

Ziegler May Emerge Unscathed

WASHINGTON (UPI) — He is handsome and dark-haired, typical of the clean-cut young men President Nixon brought into government in 1968. Unlike many of the others, he probably will emerge from the Watergate scandal relatively unscathed.

Last month, Nixon praised him publicly at the White House Correspondents Association dinner, saying, "He has the most difficult job in the country. He must serve two masters. He's been loyal to the President and loyal to the press."

Many veteran reporters

grumbled that his loyalty to the former has been much more evident than his loyalty to the latter, but almost all who deal with him agree that he is personable and likeable.

He is Ronald L. Ziegler, buffer between the President and the media. His job, always difficult and demanding, has been even more so since the Watergate break-in and bugging.

Ziegler for 10 months had denied White House involvement in Watergate, calling news reports and media revelations "shabby" journalism. He recently recanted, dismissing his previous comments as "inoperative," and apologizing publicly to the

Washington Post for blasting the paper's attempts to investigate Watergate.

Information

Nixon absolved Ziegler in those denials of White House involvement in Watergate in a recent televised address. The President said: "The comments I made during this period, and the comments made by my press secretary on my behalf, were based on the information provided to us at the time we made those comments."

Ziegler, who celebrated his 34th birthday last week, apparently has survived the turmoil in the White House that led to the ousting of H.R. Haldeman, chief of staff; and John Ehrlichman, senior domestic adviser.

Although he was brought in as "Haldeman's man," Ziegler always has denied that his statements at press briefings were inspired at staff policy meetings Haldeman conducted each morning.

Instead, he has always told reporters that he gets

his cues from the President, and has an open door into the oval office.

The relationship between the President and Ziegler has been like a father and son. Nixon is fond of his chief spokesman's low-key style, and Ziegler appears in total awe of the President, viewing his own role one-dimensionally as the voice of the White House.

Father and Son

But his Watergate statements have come home to haunt him. On June 19, 1972, two days after members of the Committee to Re-elect the President were caught breaking into Democratic headquarters, Ziegler said:

"I'm not going to comment on a group of guys who put on surgical gloves and tried to go in and bug a place."

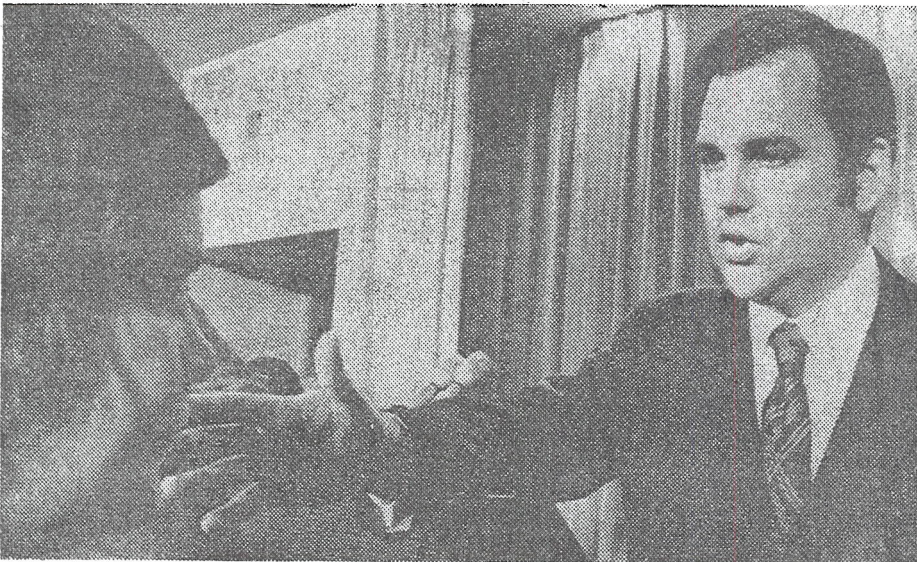
No Involvement

Then, on Oct. 16, he said, "I will not dignify with comment stories based on hearsay, character assassination, innuendo, guilt by association," in reference to Washington Post disclosures.

Two days later, Ziegler said: "No one here at the White House ever directed such activities because if they had, they would no longer be at the White House because it is activity we do not condone. We have made it absolutely clear that there was no involvement in any way in the Watergate case. The investigations have shown that."

It was April 17, that Ziegler declared his earlier comments and denials "inoperative." When Ziegler apologized to the Post, he said, "Mistakes were made during this period. I was over-enthusiastic. When we're wrong, we're wrong."

Reporters have observed a new humility as he grapples with as many as 80 questions at a briefing. His performance is remarkably calm and cool, qualities the President admires most in a man under fire.



Ron Ziegler fields questions at press briefing