

# The Ron Ziegler Behind Ron Ziegler

By Nick Thimmesch

**I**t was Ronald L. Ziegler talking, Press Secretary to the most aggrieved President since Woodrow Wilson. Ziegler was so fed up with punishment from the press for what they earnestly regard as his many trespasses, that he sought escape through perverse humor.

"You are doing a profile on me," he declared, looking at the ceiling of his White House office. "It will be about the brash young man, inexperienced with the press, who conducts his briefings in double-talk. He is insensitive to the press and its needs because he came out of an advertising agency. His only training was at Disneyland where he was a Jungle Cruise guide. He is only a mouthpiece for the President, and never had the press' interest at heart because he doesn't understand the press. He does nothing more than provide protection for the isolated President. Isn't that the story?"

Well, I wasn't sure it was. Could these words really be coming from Ziegler, the highly presentable, if somewhat callow young man whom I expressed doubts about in print back in 1968, but who is now said to be an uppermost influence on Richard M. Nixon, our President?

Hours later, and with a fair number of dismal 1968-73 experiences with Ziegler searing my memory, I detected the possibility of a man who was beginning to see a glimmer, perhaps even a changed man. Nothing like that which flashed on Paul en route to Damascus, or Charles Colson, en route to court. No, for Ziegler it seemed more like a forging from the Watergate crucible, "seasoning," as it is called in ath-

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letics. But was it too late in coming? Was Ziegler too dumb about the press too long?

Ziegler hasn't become Eisenhower's James Hagerty who could tell the press to go to hell and thus cause them to laugh, and respect him, too. Nor is Ziegler now fashioned into a twisted pretzel like Bill Moyers, half-savage, half-Baptist, serving Moyers first, Johnson second and the press last, though he had them thinking he was serving them first.

No, what has happened is that Ziegler has gone through nearly 2,000 press briefings, which is something like a professional boxer fighting 2,000 rounds, and finally getting knocked silly. Or, as Archie Moore, the literate light heavyweight champion used to say, "knocked to" by a block-buster punch. (Ziegler got his April 17, 1973, when all previous Watergate statements wound up as "inoperative.") Having to sit in quick humiliation on your silken trunks in the middle of the ring, your brain fogged, and your hair no longer neatly parted, your superiority fleeting with each count by the referee over you—well, it must have done a little something to Ziegler.

When you stagger to your feet, it's more real, it's not Disneyland, or Command By Bob Haldeman, or the constant opportunity to befuddle or ignore the press. Getting "knocked to" Archie Moore once explained, after hitting the canvas 11 times in a championship bout which he finally won, is getting hit so hard, your head clears.

"Inoperative" was the punch which was more than a punch. It has stuck to Ziegler like flypaper and will haunt, perhaps even humor, him until that thick, well-combed hair turns to grey, and the young face turns

to wrinkles. But there were more jolts soon to come. Four months after "inoperative," there was the presidential push that was more than a simple shove.

The horror of Watergate was in full bloom on Aug. 20 when President Nixon swept into New Orleans, in search of support at the Veterans of Foreign Wars convention. The American public had had a summer full of Watergate on television. The VFW delegates could provide that lift a beleaguered President needs. This appearance could have been one of those turning points all politicians think of. The President was keyed up.

There had been an assassination warning. Tension, on top of being keyed up, and Watergate's pangs underneath. The street crowds near the convention center were mostly friendly, though a few protestors waved anti-Nixon signs. Quite usual, for Nixon. Like Jack Kennedy, like many men who took political appearances seriously, Nixon flexed himself before entering the arena. He wanted nothing in his way, in front or in back, before he got at that crowd inside.

But breathing on him from behind was Ziegler and the clump of TV cameras, mikes and newsmen which inevitably followed. Nixon wheeled around, grabbed Ziegler by the shoulders, spun him around, and let it all out. He was so close to Ziegler; Ziegler was such an extension of Haldeman, the jettisoned shield, such a glove on Mr. Nixon's hand, such an intimate to a man who has a poverty of intimates, that no restraint flashed through the President's mind—he gave Ziegler a good shove, and barked, "I don't want any press with me and you take care of it."

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*Ronald Ziegler: Up front for the President*

Photographed by Matthew Lewis

Ziegler, from page 10

The episode provided rich, red meat for the press which had tasted Mr. Nixon's blood all summer. Questions were raised about the President's mental health, Ziegler's status and his relationship with the President, and whether the temperature in humid New Orleans was beastly.

The White House, through Deputy Press Secretary Gerald L. Warren, was required to respond that it was indeed "a highly unusual . . . difficult situation," and that "there is no question that the past few months have been periods of pressure on the President." But Mr. Nixon, it was stated, was "very pleased" with his reception at the convention, and relations between him and Ziegler remained "excellent." Mr. Nixon, Warren announced, was doing his job and leading the nation.

