

New Ziegler Job; More Authority or Less?

By JOHN HERBERS

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WASHINGTON, June 13—A former White House aide, asked a few weeks ago whether President Nixon might replace Ronald L. Ziegler as press secretary because of the Watergate scandals, said, "The President doesn't need a new Victrola. All he has to do is change the record."

The record—the White House line on Watergate—has been changed several times since then, and it now appears that the President is, after all, in the process of installing a new Victrola.

Not that Mr. Ziegler is in danger of being dismissed. President Nixon announced on June 6 that Mr. Ziegler would assume responsibility for over-all White House communications, continue as press secretary and serve also as assistant to the President.

However, the crucial job of press secretary—the daily communication or noncommunication of the President's views and policy to the news media—has been falling increasingly on Gerald L. Warren, the deputy press secretary. In several months, according to White House Staff members, Mr. Ziegler is expected to give to Mr. Warren both the duty of the press briefings and the title of secretary.

Others close to Mr. Ziegler said that he had hoped to keep the title of press secretary, continue to conduct briefings on important events, turn over the briefings to Mr. Warren on a day-to-day basis and have General Alexander M. Haig Jr., Melvin R. Laird, the new Presidential counselor for domestic affairs, and others submit to questioning by the news media.

Tasks Are Outlined

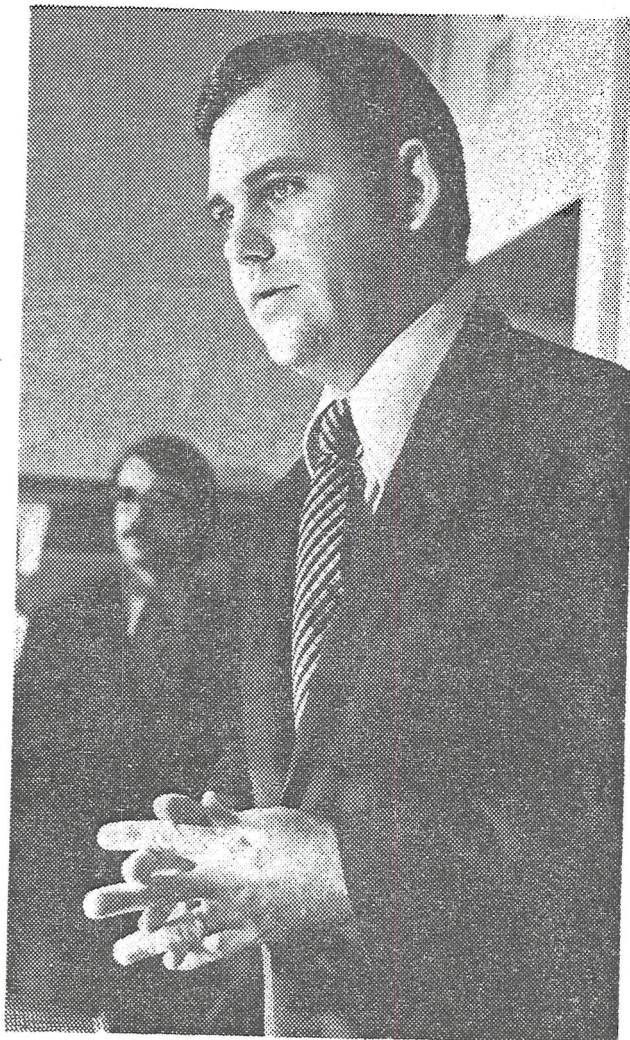
However, the plan for Mr. Ziegler to oversee both the communications office, which does largely promotional work for the White House and was formerly headed by Herbert G. Klein, and the press secretary's office, which is closer to the President and to the day-to-day operation of the White House.

As assistant to the President, Mr. Ziegler is assuming some of the functions formerly performed by H. R. Haldeman, the chief of staff who resigned April 30 as a result of the Watergate case. These include scheduling the President's public appearances and carrying out various errands for the President.

However, General Haig, the new chief of staff, has taken over most of the functions performed by Mr. Haldeman, who had extraordinary authority.

Although Mr. Ziegler's new role has been billed as a promotion, there is disagreement on whether he will have more authority or wind up with less, as have others who have been promoted closer to the president, such as Robert H. Finch, former Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare.

