

Ziegler Attended Segretti Meeting

Washington

White House press secretary Ronald L. Ziegler attended a meeting with other top presidential assistants last October at which the aides discussed a proposed response by Donald H. Segretti to newspaper reports that linked Segretti to a widespread campaign of espionage and sabotage conducted in behalf of President Nixon's re-election.

Ziegler's attendance at the meeting is mentioned briefly in a sworn statement by Fred F. Fielding, who was the top assistant to former White House Counsel John W. Dean III. It was the first time Ziegler was mentioned in connection with sessions

at which presidential aides discussed response to newspaper account of White House involvement in the Watergate affair.

Ziegler said Saturday that he recalls attending such a meeting.

"But I attended no meeting that was a strategy session," he said. "The meetings I attended were to ascertain the facts, and the facts in this case, at that time suggested there was no illegality or wrongdoing (by Segretti)."

The Fielding deposition, in which Ziegler is mentioned only once in connection with attending the meeting, makes no suggestion that the press secretary was involved in political espionage activities.

However, it is unusual for the White House to consider assisting a private citizen who didn't work for the government in preparing a public statement about news stories. Segretti is a California lawyer who did not work for the government.

Last October — around the time Ziegler attended the meeting mentioned in Fielding's statement — administration spokesmen apparently changed to a strategy of attacking the press for its coverage of the Watergate affair rather than largely ignoring charges of White House involvement.

Ziegler was in the forefront of those making attacks on the press.

Fielding's statement was contained in a deposition taken last week as pretrial testimony in civil suits growing out of the Watergate affair.

The deposition illustrated that Segretti was in touch with high level White House aides almost immediately after his name surfaced in newspaper reports.

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