Those who regarded the shoving incident as a sign that Mr. Nixon had flipped out, were certainly wrong. His reaction to the sight of newsmen pursuing him was entirely normal, given the situation, and the interdependence he and Ziegler share. It is likely Nixon shoved Ziegler because he likes him so much. You hardly hurt the ones you don't love; you dismiss them.

"It was misinterpreted," Ziegler says now. "The President only gave me a *kind* of shove. He wanted a moment to think without the press being around. After the speech, on the plane, he put his hand on my shoulder, and said, 'I'm sorry that happened.'"

The public assaults on Ziegler are certainly harder on his large ego than the steady thousands of small ones inflicted on him by H.R. (Bob) Haldeman, his early mentor, and the man who wound him like a clock for all the Haldeman years in the White House. Haldeman had plucked him from the wreckage of Mr. Nixon's one really bad campaign, the go against Edmund (Pat) Brown for the governorship of California in 1962. So when Haldeman was gone, the only one to administer the daily wind-up was President Nixon himself. The intimacy between Mr. Nixon and Ziegler was enriched by Haldeman's absence.

Ziegler has experienced another kind of pressure, one every man in political life knows, one which creates tremendous frustration, held-back tears, and sometimes, tragedy. That has to do with what happens to a man's home life when he is obsessed with his public life. There are hundreds of victims of this common sadness in Washington.

Nancy Plessinger Ziegler, daughter of a gasoline station operator, is a hometown girl the way Bess Truman was a hometown girl, the way Judy Agnew was a hometown girl, the way thousands of politicians' wives who come to Washington are hometown women. Some throw themselves into outside lives, some get tough and bitchy, and others, like Nancy Ziegler, a pleasant, pretty blonde, patiently wait for the day when it's all over.

She remembers the last five years as a

blur, contrasted to better times when they lived in California. "It started in May of 1968, when Ron picked up in the campaign," she recalls. "He just didn't come home ever the year after that. He stayed in New York. That was the hardest time for the girls, then 5 (Cynthia) and 2 (Laurie), because they were used to our life in California and missed their father.

"When we moved here in 1969, they at least knew their father would get home sometimes. Ron is totally concerned with his work. We don't have much time together. I just don't have Ron all that much, to be able to talk with him when he does get home. He's not around much to help raise the girls. (Cynthia's now 10, Laurie, 7.) Maybe he will be by the time they are teenagers."

**T**he Nixon-Ziegler relationship is intimate. No person spends more hours with the President than Ziegler. Only Gen. Alexander Haig, whose role is different, has this "easy access."

"We sit there in the morning at his desk,

having our coffee," Ziegler said, describing the opening moments of President Nixon's day. "We review the morning news, and what went on in the early staff meeting. We discuss what will go on during his day—his schedule. I always have a notebook and I use it.

"We talk about matters such as his financial disclosure statement, the white papers on milk and ITT. I look into those for him."

I asked Ziegler if the President ever curses or cracks jokes. "Sure he uses four-letter words, who doesn't?" he answered. "He shows a sense of humor, spot humor. He doesn't rattle off jokes. He just makes wry remarks about events as they happen. Don't ask me for examples. I can't think of any offhand.

"You know, we go on for an hour or more sometimes in the morning."

The sessions are not sacrosanct. "Stephen Bull might walk in," Ziegler says, "or maybe Al (Haig) or Rose Mary. We've been around each other so long, there's nothing awkward about it."

The new Nixon/Ziegler closeness began to show itself last April, when Haldeman came under fire, but had not yet left. On one crucial weekend that month, Ziegler was the only senior staffer with Nixon on the entire weekend when the President was at Key Biscayne.

For over four years, Nixon almost automatically turned to Haldeman and said, "Bob," this or "Bob" that. With Haldeman suddenly gone, Nixon turned and it was "Ron" this and "Ron" that. On June 6, the President announced that Ziegler was being given over-all responsibilities for White House communications, would remain as Press Secretary, and would also become Assistant to the President. Thus he would become a large part of Herb Klein who had left, would remain Ron Ziegler, and would pick up as much of Haldeman as is possible when you are grafting from a so-called indispensable man. That was a role Robert Finch, more young brother to Nixon than anything else, was never able to acquire.

The new rise of Ziegler isn't so remarkable. His power originally flowed from Haldeman, and Haldeman's from the President. Now the flow is direct from Nixon to Ziegler. While Nixon *listens* to many people, and always has, he ultimately bounces his ideas off a selected pair of people, to test public reaction.

Thus, in pre-presidential days (1967-1968), Nixon's stereo-sounding boards were Patrick Buchanan and Rose Mary Woods, both sequestered in Nixon's law firm. To help decide what to do, Nixon confided in John N. Mitchell then. Once he was President, Nixon's pair was Haldeman-Ehrlichman. Now it is Ziegler-Haig.

