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Nixon's Edginess Explained by Aides

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SAN CLEMENTE, Aug. 21—A White House spokesman, responding to questions about President Nixon's public blow-up at press secretary Ronald L. Ziegler, said today that Mr. Nixon has been under strain and pressure for many months.

In an effort to keep reporters from accompanying him Monday through a door into a New Orleans convention hall, the President shoved Ziegler in the direction of the reporters and said angrily:

"I don't want the press near me. You take care of it."

"It was a difficult situation, it was a serious situation," deputy press secretary Gerald L. Warren said yesterday at a briefing. "And there is no question that the past few months have been periods of pressure on the President."

In a separate interview, presidential counsellor Melvin R. Laird said that "it might have been better if the President had taken a longer rest" following his

bout of pneumonia last month. Mr. Nixon was hospitalized from July 12 to July 20.

Both Laird and Warren insisted, however, that Mr. Nixon now has a positive attitude about the presidency and can govern effectively. Warren said that Mr. Nixon was "very pleased" with the warm response he received in New Orleans at the Veterans of Foreign Wars convention, where the President described the secret bombing of Cambodia in 1969 as necessary to save the lives of American soldiers.

White House officials nevertheless made no attempt to conceal that the President has been behaving in a tense and strained manner the last several days. But the explanations differ as to the reasons.

Some aides said the strain has arisen chiefly from the Senate Watergate hearings and, following Mr. Nixon's speech of last Wednesday,

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from polls showing that a majority of Americans believe he knew of the Watergate cover-up. Others, like Laird, said that the President at 60 years of age returned too quickly to work after his hospitalization. And still others said that the President was annoyed by the diversion of the New Orleans motorcade away from the downtown business district because of a threat on his life.

"The President believes that it is important now for him to demonstrate that he can govern effectively, and the change in plans at New Orleans upset him," one aide said.

Another said that the President was in "a kind of grim mood" when he left for Key Biscayne Friday for a weekend of relaxation.

"It was like it was after the April 30 speech, only more so," the aide said. "It's the wearing down, a wearying effect."

This same aide also warned against blowing the Ziegler incident out of proportion because it happened in front of the cameras.

"There's no talk or sign of any extreme state of agitation, just very grim," this aide said.

Warren today denied that the President's remark upon arrival here Monday to personal secretary Rose Mary Wood that "they're never going to get a cancel on me again" was in reference to the New Orleans motorcade diversion. Warren said the President was speaking about "something entirely different . . . a personal matter Rose Mary was working on for the President."

Despite this denial, the President was described by other aides as "very upset" that his acceptance of Secret Service recommendations for his safety had led him to agree to diversion of the motorcade. Aides said that Mr. Nixon believed that Presidents were always subject to such threats and that cancellation of public events would encourage additional threats in the future.

The White House decision to accept questions about

the President's frame of mind underscored the seriousness with which the Ziegler shoving incident is regarded here.

In response to specific questions, Warren said—and repeated—that the President is not under medication. And he answered a question about whether the President thought an apology to Ziegler was necessary by describing the event as a "confused situation" and by saying, with a smile, that

the President's relationship with Ziegler was "an excellent one."

Warren was asked at one point to explain how the blow-up had occurred. After again describing the event as a "confused situation," he replied:

"The President and his party were going in one way and the press was going to go in another way, and the President reminded Ron of this, and that is where it is."

Warren joined in the ensuing laughter of reporters.

An account of the President's frame of mind reconstructed from the accounts of four different aides gives this picture of the events leading to the blow-up:

The President learned on Sunday night from chief of staff Alexander M. Haig of the assassination plot. He asked for more information and was given a report by the Secret Service on Monday morning that a change had been recommended in his motorcade plans. The President approved the change and was assured that the new route would be announced and that there would be crowds along the motorcade route.

Aboard the plane to New Orleans, the President complained both of press response to his Watergate speech and to the change in motorcade plans. He reportedly became even more irritated when the crowds were sparse and some of the signs — "Impeach Nixon" and "Resign" — were unfriendly.

The President briefly crossed the street upon his arrival at the Rivergate Convention Center to shake hands in the crowd, then apparently observed reporters from the press pool near him. The shoving incident with Ziegler occurred as Mr. Nixon was approaching the doors to the center surrounded by reporters.

The incident was totally unexpected. In the past, Mr. Nixon has complained privately of being hemmed in by cameramen, but the cameras were not unusually

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close to him when he seized Ziegler and pushed him toward the press corps.

Reaction from reporters generally was that the event demonstrated Mr. Nixon's growing irritation with the press as he approaches the first news conference he has held in more than five months. Ziegler promised early in July that Mr. Nixon, who has held only three press conferences this year, soon would hold another one.

There is a growing belief among reporters in San Clemente that the next presidential press conference

will not be televised, whenever it is held. No date has been set, although Warren said last week that it will be held while Mr. Nixon is in California.

One aide said that Mr. Nixon apparently was disturbed by a report in The Miami Herald on Sunday showing that 63 per cent of the people in Dade County (which includes Miami) thought he knew about the Watergate cover-up. It was the top story in the Miami paper on Sunday, while Mr. Nixon was vacationing at Key Biscayne.