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Ziegler Says He Lacked Facts In Watergate Press Relations

WASHINGTON, Feb. 13 (UPI)—Ronald L. Ziegler said today the Nixon Administration's public relations and press programs concerning Watergate may have been the worst in the nation's history.

"Of course I made mistakes," the former White House press secretary said. "But a press secretary is only as good as his source of information.

"A press secretary," he continued, "can make a misleading statement or make a statement that turns out to be untrue later on and still believe deeply in what he said when he made the statement."

Mr. Ziegler was roundly criticized by the news media during his 5½ years as press secretary for his handling of Watergate information and other matters.

He once called the Watergate break-in a "third-rate burglary" and later when the scandal was unfolding called his previous comments "inoperative."

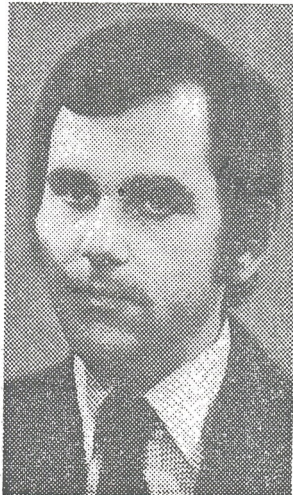
'Did Not Have Facts'

"We conducted probably the worst public relations and press program in the history of the United States in the way we handled Watergate," he said. "I did not have the facts, only those I could find out about or that I was told."

Mr. Ziegler was interviewed on the NBC "Today" Show.

Mr. Ziegler also said that former President Richard M. Nixon told President Ford in a telephone call last weekend that at no time had he doubted Mr. Ford's ability and that he had complete confidence in Mr. Ford.

"President Ford not only has the respect of former President Nixon," Mr. Ziegler said, "but



Ronald L. Ziegler

also he feels that President Ford has taken hold of the office."

Mr. Ziegler also said that at no time had Mr. Nixon ever planned a political comeback and that the former President "would never accept an ambassadorial post."

The issue of Mr. Nixon's confidence in Mr. Ford surfaced last Friday when Charles W. Colson, the former White House aide, said that Mr. Nixon had expressed doubts to him about Mr. Ford's potential abilities as a President.

Mr. Colson said that Mr. Nixon had thought it would take Mr. Ford at least two years to be effective because he was a slow starter and doubted whether Mr. Ford could successfully deal with Secretary of State Kissinger, who, according to Mr. Colson, was considered "unstable" by Mr. Nixon.