's needs at the White House. "He practically has no self any more," says White House Counsellor Dean Burch. "He spends almost all his working hours at the White House, eating off trays, putting out fires, and put-

KISSINGER & DEFENSE SECRETARY MELVIN LAIRD WITH HAIG (1973)



DICK HALESTAD

ting on Band-Aids." Haig rises every morning at 6:30, scans the newspapers and reaches the West Wing of the White House at 7:50. Promptly at 8:30, he chairs a meeting of the top presidential advisers. His manner is more that of a panel moderator than a commanding general. Once a consensus has been reached on a variety of matters, Haig assembles the recommendations in written form and submits them to the President. After spending an hour or two with Nixon, he relays the presidential decisions to the appropriate White House aides.

In the afternoon, Haig opens his door to Senators, Representatives, Cab-

taken only one full day off. On Sundays, he plows through paper work that has accumulated during the week. Says his aide George Joulwan: "He believes that if Watergate takes up x number of hours, he has got to make up that time somewhere."

Haig performs much the same function as Haldeman did. He serves as the eyes, ears and political nose for a President who prefers to remain remote. Like Haldeman, Haig is also a stickler for detail. But there the resemblance ends. Unlike his predecessor, Haig is never chummy with the President. The kind of raw, conspiratorial chatter that emerged from the tapes is unthinkable in the case of Haig, who maintains a military formality in his dealings with Nixon. "I think he's more comfortable with that kind of relationship," says Haig, "and it's what I was accustomed to in the Army." Perhaps an oblique dig at the relationships exposed by the transcripts, he adds that an "executive who indulges in totally uninhibited familiarity with his subordinates risks some degradation of his effectiveness." Yet Haig is not shocked by the tapes: "Men who have worked together for a number of years in any organization always dispense with everything but the crudest pragmatic articulation of issues."

The chief of staff often gives the impression that he is engaged in an effort to rescue the presidency but not necessarily this particular President. Yet if he has any doubts about Nixon's behavior, he has kept them to himself. "I obviously have faith in the President's policies, his insistence on the relevancy of American participation in the world. If anything, I welcomed his moderation of that perception of America's role. It is more realistic." Still, Haig differs with Nixon when the occasion arises. Says a White House aide:

"When Haig feels strongly about an issue, he speaks out about it."

For Haig, Watergate is like enemy fire—a burden to be endured. "The Watergate climate has been a great discomfiture to me," he says. "It has resulted in a diversion of efforts from things all of us would like to accomplish." Still regarding the Watergate break-in as a "second-rate burglary," he feels it should be criticized. "But historians are going to wonder how in God's name could we be engaging in such a diversion of national effort and energy over such chickenfeed."

He thinks that the scandal is bigger than the individuals involved, that it resulted from the social instability that grew out of the 1960s. "It is America's

proclivity to belittle itself, to tear down from within, to emphasize its weaknesses and ignore its strengths." Although he feels that certain liberals have a "tendency to indulge in extremes and excesses," he takes comfort in the fact that "there's a resiliency in American life, a moderation in attitude that has always been the great strength of our society. Fortunately, we've always had a number of people whose common sense can be relied upon."

Grayer Hair. And what about Haig? Is he too in danger of eroding from within, succumbing to the immoderate pressures that have been put upon him? Though his hair is grayer than a year ago and the lines in his face more deeply etched, he believes he has held his ground—politically and ethically—in the grimmest ordeal of his career. "No one can sit in the bull's-eye and maintain a demeanor of detachment," he admits. "There have been periods when it seemed the outcome was uncertain, when the degree of intensity was incredible. I don't suppose there's ever been a more difficult twelve months in the modern history of the republic. But we've coped. I can say that we've managed to go on with the business of Government." If only barely.

Haig does not profess to know how it will all come out. He lives day to day. "I've been so busy since I came here that I've been unable to think about tomorrow. I may even have a psychological inhibition against doing so." He is aware that in all likelihood he has become too politicized, too close to his embattled boss to attain his ambition of becoming Chairman of the Joint Chiefs or even of returning to a top military job, though he would like to. He could regain his four-star rank by presidential commission; the Senate would then have to confirm the appointment. The interruption of his military career is the high price he has paid for doing his duty as he saw it. "I've been tainted by V.C. shrapnel," he says, "and I recognize that I've been tainted by Watergate." But amid the appalling carnage of the White House, strewn with damaged political careers, he still remains one of the few surviving symbols of integrity.



HAIG WITH WIFE PATRICIA & CHILDREN
Too busy to think about tomorrow.

inet officials and military officers. At times unsure of the men he must deal with, he calls on more seasoned White House aides for advice. While meeting with the officials, he is frequently interrupted by calls from the President. It is 9 p.m. or later before he can finally leave for the day and spend a few rejuvenating hours at home. A devout Roman Catholic and devoted family man, Haig insists on setting aside a few hours every night to dine and chat with his wife Patricia, his son Alex, 22, who is a senior at Georgetown University, and his daughter Barbara, 18, a senior at Georgetown Visitation Preparatory School. A second son, Brian, 21, is a third-year man at West Point. Since he joined the White House staff, Haig has

FLORIDA

Charge Dismissed

Republican Senator Edward J. Gurney, President Nixon's most frequent defender on the Senate Watergate committee, has been running for re-election in Florida under the cloud of a scandal of his own. He was indicted in April for violating a Florida election law by not naming a campaign treasurer or setting up a special bank account. The charge involved funds, reportedly as much as \$400,000, raised on Gurney's behalf from building contractors seeking influence with the Federal Housing Authority. But last week a Leon County judge.