

Ford Was Told Nixon Would Never Admit Guilt

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'An Act of Mercy'

By Lou Cannon

Washington Post Staff Writer

President Ford granted Richard M. Nixon a full pardon even though he was informed that the former President would never enter a guilty plea or acknowledge criminal conduct in the Watergate case, White House counsel Philip W. Buchen said yesterday.

At a White House briefing that left many questions unanswered, Buchen said Mr. Nixon's acceptance of the pardon was tantamount to an acknowledgment of guilt.

"The fact that someone accepts a pardon . . . means that it was necessary for him to have the pardon . . ." Buchen said.

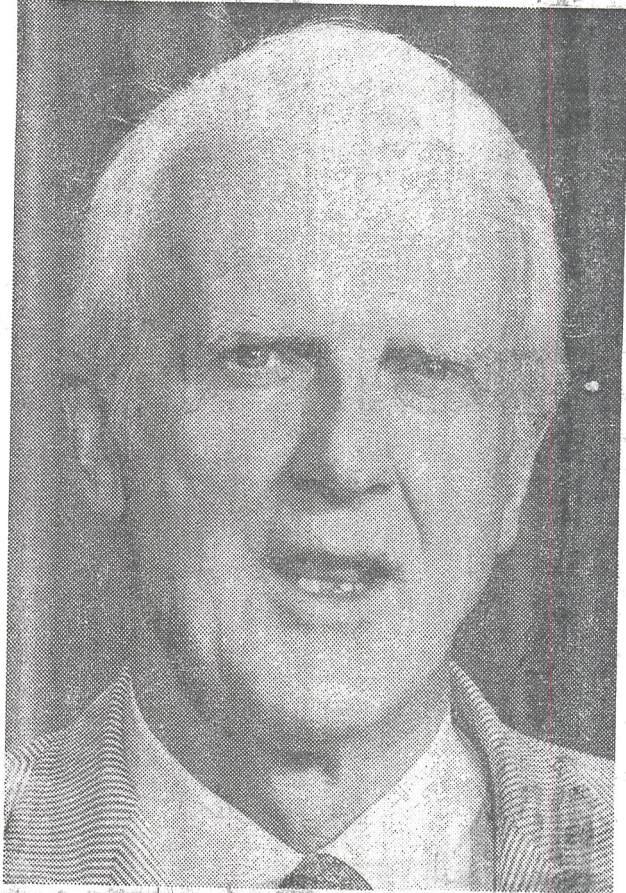
Asked whether Mr. Nixon's acceptance of a pardon implied an admission of guilt, Buchen replied:

"You can so read it."

He also cited the unanimous vote of the House Judiciary Committee on the first article of impeachment as indication of Mr. Nixon's involvement in the Watergate cover-up, and the transcript of the June 23, 1972, White House tape, which shows Mr. Nixon approving the cover-up six days after the Watergate burglary.

Despite this evidence, Buchen said, he had been informed by Herbert J. Miller Jr., Mr. Nixon's Washington attorney, that the former President "would never enter a plea of guilty."

Buchen would give no explanation of why Mr. Ford did not think such a plea—



Associated Press

Buchen: Nixon statement would be "very beneficial."

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or a statement acknowledging guilt—a pre-requisite for a pardon except to say that the pardon was "an act of mercy" which did not require a specific admission of wrongdoing.

The decision to grant a pardon was reached without knowing what Mr. Nixon planned to do, Buchen said.

But the White House lawyer, a long-time personal friend of Mr. Ford, said he had informed Miller at the time he told him of the pardon that a statement from Mr. Nixon would be "very beneficial."

Buchen insisted, contrary to some published reports, that Washington attorney Benton Becker did not take a copy of a suggested statement with him to San Cle-

mente, Calif., last Thursday when he took a proposed pardon to Mr. Nixon.

Buchen said that a published report that Mr. Nixon had been asked to make what he regarded as "a public confession of criminal guilt" and had "angrily refused" was without foundation.

However, another White House source said that there

had been a refusal—but by former White House press secretary Ronald L. Ziegler.

This source said that Ziegler had told Becker, and forcefully, that Mr. Nixon would not acknowledge any criminal wrongdoing.

Neither Becker nor Ziegler responded to efforts to reach them.

Buchen released a memo

of the Watergate Special Prosecution Force that listed 10 areas that could personally involve Mr. Nixon in potential prosecution. This was in addition to Mr. Nixon's involvement in the Watergate cover-up, which was the subject of a separate memo not released by the White House.

"None of these matters at the moment rises to the level of our ability to prove even a probable criminal violation by Mr. Nixon, but I thought you ought to know which of the pending investigations were even remotely connected to Mr. Nixon," the memo said.

The memo was prepared by Watergate Deputy Special Prosecutor Henry Ruth, and was addressed to Watergate Special Prosecutor Leon Jaworski.

The 10 matters under investigation listed in the memo:

- Tax deductions relating to the gift of pre-presidential papers.

- The Charles W. Colson obstruction of justice plea in the Daniel Ellsberg case.

- Transfer of national security information from

curity wiretap records from the FBI to the White House.

- The wiretapping of John Sears, a former National Security Council aide.

- Misuse of Internal Revenue Service information.

- Misuse of the IRS through initiation of audits of Nixon administration "enemies."

- The question of daily industry campaign contributions.

- Filing of a challenge to The Washington Post Co.'s ownership of two Florida television stations.

- White House participation in Department of Justice decisions concerning the International Telephone and Telegraph Co.

- Campaign contributions made to C. (Gene) Rebozo.

Buchen did not shed any light on two key questions arising in the pardon of Mr. Nixon: One is whether President Ford had acted on the basis of reports of Mr. Nixon's supposed emotional admission of which Buchen said he had no knowledge.

Nor did Buchen explain, other than in reiterating Mr. Ford's determination to commit "an act of mercy," why the President directed him to prepare legal research on grounds for a pardon only two days after he told his first press conference that he would let the legal process run its course.