Both men share Nixon's moderate-conservative value system regarding patriotism and the work-ethic, and hard line on what to expect from people. In recent months, Nixon asked them about the

*Continued on page 18*



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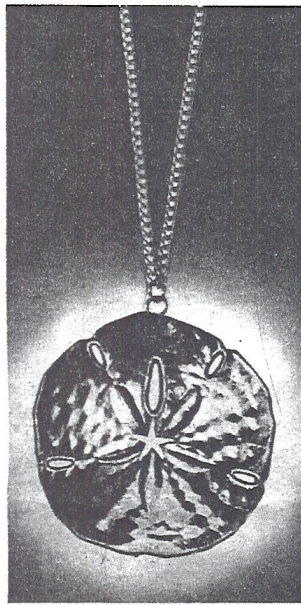
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Ziegler, from page 12  
timing and the impact of actions on Vice President Spiro T. Agnew; Special Watergate Prosecutor Archibald Cox, Elliot Richardson and William Ruckelshaus, then honchos at Justice; the energy crisis; the President's income tax and financial disclosures; and white papers on milk and ITT.

About the night Cox was dismissed and Richardson and Ruckelshaus were blown out of office, Ziegler says: "I was in the meetings with the lawyers and with Al (Haig), so in a sense I was in on the decision. We were here very late that night. We talked about the fact that the President had no option on Cox. I mostly coordinated with the lawyers."

Why does the President seek Ziegler's advice? "Ask any staff man," Ziegler says. "The President is the one who would really have to answer that, but I think you'll find there is agreement that he asks those who get the job done for him. I think I've done that. I worked for him in 1960, 1962 and from 1968 on. I believe he's a great leader. And if you feel this way, as I do, it doesn't carry an obligation to be a 'yes' man. I've stressed my disagreements with the President many times."

Ziegler gets worked up when he is asked whether he is merely a replacement for Haldeman, or whether he still serves as a conduit for Haldeman. "I have never talked to Bob Haldeman as an intermediary with the President in making White House policy since Bob left," he says vehemently. "I've had about five social phone calls with him, and that's all. I've always been able to walk into the President's office, ever since the early days of this administration."

Ziegler acknowledges his work load has increased considerably in the past eight months. "My role has changed 100 per cent, not a whole 100 per cent because I'm inclined toward overstatement," he explained. "I advise the President on communications, on the need to communicate with leaders. I give advice on how to communicate and how to coordinate communications through the whole government. I also have an operational responsibility on how the White House runs. There's no iron door around here."

But these days it is Ronald Ziegler who goes on the long, dinner cruises with President

Nixon on the Potomac, where, presumably, they discuss problems of communication. But the hours stretch on and on, and Ziegler says: "One thing goes unattended when I hop around from one responsibility to another. I don't know if I'll continue with the title of Press Secretary. I'm not sure."

**R**on Ziegler describes his wife, Nancy, as "a real great girl." Their life together has been all but snuffed out because of his commitment to President Nixon.

"We can't entertain because he gets home so late," says Nancy. "I didn't think that it was possible that he could work even more until this year. Now, it's 24 hours a day. I'll be glad when the next three years are over. In the beginning it wasn't bad, but now it goes on and on. I don't like it when I get out and see people who live normal lives. I sometimes feel sorry for myself, then."

Nancy was pretty enough in high school, in a Cincinnati suburb, to be named football queen and "Miss Dixie Heights." She studied voice at the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music, and worked as a secretary at Proctor & Gamble in Cincinnati. After marrying Ziegler—they were childhood friends—she says, "I never had a thought of coming to Washington. We liked it best when we lived in California. I would like to live there again, if I had my druthers, but it's up to Ron." Ziegler himself remarks that "as a family, we don't have time to do much here. In California, we had a good life, weekend trips and pleasant times with friends."

Of the strain here, Nancy says, "I fight it, so I try to keep busy. I'm on a hospital auxiliary board. I work with Girl Scout leaders. I go to Bible class once a week and play tennis." She reads a lot (currently, Graham Greene's *Honorary Consul*) and listens to her favorite music (Roberta Flack as well as classical). In California, she did some precinct work for the Republicans, and she's done the same in Alexandria. She says her father, who managed a Texaco service station before retiring, and her mother were always political independents in Kentucky until recent years when they became Republicans. Life was simpler.

Nancy is a smiling, attrac-

The Washington Post/Potomac/February 24, 1974

live presence when she's out in public, which isn't too often. She says she liked the administration people (the Haldemans, Ehrlichmans, Kleins and Haigs) she met in the past five years, "but they work so much, I don't get to see them."

She says she feels bad about "what happened to Bob Haldeman. I feel bad about all of them. Anybody with humanity should."

Now Nancy hangs on until the time is up. "Ron needs to regroup," she says, using an expression which doesn't seem to fit her. "He needs to relax and reflect. I ask him, what are you going to do when it's over? But there's always something urgent, and he is totally devoted to the President."

Ziegler's devotion to the President leads him to respond to Mr. Nixon's careening fortunes with a growing exasperation.

For the first time in the five years I'd interviewed him, Ziegler was pouring it out, letting it show.

"Richard Nixon's traditional adversaries are full of hypocrisy and hatred," Ziegler fumed. "They spend energy and money as though this were just a political game. They are guilty of the greater wrongdoing. This is absolutely a tired, sick town. The President is not isolated. The city of Washington is isolated, especially the people who have influence here."

