



UPI Telephoto

President Ford waited with aides, including (third from left) White House chief of staff Alexander Haig, for the first telephone comments on his action

Secret Maneuvers Behind the Decision

SFChronicle

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Ten days of intense secret negotiations and maneuvering preceded President Ford's granting of a full pardon yesterday to former President Richard Nixon for his role in the Watergate scandal.

Mr. Ford enlisted a criminal lawyer, described by friends as looking like "a TV sleuth . . . a very tough cop," to handle the face-to-face meetings with Mr. Nixon.

And he called upon another long-time lawyer friend, white-haired, soft-spoken Philip Buchen, to coordinate preparations for his bombshell announcement.

According to reconstruction based on comments of official and unofficial sources, Mr. Ford made a tentative decision the middle of last week to grant the pardon, but did not reach a

final decision until Saturday.

The reconstruction disclosed this chronology of events:

On Friday, August 30, Mr. Ford called Buchen, his White House counsel, to a private meeting and told him to research historic and legal precedents for the granting of a presidential pardon to an individual before his indictment or conviction.

Buchen worked into the night, and then throughout the Labor Day weekend on the assignment while Mr. Ford took his family for the first time to Camp David presidential retreat in the Maryland mountains.

After receiving Buchen's report of the legal and constitutional requirements for such an act, Mr. Ford called upon another friend, Washington lawyer Benton Becker. He asked Becker

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to go to San Clemente to inform Mr. Nixon that "in all probability a pardon would be granted in the near future," according to Buchen.

Becker also was asked to complete negotiations for an agreement insuring access to Mr. Nixon's White House files during the next three years for possible use in Watergate prosecution.

Becker left Washington late Thursday for Los Angeles. ^{5 SEP}

He met in San Clemente with Mr. Nixon's lawyer, Herbert Miller, and the former President's closest personal aide, Ronald Ziegler.

He also met, at least briefly, with Mr. Nixon.

The ^{6 SEP} agreement on the White House papers was signed by Mr. Nixon late Friday, and Becker returned to Washington while Mr. Nixon prepared a statement to be issued after Mr. Ford signed the pardon.

(The Los Angeles Times quoted Buchen today as saying the Nixon statement "went through quite a few changes" after Becker's return to Washington.

(Buchen said the basic paragraphs in the statement which the White House was most concerned about — in which the former President admitted he should have acted more decisively and forthrightly and in which he admitted wrongdoing — remained intact through the rewriting and editing process.

(Buchen said he argued that "the country needs a statement of contrition. He (Miller) agreed with me.

("We couldn't control the statement, but we tried to use some influence on it," Buchen told the Los Angeles

White House officials insisted that Mr. Ford's action was not conditioned on Mr. Nixon signing the agreement concerning his White House files or issuing a statement of contrition. But one official conceded that Mr. Ford knew "in a general way" what Mr. Nixon would say after the pardon was signed.

Strictest secrecy was applied to preparations for announcement of Mr. Ford's decision. The President led an outwardly normal schedule in the hours leading up to the disclosure.

He was up early yesterday. Shortly before 8 o'clock he went across Lafayette Park to gold-spired St. John's Episcopal Church, where he joined 50 other worshipers in kneeling to pray and receive Communion.

Outside the church, news-



AP Wirephoto

BENTON BECKER
Emissary to Nixon

men noticed that the usually smiling Mr. Ford seemed preoccupied and somber. A reporter asked if he would play golf again yesterday, or if he had other plans.

"You'll find out shortly," the President responded before stepping into his limousine for the quick ride back to the White House.

It was just moments later that reporters were told Mr. Ford would make "a major announcement" in his Oval Office at 10:30 a.m. But White House officials refused to disclose the nature of the announcement.

A single television film camera was set in place before Mr. Ford's Oval Office desk, which was covered with a brown felt cloth.

The small group of reporters was ushered into the office at about 11 o'clock. There they found several of Mr. Ford's closest aides, including Buchen and press secretary Jerald F. terHorst.

At ^{8:04 PDT} 11:04 a.m., Mr. Ford walked into the office through a side door. He went immediately to the desk, sat down, opened a manila folder, looked toward the television crew and asked, "Are you all set?"

When they nodded yes, he began to read slowly the statement disclosing the action he was about to take.

For ten minutes he talked, looking into the camera unsmilingly.

Then, he paused, picked up a blue and silver felt-tip pen, and quickly signed his name to the pardon proclamation.

His statement had one more paragraph, and Mr. Ford's voice seemed to thicken with emotion as he read it: "In witness whereof, I have hereunto set my hand this eighth day of September in the year of our Lord 1974, and of the independence of the United States of America the 199th."

Still unsmiling, he rose from the desk and walked from the office.