

# Gen. Alexander Haig—

## He's the Unsung Hero of Nixon's Resignation

by Lloyd Shearer

NIMY, BELGIUM.

If ever there was a man who is an authority on the last days of the Nixon Administration, that man is Gen. Alexander M. Haig Jr., currently the Supreme Allied Commander of American and NATO forces in Europe.

From May, 1973, to August, 1974, Haig was Nixon's chief of staff. It was he who adroitly engineered, orchestrated and choreographed Nixon's resignation from the Presidency, saving the nation from the trauma and turmoil of impeachment and trial.

Publishers have offered Haig as much as half a million dollars to recount in print the decline and fall of Richard Nixon, but he has steadfastly refused.

"If I'd been interested in money," he recently told a friend visiting him here, "I'd never have joined the Army."

When the friend persisted that Haig owed a careful, objective narration of Nixon's last days in office to history, the country, the Army, the public, his family and to himself, the General demurred. "It's Nixon's story to tell," he explained. "And when I saw him in San Clemente a few months ago, he was working on it. Just because I was his last chief of staff, I don't believe I have the right to beat him to it or second-guess him or any-of that."

"Besides," he added, "there are more books coming out on the subject than one can possibly read. I've talked to

reporters and writers about my role, my part in what occurred, but what I won't discuss with any of them is Nixon's role, Nixon's behavior under pressure, what he did, what he said, how he reacted, how he came to a decision in those final days.

### Mum's the word

"That's the part they all want and wanted. But that's where I draw the line."

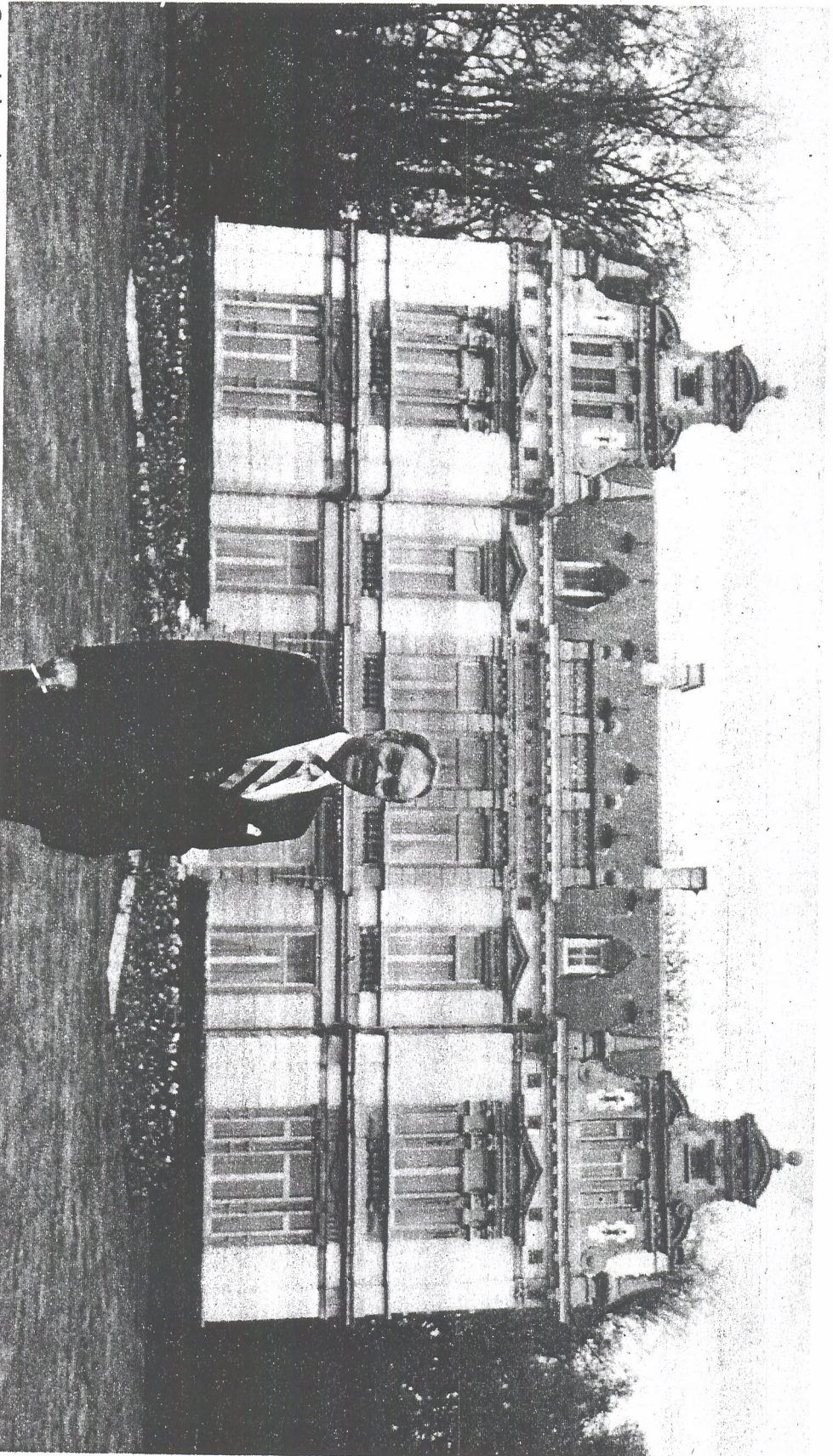
"Some time ago," he continued, "Bob Woodward [co-author with Carl Bernstein of *All the President's Men* who with Bernstein is working on a new book devoted to the last 100 days of the Nixon Administration for which