Whatever the titles, the



Ronald L. Ziegler at a news conference on April 30

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spokesman who confronts the media daily and thus is in regular contact with a wide range of Administration officials has in every recent Administration taken on heavy responsibilities. Mr. Klein, who recently resigned to work for Metromedia, Inc., had an important title as Director of Communications but wound up playing a secondary role to Mr. Ziegler.

Mr. Ziegler's supporters say that the move was planned all along and would have occurred even if there had been no Watergate. He has served as the President's spokesman for more than four years and has grown weary of the task, they say.

Criticism Is Bitter

However, the press criticism of Mr. Ziegler had become so bitter because of misleading statements that he had made on the Watergate case that many people considered it judicious that he play another role. The President's motives in transferring him were reported to have stemmed more from a feeling of mercy for Mr. Ziegler than from a desire to placate the press.

A 16-member professional relations committee of the National Press Club, an institution known for its conservatism, issued a report yesterday charging the Nixon Administration with "An unprecedented Government-wide effort to control, restrict and conceal information to which the public is entitled."

"Ronald Ziegler as White House press secretary, particularly during the Water-

gate disclosure of the past year, has misled the public and affronted the professional standards of the Washington press corps," the report said.

Mr. Ziegler had no comment on the report.

The committee, headed by James McCartney, a reporter for the Knight newspapers, based its report on a study of the Nixon Administration's practices made by the department of Communications of American University.

"The White House press secretary," the report said, "has been reduced to a totally programmed spokesman without independent authority or comprehensive background knowledge of Administration policies. Rather than opening a window into the White House, the press secretary closes doors. Information about public business is supplied on a selective, self-serving basis. Legitimate questions about public affairs are not answered on a day-to-day basis; even worse, such questions are often not seriously considered."

Briefing Is Recalled

The extent of tension between reporters and Mr. Ziegler was indicated at a briefing Monday that went on at length about a statement Mr. Ziegler made March 26—that the President had personally telephoned John W. Dean 3d, then White House counsel, and received assurances that Mr. Dean had no prior knowledge of the Watergate break-in.

Last weekend, Newsweek

quoted Mr. Dean as saying that he had received no call from the President. At the Monday briefing, Ziegler explained that he had got the "wrong impression" at a meeting with Mr. Nixon and Mr. Haldeman. He said that it was Mr. Haldeman, not the President, who had called Mr. Dean and received his assurances of innocence.

Following is a sample of the dialogue from the official transcript:

Q. Ron, could you ask the people in the White House, when you relay a misleading impression of things they have told you if they would let you know about it in something less than two months?

A. You know the reality is that, first of all, in 1800 briefings that hasn't happened that often. Secondly—

Q. How do we know? (laughter)

A. Well, at least I know. You can be skeptical, and I recognize that. . . .

Q. Ron, do you want us to assume that with your new title and added duties and added policy scope and all that, that you will speak with more reliable impressions of what the President actually says and does?

A. I have strived over the last 4½ years to do that and will continue to do that.

Has Supporters, Too

Yet the 34-year-old official is not without his supporters. Editorials and columns in his behalf have begun appearing around the country.

They suggest that it was out of innocence and devotion to the President that Mr. Ziegler did not display that quality that Rober J. McCloskey, former State Department spokesman, said was essential to the job—"the discrimination to detect even from a distance the barest scent of the false."

When President Nixon arrived in Orlando last Friday to deliver a speech, The Sentinel-Star said in an editorial: "This clean-cut young man—whose handsome, deceptive, boyish visage hides a keen mind—is respected by all but a few peevish newspapermen who, fortunately, failed in a try to drive him over Watergate."

Since the Watergate disclosures, the press office has made some concessions to the media in what Mr. Ziegler calls "further openness." Tonight, for example, the text of President Nixon's television talk was made available more than an hour before delivery. Usually, there have been no advance texts.

Mr. Warren, as briefing officer, seems to arouse fewer suspicions. He is a former newspaperman from San Diego. It is frequently said of him that his sentences hang and he understands the role of the media. His biggest problem has been lack of access to those in authority. He says that that is being changed with his new role. Meanwhile, the fact that he had little access at the time of the Watergate misdeeds only helps his credibility.

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