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The Men Around Gerald

By David S. Broder
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Washington

THE STAFF that Gerald R. Ford assembled as the Vice President is a faithful reflection of the man himself. It is predominantly middle-aged, midwestern, conservative in its politics and savvy in the ways of Capitol Hill. It is even less flashy in its collective personality than the man it serves.

The Ford staff is also, in the view of some of his Capitol Hill friends, seriously underequipped in the range of expertise, viewpoints and ideas needed by a man who was a heart-beat — or a resignation — away from the White House.

There is no evidence that Ford himself — who recently cautioned his 64 office employees not to air their differences with outsiders — is either dissatisfied with their work or concerned about the rumored feuds that always attach themselves to any large political organization.

On the contrary, Ford has surrounded himself chiefly with men and women he has known well for years, and has gone out of his way to convey the desire that they behave as they always have — and not take on the airs of a White House staff-in-waiting.

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FORD'S CHIEF of staff is Robert Hartmann, a burly ex-newspaperman.

Hartmann, first in rank among the five members of the "action group" formed recently in an effort to get better coordination of staff functions, is a 57-year-old former Washington Bureau Chief of the Los Angeles Times. Like several others in the Vice President's inner circle, he began working for Ford in 1965 when Ford took over as House minority leader.

The others who attend the weekly "action group" meetings with Ford are:

- John O. Marsh, 47, a former four-term conservative Democratic congressman from Virginia, who



Michael Mathias Proehl

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moved to Ford's staff after a year as the Pentagon's top lobbyist.

- Richard T. Burrell, 52, a veteran of Republican congressional staffs who worked on White House congressional liaison in the first Nixon administration.

- Walter L. Mote, 50, a Senate staff member for almost 30 years who ran Agnew's Capitol Hill office and is the only principal alumnus of the Agnew operation retained by Ford.

- L. William Seidman, 53, millionaire businessman from Ford's home town of Grand Rapids, who is the only newcomer to the group and the only one whose natural orientation is elsewhere than Capitol Hill.

THROUGH Philip Buchen, Ford's former Grand Rapids law partner, who is regarded by many as his closest personal adviser (Buchen is executive director of the Domestic Council committee on the right of privacy, chaired by Ford at Mr. Nixon's request), he recruited Seidman, an egg-bald businessman who had supervised the growth of his family accounting firm into one of the giants of the industry; then branched out into television, broadcasting and other enterprises.

While Seidman is a fellow resident of Grand Rapids, he had never been part of Ford's inner circle. His own past political identification was primarily with George Romney—as a losing member of the Romney ticket

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for auditor general in 1962, as an adviser on state governmental organization and as a troubleshooter in Romney's abortive effort to wrest the 1968 presidential nomination from Richard Nixon.

A graduate of Dartmouth and Harvard Law School, an amateur polo player and maker of mobiles, Seidman shares few of the characteristics of the others on the Ford top team, whose tastes run to golf, musicals and backyard pool parties.

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NONETHELESS, what began as a 30-day temporary assignment to "look over the operation" has become a permanent post as the architect and to some extent the executor of the staff reorganization that has been taking place.

Seidman himself is at pains to identify Hartmann as "the top man" in Ford's operation. Rumors of bad blood between the two men have reached print but both of them deny it.

Others on the Ford staff blame the rumors on those same White House aides who periodically leaked stories that Mr. Nixon was unhappy with Ford's effort to establish an independent political identity for himself.

"His use of staff is characteristic of a member of Congress," says Marsh, who served eight years in the House himself. "Each of them wants to establish a personal relationship with every one of his constituents. Obviously, you don't change that habit overnight.

"But more and more, as the staff learns its functions, you're seeing a delegation of responsibilities," Marsh adds. "Ford is a good manager. You never want to give him a piece of paper thinking he won't read it. He'll read it, all right.

"He's a prodigious worker. He comes in here at 7:30 a.m. and works straight through, between appointments, on the plane, in the limousine," Marsh says. "If he leaves the office at 2 p.m. to go to Chicago for a speech and gets back at 10 p.m., we'll send the afternoon accumulation of memos and work out to the airport in the limousine that picks him up, and

he'll have been through it by the time he comes in the next morning. He knows what's going on in this office."

Accessible as Ford makes himself, he still apparently worries that the staff may begin to isolate him from his normal contacts. In a recent memo, he told his aides "fairly bluntly," according to one, "that he didn't want them enlarging themselves just because his office had changed."

That warning reinforces the lessons those staff members say they have learned on their own from what happened inside the White House during the first Nixon term.

Hartmann says, for example, that "I am the chief of staff for a guy who has been his own chief of staff and always will be. He wants to know what's going on and he doesn't want to delegate any important part of his business. My job is not to keep people out, but to get people in, in an orderly fashion. The last thing I want to do is to be another Berlin wall," referring to the barrier erected around Mr. Nixon by ex-aides H.R. (Bob) Halde- man and John D. Ehrlichman.

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WHETHER THERE is enough capacity on Ford's staff to give him a systematic and independent analysis of the issues on which he is speaking and acting is a matter of debate.

Richard Reeves, in a recent New York magazine article on Ford, said he has "a personal staff that can most charitably be described as being in over their collective heads."

Ford, who worked comfortably with both progressive and conservative Republicans in the House, has built some philosophical diversity into his staff.

But the weight of the senior staff is clearly on the conservative side — both in politics and personal style.

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HARTMANN calls himself "an Eisenhower Republican," and says, "I don't think I'm as conservative as people think." But his 25-year career on The Los Angeles Times ended shortly after the paper abandoned its hard shell conservatism, and Republican aides who worked with him on Capitol Hill describe him as both "partisan" and "hard right."

A former House colleague of Ford's said before the events of last week the staff problem "is not critical as long as Ford remains vice president. It becomes serious," he said, "only because he's in a position where he might have to become President on short notice."