

Press Corps Meets New Secretary

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Yesterday was "transition" day at the White House. And it was reflected perhaps most vividly in the pressroom.

"What's the mood?" one reporter jokingly asked another. "Happiness that it's not Agnew," was the reply.

But yesterday was not a "happy" day in the pressroom, especially yesterday morning.

The first indication of a transition came early in the morning when suddenly there were two sets of press secretaries.

Ronald L. Ziegler, who was about to depart with the President, Nixon that is, still maintained his official title of press secretary. Gerald L. Warren was still assistant. But the Vice President had already chosen his new press man, Jerald F. terHorst, and he and his assistant were both around.

This created some confusion since everyone was issuing statements, or commands, and nobody knew whom to ask anything or what to believe. But that was all right because nobody knew anything anyway, or not much.

Gerry Warren and Jerry terHorst together chose the small group of reporters to give the "pool" report from the East Room where President Nixon was to make his farewell speech. Representatives of Michigan papers and local papers were selected. Other reporters were ushered out to the White House lawn to wait for the President's departure by helicopter.

One group was behind ropes on the lawn and another group of latecomers was directly at the exit. Ron Ziegler came out first, his face tight and grim. He turned to the small group of reporters next to the door and made his last remark to the press.

"You'll have to move back," he said, then walked forward toward the helicopter.

Suddenly there was a sharp, startling bark and Mr. Nixon burst out of the doorway, his arm at his wife's elbow. "Well, here I go!" he said. He had a smile on his face but it was a grotesque, distorted smile as he looked at the members of the press on both sides of him.

"Oh, God," one reported whispered. "He really does think we did it to him."

His family came right after him. Straining to fight back the tears, they went to the helicopter, the Nixons boarded, and it slowly rose up into the air.

Rose Mary Woods, crying openly by this time, ran across the lawn past the press as the crowd broke up, and David and Julie Eisenhower dashed back inside, their eyes swollen and reddened. There were some members of the press who cried. And many who later sheepishly admitted to feeling very sad.

"I felt so sorry for Julie," one said. "She really is a

mensch" (Yiddish for good person).

"I feel like I've just been divorced," said another reporter.

"I did everything I could not to cry," said another.

"But I just knew I couldn't. I would have been drummed out of the press corps and my family and friends would never have spoken to me."

"I kept saying to myself over and over," said another reporter, "Remember, he's a crook, he's a crook."

"I felt so angry at him for making me cry," said another. "He did it to himself. We didn't do it."

But later, back in the pressroom, waiting for Gerald Ford to be sworn in, the cynicism returned, as members of the press watched a rerun of the President's morning speech.

There was laughter as the President made what was considered to be a Freudian slip—"... this country needs good plurabers..."—and when he talked about Teddy Roosevelt's first wife dying, someone yelled, "Milk it. Milk it."

When Mr. Nixon, toward the end, said, "Others who hate you don't win unless you hate them and then you destroy yourself," there was a low moan from the reporters.

"The irony of it," someone said. "He hated us so much and feels we destroyed him, yet he can see clearly enough to say that."

But there was little time to reflect upon the departure of President Nixon. For within the hour President Ford was sworn in. The king was dead, long live the king.

The transition of presidents, however, was far less important in the press room than the transition of press secretaries. Nobody could find either Warren or terHorst, and a lot of people didn't know what terHorst looked like.

"We need a transcript of the President's speech," someone yelled to nobody in particular.

"Which President," came the reply.

"Who's running this show, anyway?" shouted a reporter. No answer. "This is

supposed to be the new open administration and we're getting less information than ever," complained another. "S.O.B.'s," grumbled another, "Don't know how to run the place."

But soon Gerry Warren appeared to calm people down by explaining that he was now a "transitional press secretary" and Jerry terHorst appeased their displeasure by accompanying the President over to greet the press.

President Ford began by introducing terHorst, who is quite short. "Will you lift him up so we can see him?" the Daily News asked the President.

President Ford disarmed everyone and made them laugh by saying, "Where many of you were standing. He was referring to the fact that he, an avid swimmer, was fully aware that the White House swimming pool

had been transformed into the pressroom.

"We'll have an open candid administration," concluded Mr. Ford. "I can't change my nature." Then he left.

"Isn't it terrific," sighed one reporter. "He's so normal."

Jerry terHorst was asked to pose for a few pictures. He did so willingly, but uncomfortably and self-consciously, shuffling back and forth, his boyish haircut flopping over his forehead. "He seems much too nice to be press secretary," said someone. "He'll never last in this lion's den."

There was a break for lunch before a 3 o'clock terHorst briefing and several people walked across the street to the Sans Souci restaurant. It was "transition" day over there as well. There was no one from either the Nixon or the Ford administration. "I don't think I know anyone on President Ford's staff, said maitre d'hotel Paul Delisle. "I suppose I will have to learn fast."

After lunch things were beginning to settle down be

fore the briefing. TerHorst held his first press conferences with only a few uncomfortable moments, but people thought he handled himself well and mostly just felt sorry for him. "Who would ever want that job?" mused a reporter.

But that was just a minor consideration. The next question was who was to be Vice President. Everyone was buzzing with theories, scrambling for new story ideas, speculating on the staff and Cabinet changes. It seemed just like a normal day in the White House pressroom except that it was more crowded and hotter and smellier and dirtier and Walter Cronkite was there.

Outside, past the pressroom, the President's son Mike and his new bride were wandering by. They were cornered by two reporters. They stopped and chatted openly, candidly and pleasantly for a few minutes, then moved on.

"That's very unusual," observed one of the reporters.

"They'll learn," said the other.