

HAIG TAKES OVER AS HEAD OF NATO

Ford Ad

He Defends His Experience and Asks to Be Judged On His Performance

By DREW MIDDLETON
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CASTEAU, Belgium, Dec. 15 — Gen. Alexander M. Haig Jr. took over today as the supreme commander of North Atlantic Treaty Organization forces in Europe.

At a brief and simple ceremony here at Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, he replaced Gen. Andrew J. Goodpaster.

Earlier, at a news conference, General Haig asked "to be judged on my performance, and not how I got here"—a reference to his service as the White House Chief of Staff under former President Richard M. Nixon, and the Watergate scandals that clouded the Nixon Administration.

General Haig defended the adequacy of his combat experience, saying that when he was in the White House he was responding to political authority. He expressed doubt that he would be called back to Washington to answer further ques-

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tions about Watergate. General Haig is the seventh American officer to hold the supreme command and the first to lack military experience from World War II. He took command before an audience of generals and admirals whose chests were bright with the medal ribbons of that war.

General Haig said in a short speech that he was taking over at "a time of great danger and great challenge." The challenges, senior NATO officials said, come as much from the pressures of inflation and recession on NATO defense budgets as they do from what the new commander called "the more sophisticated" Soviet military position in Eastern Europe.

The general retired from the army in June, 1973, when appointed chief of the White House staff. He was recalled to active duty by President Ford and appointed to the two most prestigious foreign posts an American officer can hold, Supreme Allied Commander Europe and Commander in Chief American Forces Europe. General Haig's lateral mobility from politics to high command occasioned some bitter criticism in the American Army and his comparative inexperience raised doubts among NATO officers.

Both General Goodpaster and General Haig were anxious to combat the impression that the latter's appointment had irritated General Goodpaster, who was absent from the ceremony in Stuttgart, West Germany, on Nov. 1 when General Haig took over as Commander in Chief, United States Forces Europe. They walked off the stage of the SHAPE theater with hands clasped while a Belgian police

band played the Ode to Joy theme from Beethoven's Ninth Symphony.

General Goodpaster explained to newsmen that he had been convelescing after a minor operation and had been advised to rest rather than attend the change-of-command ceremony.

War Duty Noted

General Haig told newsmen that he was "very conscious" of criticism that he lacked experience for what General Goodpaster called "the highest post of command in the free world." However, General Haig noted that he had been in two wars, in Korea and Vietnam, had commanded a battalion and a brigade and had had responsibility in Vietnam for divisional and corps operations.

His performance in his new post, he suggested, "should be left to the test of time."

"I'm not the least bit self-conscious" about experience, General Haig said. "I've seen much battle and I've been shot at."

He also rejected the suggestion that his appointment was due to political pressure from the White House and consequently that he was unsuited to the job.

The general said mildly that he had performed responsible planning tasks over the last five years while at the White House, during the windup of the Vietnam war and during the first phase of that war.

"A man's lifetime experiences are a determining factor in his progress," the general suggested, but he would not speculate on "how far my luck and political pressure" applied to his selection to head NATO. Napoleon, wobservers recalled,

invariably asked other generals, "Is he lucky?"

Eisenhower's Service Cited

General Haig said of his White House service that he was a soldier with a lifetime of military service and as such had responded when he received orders "from political authorities as a military man."

Such deference to higher political authority, General Haig noted, was usual; General Eisenhower and Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor, a former Chief of Staff, had followed similar paths.

The concentration on General Haig's past tended to obscure General Goodpaster's discolure that he "anticipated" a change in the number and total yield of American tactical and nuclear weapons in Europe. NATO has made great progress, he said, and he would welcome a review of the situation covering the 7,000 American tactical nuclear weapons in Western Europe.

The retiring Supreme Commander, however, rejected suggestions by American civilian experts, notably in a report by the Brookings Institutinn this autumn, that the United States Army, now nearing its old strength of five divisions, should move northward to be in a position to meet a Soviet thrust across the north German plains.

Special President Decision