"This President has done a good job for the country. This has been a strenuous year. Besides Watergate to deal with, he worked to end the war, he met with Brezhnev, he had the Middle East and energy crises."

Ziegler shook his head from side to side for emphasis, something he doesn't do in briefings, when he got into the bit about the "isolated President." He declared, "It is a myth that the President only listens to Haig and Ziegler, and the story that he is getting advice from only a few people is absolute, total bunk. He is talking with more people than ever, and getting advice from many. What do you think all those congressmen and congressional leaders were doing in there?"

"Bryce Harlow and Mel Laird weren't shut out. Bryce Harlow is one of the very valued advisors to the President on a day to day basis. Quite

irrankly, I think Mel Laird is one of the most colorful figures in Washington. Mel Laird is Mel Laird, a helluva man. For heaven's sake, he's been a politician all his life."

Conventional wisdom has it that Laird was disappointed because he didn't have access to Nixon, yet Laird publicly and privately insists that he did.

What Laird had was access on legislative and congressional relations matters; Laird wasn't asked about the income tax disclosure or the other public thrusts by Mr. Nixon, though Ziegler says, "Al Haig talked to Laird on the Saturday night Cox was fired." Laird's power flowed from Congress, and Nixon respected what Laird thought about congressional reaction. Nixon never "owned" Laird the way he owns Ziegler. On crucial decisions, say the Cox firing, Laird probably would have given advice the President wouldn't have liked, so why ask him?

Laird wanted Ziegler taken out of the press secretary's role. He is no fan of Ziegler's, but is careful the way he gets back at him. When Laird held his public goodbye session with the White House press, Dec. 19, 1973, he thanked the "men and women" of the press "for the fair treatment I have always received in politics..." Laird said the "adversary relationship between government officials and the press is very important" and that "it is very important also not to let that adversary relationship become an antagonistic relationship." The "adversary relationship," Laird explained, should "be nurtured and cultivated because that is a responsibility of the First Amendment."

Ziegler talks freely on that relationship:

"For the President to have lunch with editorial boards is good, but the editors of The Washington Post don't deserve to have lunch with this President. Ben Bradlee should join Colson at one of these prayer breakfasts. Individually, the Post people are mostly nice guys. I like Phil Geyelin. I like to sit and have a drink with him."

"But The Washington Post is too dominant an influence in this city. On the way to work, what do I have to listen to—WTOP, with its round-the-clock news, (all-the-news-all-the-time). All the congressmen driving in in the morning have that to listen to."

"... I have learned that

the guys who scream the most at the briefings are the worst reporters. The guys who do a solid job on you, even critically, are the ones who go about their business."

"I admit that we had people around here who didn't understand the press. But now that's over, and the press should take a deep breath and examine itself. Here it's getting a little like the Japanese press when it moved against the government and could report no good at all. The Washington press has fallen into that syndrome. There really is very little investigative reporting—it's reporting by leaks."

"I am disappointed in the press, though I respect the press. The free press has a key role in our country, but it needs to examine itself."

"... I know my shortcomings as a press secretary. When I took this office people gave me six months to last. I came in here not as an advertising man, but as someone who had worked with the press for a number of years. Contrary to what the press says, I fought for them and for their needs every day, and so did Gerry Warren."

"We just had a President who didn't attempt to sell himself to the press, and some people don't like that."

Whatever the Nixon game plan was for the press, not courting it and letting it decide, (as Ziegler claims), or viewing it with mixed fear and contempt (as is often charged), the President hung in there pretty well for the first four years. He could have had much better press relations, but he got by largely because of the events he dominated—Vietnam, detente, the inflation spiral and the feckless, hopeless McGovern campaign. Through all this Ronald Ziegler was the artful dodger, steady, evasive, and mostly successful.

But on April 17, 1973, in a briefing session which lasted 31 minutes too long for him, Ron Ziegler got knocked silly with that blockbuster punch.

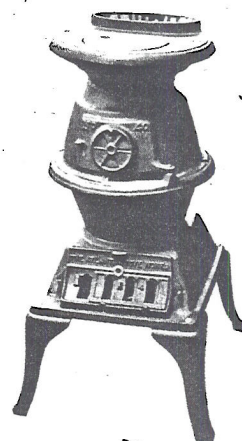
Ziegler had danced, backedpedaled, jabbed and hooked for months with the press over Watergate, leaving it infuriated and frustrated, but also under his command. But successful fighters are sometimes felled by sucker punches.

