

A Two-Star General Is Favored For Second-Highest Army Post

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WASHINGTON, Sept. 1— Pentagon civilian leaders are seriously thinking of reaching into the White House for a relatively junior two-star general to fill the second highest military post in the Army.

Well-placed Defense Department sources say the job of Vice Chief of Staff of the Army may soon go to Maj. Gen. Alexander M. Haig Jr., deputy national security adviser to the President.

Both Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird and Secretary of the Army Robert F. Froehlke are understood to favor the nomination, if Henry A. Kissinger can be persuaded to part with his deputy, and if President Nixon approves the move.

To name General Haig, who has been a general less than three years, as Vice Chief of Staff with four-star rank, the Army would have to jump over the names of 243 more-senior generals, a move that would cause considerable muttering among ranking officers.

The favorites in senior echelons for the job have been two three-star generals, Lieut. Gen. Richard G. Stilwell, Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, and Lieut. Gen. Walter T. Kerwin Jr., Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel.

But informed Pentagon sources

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es say that top civilians want to reach deep into the pool of about 500 general officers to promote a bright, young, articulate two-star general who might bring fresh ideas to his job and who might be especially useful in dealing with Congress and the public during the difficult transition to an all-volunteer Army.

Two other two-star generals also are said to be in the running: Maj. Gen. George S. Blanchard Jr., until recently commander of the 82d Airborne Division and now in charge of personnel plans and budget; and Maj. Gen. Bernard W. Rogers, chief of Army liaison on Capitol Hill.

But General Haig reportedly is the odds-on favorite of the Pentagon's civilian leadership.

A final decision and announcement has been held up, pending Senate action on the nomination of Gen. Creighton W. Abrams to be Army Chief of Staff.

General Abrams's confirmation has been deferred until the Senate can clear up the confusion over whether, when commander of all American forces in Vietnam, he was aware that his Air Force chief, Gen. John Lavelle, had sanctioned falsified reports in order to conduct some unauthorized air strikes in North Vietnam.

Abrams's Experience

General Abrams, at 57, is considered a soldier's soldier, with extensive combat command experience in World War II, the Korean War and in Vietnam. He served as Vice Chief of Staff of the Army from the fall of 1964 to the summer of 1967, when he went to Vietnam



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Maj. Gen. A. M. Haig Jr.

to be groomed to take over command of United States forces there.

General Haig, 47, was at the University of Notre Dame and later at West Point while General Abrams was commanding major armed units in Europe during the second World War.

Both men are armor officers. But while General Haig served in combat in Korea and briefly commanded first an infantry battalion and later an infantry brigade in Vietnam, many Pentagon officers are privately complaining that he lacks the top command experience traditionally thought necessary for either of the two top Army assignments.

While General Haig has long been tabbed within the Army as one of its "comers," he has most impressed Washington officials in key staff rather than command assignments.

From 1963 to 1964 he was deputy special assistant to Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara and Deputy Secretary Cyrus R. Vance.

When the Nixon Administration came in, Mr. Kissinger

wanted a military assistant with combat experience who could provide some personal judgments on the feasibility of various military courses of action, to perform administrative chores and to open an informal pipeline to the Pentagon to provide information beyond that coming through normal channels, sources say.

He was a colonel when he got the job in January, 1969. But the young officer soon was impressing both Mr. Kissinger and President Nixon with his ability to "grasp the larger picture, especially on Vietnam policy," as one official puts it, and in less than a year he got his first star.

"Al is amazing," comments one State Department official who has worked with him. "In a high-powered National Security Council staff he's the only man, other than Henry Kissinger, who has personal entree to and standing with the President. If we need an answer, we can go to Al, and he'll get it fast."

An Army general noted that General Haig puts in so many hours at the White House that when someone wants to include the Haigs at a party, it has to be scheduled for around 4 P.M. on a Sunday to have a good chance of getting him. "That's about the only time in the week he feels free to accept a social invitation," the officer said.

Pentagon officials expect the Senate to confirm General Abrams within the next two to three weeks. They will then nominate the man to succeed the current Vice Chief, Gen. Bruce Palmer Jr. "Whoever gets the job," said one senior general, "he'll be filling a mighty large pair of shoes."

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