

Haig recalls Nixon's



ALEXANDER HAIG
To head NATO

By Helen Thomas
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WASHINGTON — Former President Nixon still believes he is "innocent of committing an impeachable offense" and felt that way even when he resigned the presidency, Gen. Alexander Haig said yesterday.

In an interview, Haig said all possibilities, including pardon, were discussed but in the end Nixon had two choices: "... to continue the fight for survival in office, recognizing the outcome was probably inevitable," or unconditional resig-

nation "and that is what he chose."

Haig, who has been White House chief of staff for 18 months, will be leaving his post next week. In a few days his appointment as commander of U.S. forces in Europe and supreme allied commander for NATO will be announced. The NATO nations have unanimously approved his appointment, according to administration officials.

Haig confirmed reports that his White House predecessor, H. R. Haldeman, who was forced to resign

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decision to give up presidency

when the Watergate coverup began to unravel, tried to get Nixon to pardon him and other Watergate defendants.

Haig said Haldeman called the White House Aug. 7, the day before Nixon's resignation announcement, and asked to speak personally with Nixon. But the former president told Haig to take the call.

Haig asked former White House lawyer James St. Clair to listen in, and later St. Clair asked Haldeman's attorneys to submit proposals for pardons of Watergate figures.

The Haldeman attorneys did so Aug. 8, in the hours before Nixon went on the air to resign. One proposal would have linked amnesty for Vietnam draft evaders with a pardon for Watergate figures.

"Nixon thought the pardons would be the wrong thing to do, given his own situation," said Haig.

He also said he had heard a report that another former Nixon top aide, John Ehrlichman, asked Julie Nixon Eisenhower to intervene for him.

Haig said Nixon had com-

passion for everyone involved but didn't believe he should grant the pardons.

Haig said he felt the country should now return to solving its domestic problems. He said: "if the public attention is to be diverted to events of the past, however justified, then we are not taking advantage of this act of President Nixon to relinquish office.

Haig said he doesn't agree that historians will forever be confused because Watergate-related charges against Nixon were not tak-

en through the judicial process. He said a voluminous record was built by the Senate Watergate Committee and "in a brutal fashion" by the House Judiciary Committee.

"I think Nixon feels and felt that mistakes were made but doesn't believe he committed an impeachable offense," Haig said. "He still feels he is innocent of any impeachable offenses."

As for himself, Haig said: "I have no regrets. I have no sense of apology." He called it unfair to say he was the acting president during those final months.