

NBC's Ron Nessen Chosen by Ford as Press Secretary

By Carroll Kilpatrick
Washington Post Staff Writer

Ron Nessen, NBC's 40-year-old White House correspondent, yesterday became President Ford's second press secretary and the first person from the electronic media to head the White House press office.

Mr. Ford personally made the announcement of Nessen's appointment in the White House press room and praised him for his "skill and objectivity."

Nessen promised that his first loyalty would be to the public. He said that if he ever misled the press it would be justified in "questioning my continuance in the job."

Unlike J. F. terHorst, who resigned the post in protest against President Ford's pardon of former President Nixon, Nessen said he did not believe that a press secretary must always agree with the President.

The spokesman's duty is to report on the President's actions and tell why the President made the decisions he did, Nessen said.

"I won't be a salesman," Nessen said. He described himself as apolitical and said the last time he voted was in 1960 when he cast his ballot for John F. Kennedy for President.

"I am a Ron but not a Ziegler," Nessen said in a reference to former press secretary Ronald L. Ziegler.

Nessen said his models would be Bill D. Moyers for his honesty and knowledge, Pierre Salinger for his fellowship, grace and humor "and I hope to earn as much respect as Jerry terHorst."

The President said Nessen had a "superb reputation" in the electronic medium but also had a background in the writing press, a reference to the fact that Nessen worked for United Press International here from 1956 to 1962, when he joined NBC.

He covered the White House during part of the Johnson years and was then sent to Southeast Asia to cover the Vietnam war. He was wounded by a grenade fragment the second year there

and returned to Washington later in the year.

Mr. Ford said Nessen made some 57 trips with him when he was Vice President "and I got to know him very well" and "enjoyed his company."

The announcement of a press secretary comes at a unique time, Mr. Ford said, noting that he had just met for 2½ hours with Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei A. Gromyko and next would meet with "a wealthy and influential capitalist," Chase Manhattan Bank board chairman David Rockefeller.

The title of press secretary to the President was first used in Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration when Stephen T. Early held the title, according to old-timers here.

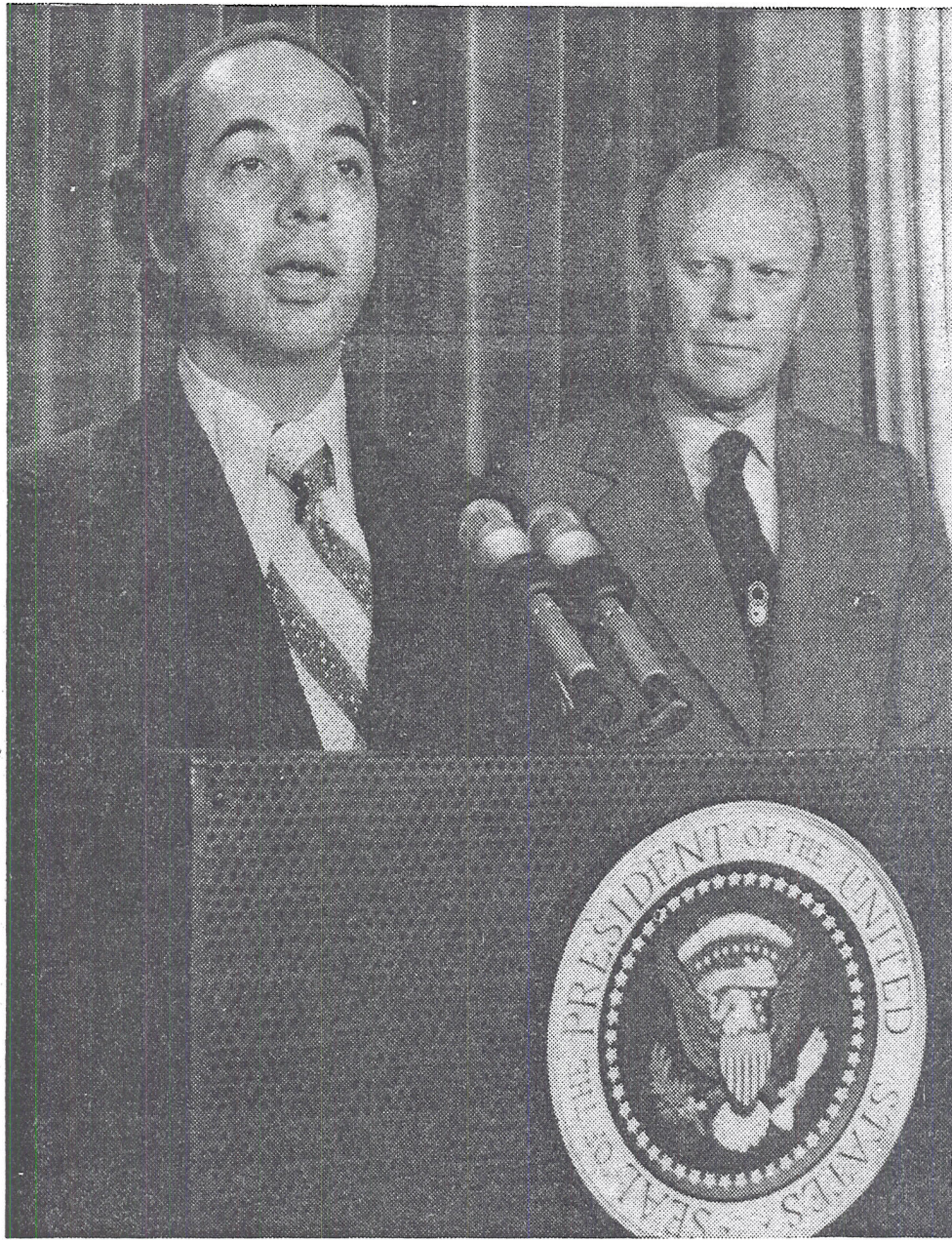
Joseph P. Tumulty acted as a press contact for Woodrow Wilson but performed varied other duties and was never called a press secretary.

Warren G. Harding, Calvin Coolidge and Herbert Hoover had secretaries who issued statements and answered press inquiries, but they did not hold daily briefings as Early did under FDR and as all subsequent press secretaries have done.

Today the job has grown enormously in scope and function, and the press secretary has a large staff. Nevertheless, the job is regarded as a backbreaker, requiring endless hours of work and constant attention to detail almost beyond the capacity of any individual.

Nessen said he had been promised full access to information and was authorized to attend all presidential meetings except those of the National Security Council and the President's private meetings with guests. He said he would have direct access to all staff members.

Asked how he felt about leaving the press corps, he said, "I have had an itch to be a participant instead of always an observer." He said he was first approached about the job a week ago and accepted Thursday in a talk with the President.



Associated Press

Press secretary Ron Nessen talks to reporters after being introduced by President.