To this day, Ziegler says he did not introduce the fateful word, "inoperative," which will haunt him forever. Indeed, an examination of the

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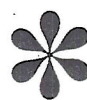
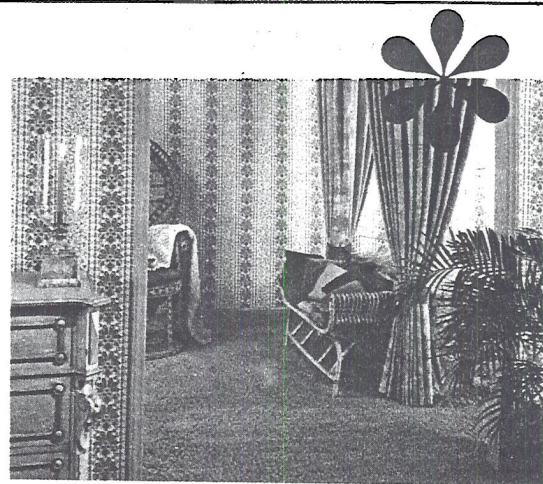


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that Ziegler was holding his own that day, under very rough circumstances, because President Nixon had just announced there were "new developments" in the Watergate case, and hinted that his own assistants might be implicated. Moreover, the word Ziegler first used was "operative," referring to the President's freshest statement. Each time a punch was thrown at Ziegler, he ducked away with "operative"—six times in a row.

Then, bam, Johnny Apple of the New York Times waded in, throwing elbows and asked: "Ron, could I follow up on your comment on the operative statement? Would it be fair for us to infer since what the President said today is now considered the operative statement, to quote you, that the other statement is no longer operative, that it is now *inoperative*?" (My italics.) Ziegler fended it off with one more "operative," but then dropped his guard, and took the sucker punch. After 80 safe words, he uttered, "The President refers to the fact that there is new material; therefore, this is the operative statement. The others are *inoperative*." (My italics.)

Kallump, Ziegler was down, and his wavy black hair was no longer parted. The life had gone out of his muscular legs, and his vacant stare never looked so empty. Many in the crowd cried for the kill, and others mercifully asked that the fight be stopped. While there never had been a presidential press secretary saddled with a Watergate, neither had there been one who declared that all his previous declarations were so much horse manure. It is the kind of evidence which drives or quietly leads men from office.

John Connally, often irritated by Ziegler's haughtiness, said out loud Ziegler should be removed. Laird tactfully suggested the office of Press Secretary would be better served if Ron were to serve in some other capacity or at least turn over the daily briefing duties to someone else.

Paul Healy, the White House correspondent for the New York Daily News, nominally friendly to the Nixon administration, said, "I think he should resign. His credibility has been ruined." Others said they never could believe Zie-

her husband works for a Mid-

steadfast observer of the Nixon administration, said he wasn't bothered by Ziegler's credibility because "Ziegler's credibility is Nixon's credibility." A professional relations committee of the National Press Club, in a report critical of the Nixon administration, righteously declared that "Ronald Ziegler, as White House press secretary, particularly during the Watergate disclosures of the past year, has misled the public and affronted the professional standards of the Washington press corps."

In the weeks following, the air in the White House press room was heavy with anger. On June 6, President Nixon announced that Ziegler would be responsible for overall White House communications, would continue as press secretary, and also serve as assistant to the President. Warren had been handling the daily briefings with increasing frequency, and it was clear that he was to become the principal spokesman, the man to take the heat.

As Assistant to the President, and with nine "inoperative" months behind him, Ziegler remains a good natured, if put-upon soul. He is jowly, having ballooned to 205 pounds, because he eats more compulsively, and has no time for exercise. "I enjoyed getting fat because I always wanted to know how it would be," he says smilingly. "I don't like it, so I'll lose weight now."

"I come in every day at 7:30 or 8 in the morning and stay until anywhere from 9 to midnight. I go easier on Saturdays and Sundays. I come in at 9 a.m."

He loves the pace and the power, like Patton loved it, like Bobby Kennedy loved it, like Nixon loves it, like Kissinger loves it, like Haldeman and Colson loved it.

Ziegler's background shows few signs of super-ambition. He was born May 12, 1939, when Nixon was in law school, in Covington, Ky., a Cincinnati suburb. His father, L. S. "Dan," had migrated from an Illinois farm, hadn't finished high school, and was to spend his working years as a foreman and plant manager for a metals company. Ziegler's mother, Ruby, by Ron's account, "was born in the Kentucky hills and worked hard to become a registered nurse, and is still working." Ziegler's

her husband works for a Mid-

dletown, Ohio, steel company.

"We've never been rich, and we've never been starving, and we've always been Republican on both sides of the family," is the way Dan Ziegler puts it. "Ron grew up liking sports, and whatever he did, he did with vigor. He broke his arm one year in high school football. I took him on long motor trips when he was a boy, and made sure he got good religious training. He's a grown man now and can make up his own mind. It's a shame, though, the way he and some others take the brunt of the blame for the whole shebang of Watergate. I'm pulling for him. He's a hard worker."

Ronald Ziegler was graduated from the eighth grade of the Concordia Lutheran (parochial) school, and at nearby Dixie Heights High School, became the star 180-lb. fullback, earning All-State honors in the Louisville Courier-Journal. That summer, he and a buddy, Ron Kings, drove to Florida, flew to Cuba "to see what it was like, only that was before Castro took over."

