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## Sense of Siege

# Haig Stands by Nixon

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Washington

Shortly after General Alexander M. Haig Jr. assumed his new command in the Watergate-battered White House last May, he confessed a sense of foreboding to a friend and former colleague.

"I feel as though I've tak-

*'The stakes  
have been  
higher'*

en over a battalion that has just been overrun," he said.

Little has happened since to dispel that sense of siege, particularly in the period since the weekend of what has become known as the "firestorm" in late October, marked by the triple exodus of special prosecutor Archibald Cox, Attorney General Elliot L. Richardson and Deputy Attorney General William D. Ruckelshaus.

As the White House political defense perimeter has shrunk under the unrelenting fire of new revelations and new challenges to presidential credibility, so Haig's silhouette has grown as Richard Nixon's point man, his lead rifle.



BOB HALDEMAN  
One who left

"Very few men who have occupied that chair," he pointed across the room toward his desk, "have been able to escape political taint and smear. There are few who haven't been skewered."

He called the roll of some past occupants: Sherman Adams, Walter Jenkins, Bob Halde- man.

"I wasn't naive about it when I came in and I'm not today. You just try to keep from being drawn in."

His friend and mentor, Washington lawyer and Democratic stalwart Joseph

Califano, said this of Haig:

"I think he's being eaten up. He's being put through a political and moral shredder. It's tough to see a friend go down that way. Nixon, in searching for a way out of Watergate, could destroy Haig."

Outwardly, Haig's vaulting career in the Nixon White House would seem to be a triumph of the work ethic, the West Point code and the American Dream.

He walked into the White House West basement nearly five years ago, boasting a gleaming military career and the rank of colonel, to work in the bureaucratic sweatshop of Henry Kissinger's National Security Council staff.

Now he holds the status of a retired four-star general, and his spacious official quarters are only a few carpeted feet from the Oval Office of the President of the United States. Although Haig demurs, there are those familiar with White House structure who say his influence ranges over a far broader area of policy — particularly in foreign affairs and national security — than did that of his fallen predecessor, H. R. Halde- man.

Haig is aware of the Watergate undertow swirling, that uneasy tug which has undone so many in the Nixon administration, his im-

mediate predecessor Halde- man among them.

"I've gone into battle where the stakes have been more definitive and the outcome less significant than this," Haig says in flat, patient tones. "I could have been dead in Korea or Vietnam or elsewhere."

Haig has an increasingly rare attribute in the scandal-ridden White House atmosphere — believability.

For one thing, he had stayed clear of Watergate, as far as was publicly known, until he began defending the President's position on the tapes and Cox issues. (Actually, Haig sat in on one of the early meetings of the White House "plumbers' unit" in the late summer of 1971.)

For another, he had been professionally bred under

*'I've been around  
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the West Point code: "A cadet does not lie, cheat or steal . . ."

During the week of the "firestorm," Haig was further cemented into the White House strategy when he was told to direct Richardson and then Ruckelshaus to carry out the presi-



**GENERAL ALEXANDER M. HAIG**  
**New White House chief of staff**

dential mandate to fire Cox.

Haig now claims that his now-famous instruction to Ruckelshaus — “Your commander-in-chief has given you an order” — has been quoted out of context in a way that portrays him as a mindless martinet.

“I’ve been around this town,” Haig protests. “I’m not a virgin. I’ve never used that kind of language.” It is Ruckelshaus’ recollection, however, that he did.

Haig, the professional soldier of 27 years and the consummate National Security bureaucrat, took another giant step toward entanglement in Watergate’s political morass when he appeared jointly with Mr. Nixon in closed sessions with Republican lawmakers.

It was the beginning of what the White House called “Operation Candor.”

Sitting in the evening quiet of his White House office,

***‘Don’t do it  
--you’re  
going to be  
ground up’***

Haig spoke of the future in stoic, foreboding tones.

He had been looking forward to 12 more years of military service at the time he accepted the job of chief of staff to the President. He realized he was jeopardizing a military career. At the same time, he had won his four stars during the period of White House service and had been jumped over scores of more senior officers.

“One of my closest friends in government called me up after I had been offered this appointment and said, ‘Al, don’t do it. You’re going to be ground up,’” he recalled.

It remains to be seen whether the advice was right.