

Jerald F. terHorst's abrupt departure from the Ford Administration is a refreshing throwback to a simpler time in American political life. First of the President's appointees, Mr. terHorst chose to give up a new and heady job as White House press secretary rather than to temporize with his principles.

Apparently, Mr. terHorst had two problems with Mr. Ford's decision to pardon former President Nixon. First, though respecting the President's right to follow his own conscience, he disagreed with the decision on its merits, believing that it would destroy the symmetry of the American system of justice.

Second, he believed that the President had undercut his efforts to establish a new relationship between the White House and the press by keeping his press secretary in the dark until the eleventh hour. In that respect, Mr. terHorst's reaction was light years ahead of the craven manipulation and misinformation of newsmen that marked Ron Ziegler's tenure in the job.

The decision was all the more remarkable because Mr. terHorst might easily have rationalized his way through this problem—a familiar Washington practice at all levels of Government through the doleful years of Vietnam and Watergate. He was new in the job, recently risen from the ranks of the Washington press corps and enjoying something of a honeymoon of his own. Since he could surely have used this reservoir of goodwill to ride out the storm, his professional reputation was only marginally at stake. Nevertheless, he chose to leave.

By his action, Mr. terHorst not only provided a reminder that an official's conscience is more important than a visible government job; he also did a great deal to restore an atmosphere of professionalism and mutual respect to the White House press room.