Several large universities tried to recruit him for football, but Ziegler entered Xavier College in Cincinnati, in 1957, where he played halfback. The Jesuit teachers impressed him, and he made the dean's list.

But the next summer, 1958, he traveled to California, following his father who had been transferred there during the school year. He became fascinated with the livelier life there, got that Disneyland job and decided to enroll at the University of California. When he finished his sophomore year at U.S.C he attended a fraternity convention in the Midwest, and stopped by his hometown to look the girls over.

"He phoned me, I guess, because I was the only one around who wasn't married," says his wife, Nancy. "We had known each other since we were children. We were born in the same hospital, delivered by the same doctor, and it was in kindergarten where Ron first kissed me, and got spanked by the teacher for it. We double-dated in high school, and I led cheers for him when I was a cheerleader."

So after a sightseeing trip to  
Continued on page 21

Ziegler, from page 20  
 Washington together, letters  
 back and forth, and a Christ-  
 mas visit in 1959, Ron and  
 Nancy became engaged. They  
 were married July 30, 1960,  
 when Ron was 21 and was  
 readying to work for the Re-  
 publicans in the fall cam-  
 paign. ("I felt I was a Republi-  
 can when I was 5 years old,"  
 Ziegler had told me. "My fa-  
 ther was a Republican.")

Ziegler got a job managing  
 an apartment building to get  
 free rent. Meanwhile, Nixon  
 was running for President  
 and Ziegler arranged for his  
 U.S.C. visit. He was errand  
 boy to Herb Klein, and "in  
 awe" of the traveling press.

Nixon lost, and Ziegler  
 graduated, to take a job with  
 Proctor & Gamble in the mar-  
 keting department, but he  
 didn't like it. He had majored  
 in political science, and  
 wanted to get into political  
 work so he took the job with  
 the state committee. Again, a  
 job with Herb Klein, this  
 time, Nixon's dreadful 1962  
 campaign, and the first meet-  
 ing with Haldeman. After the  
 election Haldeman brought  
 Ziegler into J. Walter Thomp-  
 son Co., where Ziegler even-  
 tually managed advertising

for Disneyland, 7-Up, Sea  
 Stamps, Blue Chip (trading  
 stamps) and KNBC; the latter  
 account, Ziegler claims, gave  
 him experience with the elec-  
 tronic news media.

At 34, Ziegler seems young  
 to be reflective, but he is,  
 especially when his creden-  
 tials are challenged. Sure, he  
 says, he was a guide on the  
 Disneyland Jungle Boat, but  
 he was 20 then, and who  
 hasn't performed such junior  
 jobs when young? And yes, he  
 believes he was qualified  
 when, at 29, he was ap-  
 pointed press secretary.

"I had been trained by the  
 California press, although  
 maybe they wouldn't admit it  
 now," he explains, somewhat  
 in indignation. "I was a young  
 kid of 22 when I worked for  
 the California Republican  
 state committee as press offi-  
 cer in Sacramento. Jack Mc-  
 Dowell of the San Francisco  
 Call-Bulletin helped me get an  
 office in the dome of the capi-  
 tol. I wrote releases, pub-  
 lished a paper and did re-  
 search and knew all the re-  
 porters. I rode press buses all  
 through the '60s and even  
 thought about becoming a  
 newspaperman."

A California political pro-

fessional remembers Ziegler,  
 at that time, as "a good-look-  
 ing boy, not smart and not  
 dumb, and doing no big  
 chores. I never visualized him  
 in the position he is in now."  
 McDowell, now in public re-  
 lations, recalls that Ziegler had  
 a "... real good personality,  
 but never showed ideology. I  
 liked him then, and I like him  
 now. He never gave me rea-  
 son to think badly of him. But  
 I never thought he'd ever be-  
 come presidential press secre-  
 tary, and he didn't either."

Haldeman groomed Ziegler  
 for everything after 1962, in-  
 cluding his eventual job as  
 press secretary. Ziegler still  
 acknowledges his debt to  
 Haldeman, though murmuring  
 that "Bob didn't keep this  
 place open as often as he  
 should have." Haldeman, as  
 much as Nixon, dictated or-  
 ders to Ziegler, and set the  
 tone by which Ziegler was to  
 operate. If we are open-  
 minded, we could think that  
 perhaps Ziegler would have  
 been a different kind of press  
 secretary, had Haldeman not  
 been around, but then Halde-  
 man would not have been  
 around had Nixon not been  
 around, so there we are, back  
 at the start.

