

Haig Assumes European Post

Stuttgart, Germany

After six years at the center of power in the White House, and a year as President Nixon's chief of staff, General Alexander M. Haig Jr. assumed command of U.S. forces in Europe yesterday in a ceremony that his predecessor, General Andrew J. Goodpaster, did not attend.

Haig will also take over from Goodpaster as supreme allied commander of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in Belgium December 15.

Asked about the absence of Goodpaster, who is said to be "resentful" about President Ford's decision in September to name Haig to the NATO post after Mr. Nixon resigned, the 49-year-old Haig told reporters, "I think you should ask my predecessor that."

He did not answer questions about his role in the Watergate case, or in leading Mr. Nixon to resign in August. "I think it was (General of the Army) Omar Bradley who once said the wise thing for old military men is to keep their mouths shut," he said, and added that he had not had any direct contact with Mr. Nixon in recent weeks.

Although he had retired from the Army in August, 1973, to assume the White House chief of staff position, he said yesterday that after the Nixon resignation,

"President Ford asked me what I would like to do and I told him, 'return to the military.'"

Goodpaster was in Germany earlier this week, officers said, but left for Belgium before Haig's Wednesday night arrival, and will stay there until next month.

"Of course, he's resentful," an Army officer said, "but not so much of General Haig. He just doesn't want to be retired."

Goodpaster had been in Germany since 1969, and his career goes back to 1939. He is 59 years old. Haig, who will turn 50 on December 2, was appointed by Mr. Ford well before Goodpaster expected to leave.

The post Haig took over is largely a paper organization, the U.S. European Command. Theoretically, Haig is in charge of 310,000 troops of the Army, Air Force, and Navy, scattered through Western Europe and around the Mediterranean. Each service, however, has its own separate commander in Europe as well. Haig has told subordinates that he will spend the next month and a half here "getting out to see the troops."

After December 15, when he moves to the more important post in Belgium, the Stuttgart responsibilities will be in the hands of his deputy, General George J. Eade, of the Air Force.

New York Times