

wx Post

FBI Guards Files Of Resigned Aides

By Carroll Kilpatrick
Washington Post Staff Writer

FBI agents moved into the White House on a 24-hour basis yesterday to safeguard files in the offices of three presidential aides whose resignations President Nixon accepted Monday.

Later, at a Cabinet meeting, the President reportedly spoke with irritation about the way the agents were standing around in the corridors in full view of visitors.

At a news conference prior to the Cabinet meeting, press secretary Ronald L. Ziegler said that the FBI men were put into the offices of former aides John D. Ehrlichman, H. R. Haldeman and John W. Dean III "to physically protect the files to make sure that access and removal of any files were supervised in accordance with very strict procedure."

Ehrlichman and Haldeman, who are still in their offices but are not conducting official business, "wanted this to take place" and are "fully cooperating," Ziegler said.

Dean, whom the President fired, was not in his office, and Ziegler said he knew of no letter of resignation from Dean.

In other developments in the wake of Mr. Nixon's Monday night television report to the nation on Watergate:

- The President followed the hastily-called Cabinet meeting with an hour-long meeting with Vice President Agnew, described as an "important" conference. The White House will make an announcement about the meeting today, official sources said, suggesting that the Vice President will be given a major new assignment.

- Ziegler apologized to The Washington Post for charging last fall that its Watergate stories were based on "hearsay, character assassination, and innuendo."

- Mr. Nixon hinted strongly at new action to curb inflation. He promised

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PRESIDENT, From A1

a statement today on the

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economy after he holds a morning meeting with his chief economic advisers and an afternoon meeting with the Labor-Management Advisory Committee.

- Editorial reaction from the nation's press to the President's speech on Watergate generally applauded what was described as his limited action to restore public confidence but said he failed to remove all suspicions. Ziegler reported many favorable telephone responses to the address.

- Mr. Nixon began and ended his long day with meetings with West German Chancellor Willy Brandt. They conferred in the Oval Office in the morning and at a dinner the President and Mrs. Nixon gave for their guest last night.

- But Mr. Nixon's chief attention was centered on Watergate even though he said in his Monday address that he would "now turn my full attention once again to the larger duties of this office."

- At the Cabinet meeting, Mr. Nixon told his colleagues that Haldeman's aides would continue to perform administration chores at the White House and that Kenneth R. Cole Jr., head of the Domestic Council, would be the proper person to discuss domestic issues with instead of Ehrlichman.

- Apparently bristling over the fact that FBI guards were in the White House corridors and thus suggesting that Ehrlichman and Haldeman could not be trusted, the President reportedly ordered the agents inside the offices they were protecting.

- Similarly, the President referred "rather bitingly," one source said, to what he called the "political play" by Sen. Charles H. Percy (R-Ill.) in demanding the appointment of a special prosecutor to conduct the Watergate investigation.

- Percy should not be making that decision either for the President or for Attorney General-designate Elliot L. Richardson, Mr. Nixon observed. He noted that he had given Richardson full authority to appoint such an investigator if he should deem it advisable.

Despite the talk about Watergate, the President "was not looking backward, but forward," one person present reported.

At Ziegler's briefing, Baltimore Sun correspondent Adam Clymer asked whether, in view of the President's praise in his speech of "a vigorous free press," he was ready to apologize to The Washington Post for a number of attacks he made on it in the course of the developing Watergate story.

"We would all have to say that mistakes were made in terms of comments," Ziegler replied. "I was overly enthusiastic in my comments about The Post, particularly if you look at them in the context of developments that have taken place."

Describing his criticisms as an "overstatement," Ziegler said: "I would apologize to The Post and to Mr. Woodward and Mr. Bernstein." Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward are The Post reporters who did the bulk of the paper's investigative work on the Watergate case.

They have "pursued the story" and "deserve credit" for their work, Ziegler said. "When we are wrong, we are wrong, as we were in that case," the press secretary said.

He emphasized that he did not necessarily agree with all that Bernstein and Woodward wrote and was not prejudging the individuals mentioned in The Post stories.

Katharine Graham, publisher of The Washington Post, said she accepted the apology "with pleasure."

"The administration was trying to undermine the credibility of the press for the last 10 months," she said in New York. "It is a very great satisfaction to find that the press's credibility has been proven to the whole world and I hope that this will be remembered."

"We could never, never have reported the Watergate without the use of anonymous sources and yet the courts, the grand juries, and the government are subpoenaing such sources."

In another development, former Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird told reporters in a meeting here that Mr. Nixon never asked him to become involved in the Watergate investigation "in any way." Friends in the Cabinet and in Congress did approach him, he said, but they were not speaking for the President.

Laird said he had told Mr. Nixon some time ago that he would not be available for any full-time assignment before July 1. "I have a commitment to him to talk to him before I take on any other full-time job," Laird said.

In an interview with CBS, Haldeman said he was convinced that when the truth is known "I will be seen as totally clear of any of the implications or allegations that have been made."

Discussing the decision to place FBI agents on guard in the Ehrlichman-Haldeman-Dean offices, Ziegler said the order by Acting FBI Director William D. Ruckelshaus was made after a conference between Attorney General-designate Richardson and Leonard Garment, acting counsel to the President.

"This procedure is not to cast any aspersions but to make sure that a strict procedure is followed in relation to the security of White House papers," Ziegler commented.

The Associated Press reported that Haldeman and Ehrlichman had culled through their files to document their claim of innocence.

The two former aides were seen leaving the White House together in a car with what appeared to be papers on their laps. A spokesman said any papers removed would have been with the approval on the FBI agents.



By Joe Heiberger—The Washington Post
Press secretary Ziegler: FBI men were put at offices
of former aides "to physically protect the files."