Though Ziegler isn't  
 out front on the daily  
 firing line these days,  
 he is still roundly criticized by  
 the White House press corps.  
 The press-Ziegler relationship  
 is, by any measure, antagonis-  
 tic, and Ziegler is condemned  
 for:

• *His celebrated circumlocu-  
 tion, wherein, it is charged  
 that he has invented, and rou-  
 tinely uses, a language no one  
 understands.* Long before  
 Watergate, correspondents,  
 in exasperation and wear-  
 iness, struck the verb, "zie-  
 gle," to describe Ziegler's zig-  
 zagging. Verbosity is cited as  
 his cardinal sin. To which  
 Ziegler replies:

"All press secretaries have  
 been accused of that, and  
 have done it," he said. "When  
 these leading questions come  
 at you, you must think, how  
 will my answer be written or  
 interpreted? I must be aware  
 of the wire-service lead, espe-  
 cially on foreign policy. The  
 press secretary makes a seri-  
 ous mistake if he only tries to  
 please the room. I was overly  
 cautious in the first two to  
 three years, and I can be legiti-  
 mately criticized for that."

• *Dictating to Deputy  
 Press Secretary Gerald War-*

ren, who is now principal  
 briefer, as to what to say, put-  
 ting Warren into an impossi-  
 ble position. Warren, it is  
 pointed out, does not have  
 prime access to the President,  
 nor does he enjoy the "A" list  
 privileges, including a limou-  
 sine that Kenneth Clawson,  
 also a deputy press secretary,  
 enjoys.

Ziegler prevents Warren  
 from becoming a real "press  
 secretary," it is said, and is  
 jealous of the attention War-  
 ren gets. To which Ziegler  
 replies: "No, that's simply not  
 true." Period.

• *Talking accessibility, but  
 not being accessible himself,  
 even in the era of "Operation  
 Candor."* To which Ziegler  
 replies: "My accessibility var-  
 ies from day to day, depend-  
 ing on my new work. I hope  
 to be more accessible. Quite  
 frankly, some days I'm not. I  
 know the press thinks I'm less  
 accessible."

• *Not protecting the press by  
 making sure a White House  
 press pool got aboard the  
 commercial plane which flew  
 President Nixon to California  
 after Christmas.* To which  
 Ziegler replies: "It was prima-  
 rily related to the element of  
 surprise. The President



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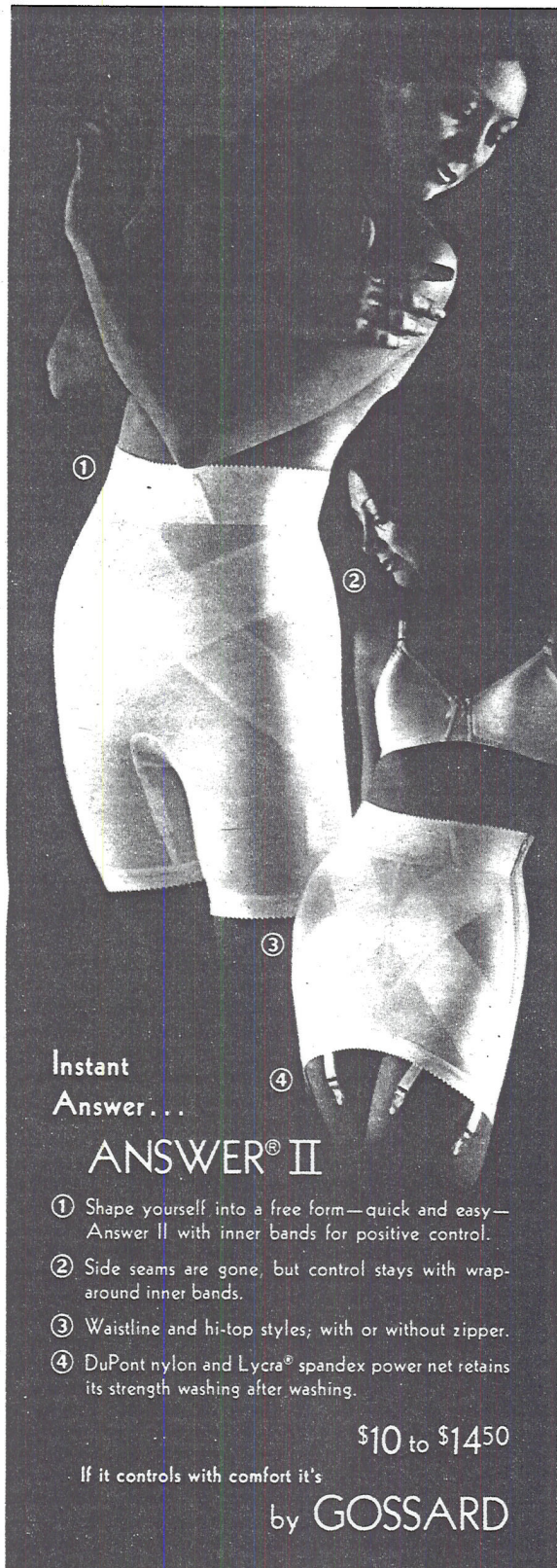
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wanted to try commercial without having the press all over a commercial plane. The press got pictures because I took them myself, and gave them to the wires. Time magazine sent me a check for \$50 for one of mine they used. I will probably send the money to the Cancer Society, but I should give it to the committee supporting the President."

