

Keep an Eye on 'Rummy'

WASHINGTON

By James Reston

WASHINGTON, Oct. 3—The man to watch in the Ford Administration over the next few months is Donald "Rummy" Rumsfeld, the 42-year-old former U.S. Ambassador to NATO, who has just taken over as the President's top staff coordinator at the White House.

Top coordinators usually wind up on the bottom of the pile in this town, but if anybody can bring order and new talent into the Ford Administration, Donald Rumsfeld will be in the slot to do it. He will not have the authority of H. R. Haldeman or Gen. Al Haig, who were President Nixon's chiefs of staff in the White House, but President Ford insisted on giving him a job he didn't want to take, and is likely to give him as much running room as he needs.

The two men have been close for years. Mr. Rumsfeld served four terms in the House of Representatives from the fashionable 13th District of Illinois north of Chicago, and led the fight to make Mr. Ford Republican leader of the House.

He was seriously considered by Mr. Ford, along with Nelson Rockefeller and Republican National Chairman George Bush, for nomination as Vice President after the resignation of President Nixon, and has strong support within the Republican party as one of the most attractive and capable leaders of the rising generation.

He was off touring with his family in Italy in the last days of the Nixon Administration and heard the news late. He called Washington and was asked by Mr. Ford to fly immediately to Washington to help with the staffing of the White House.

At that time, his advice was to move quickly to establish Ford's own men in the White House and the Cabinet. It was practical to give a sense of continuity for a short while, he suggested, but if the President waited beyond the November election, it would be more difficult to change and might give the impression Ford was merely presiding over the old Nixon team.

The new President did not take his advice then, and is coming under increasing criticism for not moving faster. Presumably, Mr. Rumsfeld had some assurance that the waiting period is over and he would be given the task of helping speed things up.

It will not be an easy job in the early days of the Administration, Mr. Ford was urged by some of his associates, not by Rumsfeld, to give his Administration a national character by selecting the best men he could find, regardless of party.

Mr. Ford did not follow this advice either. He has shown a tendency to

turn to old friends, to keep on many Nixon appointees who have very little to do around the White House, and to transfer other Nixon men from one job to another.

There is little in Mr. Rumsfeld's record to suggest that he will be non-partisan in his recommendations. He started out in Congress as a traditional conservative. His voting record in the House on New Frontier and Great Society social legislation followed the recommendations of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce 100 per cent in 1967 and, like Mr. Ford, he has been in the forefront of his party's battles.

Within his party, however, he has shown considerable talent for change and for taking chances with his own career. He not only helped lead the revolt against the Republican Old Guard in the days of Charlie Halleck but joined with Democrats in an assault on the seniority system, fought for campaign expenditure reform, urged the substitution of a volunteer Army for the draft, proposed the substitution of South Vietnamese soldiers for Americans against the wishes of Mr. Nixon, and left the Congress to take over the administration of the embattled Office of Economic Opportunity.

In this job, he had the reputation of being a tough and efficient administrator of a \$2-billion budget, highly controversial within the White House, where he clashed with H. R. Haldeman and John Ehrlichman in trying to keep the poverty program going.

In 1970, demonstrating his willingness to take on tough assignments, he became counselor to Mr. Nixon and director of the Cost of Living Council, but his problems with Haldeman and Ehrlichman persisted. He asked for a foreign post and was named envoy to NATO in December of 1972.

This post has greatly broadened his experience and widened his acquaintance with experts in the diplomatic and military fields. It was his intention to resign from this post and accept a university presidency or go back into the investment banking business, when Mr. Ford persuaded him to return to the White House.

His view is that this is not the ideal spot for an ambitious politician, and Mr. Rumsfeld is nothing if not ambitious. He is a handsome, athletic, cheerful man, a former captain of the wrestling team at Princeton, and was a Navy flier and flight instructor from 1954 to 1957.

So it would not be a bad idea to keep your eye on "Rummy." He could turn out to be in the right place with the right credentials for much larger things in his party. He will be only 44 in 1976, and nobody knows at this date whether Mr. Ford will put politics ahead of his personal responsibilities in the next Presidential election.