

Haig Denies That He Urged Ford to Pardon Nixon

By EVERETTE R. HOLLES

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SAN CLEMENTE, Calif., Sept. 17—Gen. Alexander M. Haig Jr., outgoing White House chief of staff, said today that his strong personal desire for an immediate pardon for former President Richard M. Nixon had "not been an operative factor" in President Ford's decision to grant such a pardon.

But, in a telephone interview from his White House office, General Haig added that, since Mr. Nixon's arrival here after his resignation on Aug. 9, he had talked "repeatedly" with the former President and Ronald L. Ziegler, former White House press secretary who is serving now as Mr. Nixon's principal adviser.

Before the President announced his pardon of Mr. Nixon on Sept. 8, General Haig said, his telephone conversations with Mr. Ziegler at the Nixon Casa Pacifica estate here dealt briefly with the former President's health among other subjects, including legal matters.

At no time, the general asserted, was it suggested that he use his influence as President Ford's chief of staff to bring about a Nixon pardon without awaiting legal action in the courts.

Denies Any Warning

"I never conveyed to the President any warning that, if a pardon were not forthcoming, Mr. Nixon might suffer a complete physical and mental collapse," General Haig said.

President Ford said, in an authorized statement issued at today's White House news briefing in Washington, that "Al Haig never discussed with me the mental or physical condition of former President Nixon prior to my decision to grant the pardon."

Categorically denying a report from San Clemente that was published today in The New York Times, General Haig said he had participated in two conferences with President Ford preceding the pardon, but that he remained "essentially neutral" and made no effort to influence the President's decision.

"Much as I favored such a pardon being granted without delay, I was not asked for a commendation and did not give one," said General Haig, whose appointment as Supreme Allied Commander in Europe was announced by the President yesterday.

The Times account, obtained from a long-time friend and associate of Mr. Nixon in touch with affairs inside the Nixon estate, identified General Haig as having been primarily responsible for the surprise pardon.

The Times source, advised that both General Haig and President Ford had denied the

reported role played by General Haig, said today that his information came from "very trustworthy sources" and that he was convinced of its authenticity.

The Nixon associate told The Times that General Haig had warned Mr. Ford on Aug. 29 that, unless he moved quickly in announcing a full and unconditional pardon instead of waiting for legal action to be taken, it might be too late to avert "a personal and national tragedy" of Mr. Nixon's complete physical and mental collapse.

At today's White House news briefing, John W. Hushen, the deputy press secretary, said that Leon Jaworski, the special Watergate prosecutor whom

General Haig was reported to have consulted prior to urging Mr. Ford to grant a "humanitarian" pardon, had informed him that The Times reference to his meeting with General Haig lacked any basis of fact.

In his telephone interview after the White House news briefing, General Haig said that, "contrary to The Times account," he had never spoken to the Nixon daughters, Julie Eisenhower and Tricia Cox, regarding the state of their father's health.

He said his only conversation with them since their father's resignation concerned Secret Service coverage.

The Times source also reported that General Haig had received, either directly or in-

directly, alarming reports about the former President's condition from his friends, Charles G. Rebozo and Robert H. Abplanalp, when they returned East after being with Mr. Nixon for several several days after at the Casa Pacifica estate here his resignation.

"I haven't spoken with either of these gentlemen for at least four months," General Haig said.

Intimating that there were men around President Ford who bore him enmity, presumably because of his position as a Nixon holdover, General Haig said he believed the account appearing in The Times originated in Washington rather than here.