Despite these criticisms, and the general disgust with Ziegler's performance, many reporters say that they personally "like Ron." They see Ziegler as affable, personable, a good guy to have lunch, play golf or play touch football with, and showing a sense of humor. He is known to be bright, blessed with an exceptional memory and enormous stamina. They agree he works hard to provide the best travel accommodations arrangements for them, and greatly improved their physical working facilities.

Moreover, there is no quarrel that Ziegler does what all White House press secretaries have done—represent his boss, the President, and reflect his views. "It is pure crap to expect a press secretary to do otherwise," observes a correspondent on duty here since Truman's time.

Nor does anyone fault Ziegler for falling into many of the duties once exercised by his mentor, H.R. (Bob) Haldeman. After all, Hagerly's power and responsibility broadened considerably when Eisenhower was disabled. Nor is Ziegler's utter devotion to Nixon questioned either. That's his business.

No, when newsmen express disgust with Ziegler, it comes down to their belief that Ziegler views the press as an entity existing solely to promote and publicize the President. "He lives with an illusion held in his younger days," explains one old pro, "that the press is really an outlet for public relations schemes and designs."

Ziegler's sensitivity over what the press thinks of him was reflected in a rather gutsy way during the most violent hours of the Nixon administration's experience with the Vietnam war. An article in the Wall Street Journal, early in 1970, snidely dismissed Ziegler as the kind of fellow who would never be invited to deliver a commencement address. Then, by happenstance, Ziegler was invited by Muskingum College

(enrollment 300), New Concord, Ohio, to be their commencement speaker on May 31, 1970. He swelled. That would show the smart-ass WSJ. Naturally, he accepted with pleasure.

But, there were the Cambodian invasion, campus protests, and rioting, and on May 4, the shooting of the students at Kent State University, only 100 miles from Muskingum.

Muskingum offered to let Ziegler find an excuse to cancel out. But Ziegler said no, he'd rather tough it out.

In his speech, Ziegler stressed that President Nixon really wanted to communicate with students and other protestors when he made that remarkable pre-dawn visit to the Lincoln Memorial. The good applause and reception Ziegler got at Muskingum, where he had been warned the contrary was to be expected, was, he feels, one of the best things that's happened to him as press secretary.

Ziegler handled that one rather coolly. Out of range, and around the hired help, Ziegler has a short fuse.

While admiring him to the point of worship, his girl Friday, Diane Sawyer, testifies: "Ron has a temper as volatile as gasoline and fire, but he doesn't punish you for your mistakes. He goes immediately to the next thing we're doing, and you know where you stand. It is not an unreasonable temper. Ron is such a perfectionist himself. When he flares up, it is a sign of commitment, not temperament."

Leonard Garment, who has felt some heat himself, sympathizes with Ziegler. "There's a lot of self-sacrifice in that job," Garment told me. "Ron is hated because he is an extension of the President in a town which is full of animosity for Nixon. Nixon is hated more for his triumphs than his trespasses. Watergate is only an excuse for release of the suppressed feelings for Nixon."

Boiled down, the foregoing means if correspondents don't like Ziegler's work, what they really don't like is President Nixon's concept of what a press secretary should be.

In defense of Ziegler, it can be said that if he deceived the press on Watergate those many months, it was very likely because he too had been deceived. Perhaps the greatest deceiver of all was John Dean, whom Ziegler, the

press secretary and others claim they relied on for the straight scoop on Watergate. But for the last nuance on this aspect, should not a press secretary, even the most devoted one, be able to whiff an odor of stench, of falsehood? This is where Ziegler's lack of training as a newsman served him poorly.

George Christian, who worked for President Johnson in the toughest part of his term, won't criticize Ziegler or any other press secretary. But, he'll say: "A press secretary has to try to help a President get a better view of what the press wants and what it is entitled to. I did the best I could to convince President Johnson that certain members were not his sworn enemies. It is not in the President's interest to allow barriers to exist between the President and the press. Hands off is a bad policy."

Yet, Ziegler denies he bore anyone in the press any ill-will, and expresses hurt that people feel that way. He betrays small signs of wishing that he could be considered in the press himself, and is pained to learn that so many consider him solely an advertising man. Once, Ziegler aspired to an upper-level position in journalism, after the Nixon years. He makes \$42,500 a year now, and the old saw has it a former press secretary is always good for \$100,000 a year. Whether the media will pay Ziegler that now is a good topic for the lounge lizards to chew on. All Ziegler would tell me is, "I would like to have a future in journalism. I would kind of like to do some writing."

But that's the future, and for now Ziegler says emphatically, "I am going to stay until 1977. I will have a sense of satisfaction then. Do you know where I will be Jan. 20, 1977? I will be standing on the inaugural stand with the President of the United States, as the new President takes his oath of office. I will look out over those stands and see all of the people. And I will know that I have seen a man under vicious attack show the courage and strength to last it out. President Nixon is a conservative-moderate President, elected to fix things in this country. Elected twice against great pressures, he dealt with foreign policy and Vietnam, and then sustained himself in 1973. He will go out with dignity." ■