they have been paid a \$300,000 advance] phoned me from the States. Bob told me he was coming over to Europe and would like to talk to me. I told him to save his money. I'd had a previous unfortunate experience with both of them. I'd come home from the White House late one night, and there they were, both camped on my front doorstep waiting for me.

"They said they wanted to verify some story about Nixon's pill-taking and medication. I heard them out, and from what I knew of the matter, their version wasn't too accurate. I told them so, but they ran with the story anyway.

"Well, Woodward rang me up from London or someplace and said, 'I'm here. I'd like to talk.' But I refused, I wouldn't see him. He said, 'But you've already talked to us in the past.' What I didn't tell him was that I had learned my lesson. I simply said I wasn't going to talk to him. And I didn't. What he and Carl get for their new book on Nixon they will have to get from others. I'm sure they can piece the story together from a lot of other sources just as many of their colleagues have."

General Haig admits that his memory of Nixon's last year in office remains at this point remarkably clear. He concedes that it will fade in time. He is aware as a protagonist in the drama of his responsibility to truthful history, but the most one can get out of him at this point is, "Maybe I should write something or tape-record what happened. But if I do, it will be done only under the provision that nothing will be printed



General Alexander Haig, who was President Nixon's chief of staff and is now Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, outside his chateau near Mons, Bel-

gium. The Belgian government pays for the upkeep of this beautiful chateau and also provides the Haigs with two security guards around the clock.

or released until after the year 2000. By that time all of us should be gone."

Haig is only 50 and may well live to 75. His mother, a sprightly 85, still walks five miles a day in Pennington, N. J. But Nixon is 62, and the chances of his living until age 87 or the year 2000 are not particularly good. It is Nixon or possibly the office of the Presidency Haig seeks to protect. He is deeply loyal to both; some critics say unquestioningly. But Haig will not argue the point, nor will he be trapped into any discussion of Nixon's character or behavior pattern.

When newsmen in Brussels suggested last December that he had been named SACEUR—Supreme Allied Commander in Europe—because of his political ties to the Nixon White House, Haig asserted that basically he was a soldier, not a politician.

### General's rebuttal

"I feel qualified for this job," he declared. "I'm enthusiastic about it. I would like to be judged on my performance and not on any internal inhibitions those of you may have regarding how I got here. I have been in much battle [Korea and Vietnam]. I have been shot, and I've participated in two conflicts, including command of battalion and brigade."

Haig has regarded himself as a professional soldier since entering West Point in 1944 and explains his activities under Robert McNamara, Cyrus Vance, Henry Kissinger and Richard Nixon as the response of a trained soldier to orders from higher authority.

One of the truths about the Nixon-Haig relationship is that Haig did not want the job as Nixon's chief of staff after Bob Haldeman was compelled to resign it. When Haig took it at Nixon's

request, he expected it to last six, maybe eight weeks at best. His was a temporary appointment. He expected to be replaced by a more political figure. Only Nixon never replaced him. And gradually, inexorably, as Nixon became more entangled in the web of Watergate lies to the public, lies to his friends, lies to his lawyers, lies to his family—Alexander Haig became the surrogate President of the United States.

What role he played in helping appoint Clarence Kelley head of the FBI, Bill Colby director of the CIA, Ray Garrett chairman of the Securities & Exchange Commission, Henry Kissinger Secretary of State, how he replaced Archibald Cox with Leon Jaworski, got Fred Buzhardt, Len Garment, and James St. Clair to defend Nixon to the bitter and tragic end, how he ran the government when it had no Vice President and there was a distinct possibility that Carl Albert, Speaker of the House, might take over the Presidency—of all this and much more, Haig will not talk in detail. He says with a small, wry smile that from 1973 to '74 he increased his cigarette smoking from one to three packs a day. It's now down to two. But the fact is that during this period Haig was virtually running the country, because Nixon was obsessed with hiding the truth of Watergate. And the truth was that he had conspired to obstruct justice by ordering the CIA to call off an FBI investigation of Watergate because he feared needlessly that such an investigation might hurt his reelection probability. Moreover, Nixon knew that he had committed the crime on June 23, 1972, and that hopefully the June 23rd tape must never come to light or ear.

Haig ran the White House in crisis.

He held the staff together. He fought valiantly to protect and defend the President, because the President never told him the Watergate truth. Haig himself, according to Fred Buzhardt, one of Nixon's lawyers and the master of the tapes, never listened to a single tape.

"Al had to run the government," Buzhardt explains. "I warned him that just listening to some of those tapes would drive him out of his mind. I myself didn't listen to the vital June 23rd tape until July 24th, 1974, the day the U.S. Supreme Court ordered the President to turn over the tapes to the Special Watergate Prosecutor.

"Al and Jim St. Clair were out in San Clemente. I phoned and told them that in my judgment it was all over. The June 23rd tape clearly contradicted material we had submitted to the House Judiciary Committee. I told Al that in my opinion the tape was conclusive evidence. It was no longer a question of the President leaving office, but how he was leaving. That was one problem which landed square in Al's lap. I wondered how he would tell the President.

### Facing facts

"As a matter of fact, Haig didn't read a transcript of the June 23rd tape until, I think, Tuesday, July 30, 1974. And then Al was sick and shocked. He was faced with the job of conveying to the President, an unreceptive President, the reality of the situation, which he knew was desperate but which he also knew the President was not likely to accept.

"How Al Haig got Richard Nixon to decide that Richard Nixon must resign is, to my way of thinking, one of the most skillful, tactful, diplomatic, brilliant and sensitive feats in American history.



It was Haig who finessed arrangements in the last days of Nixon's Administration so that Nixon reluctantly but finally agreed to resign. It was by then clear to Nixon



that if the Senate tried him, he would be found guilty. Two of Nixon's staunchest loyalists, Buzhardt, shown with Haig (l), and Kissinger (r), were also convinced of that.

"I don't know any other man I've ever worked with," Buzhardt says flatly, "who performed a more selfless, capable service for his country than Al Haig. The nation was indeed lucky that he occupied the office he did. Al is a man of towering integrity and tremendous capabilities. He kept the government on course for seven critical days, realizing that he had to pressure the President without stimulating the President's well-recognized combative instinct."

All his life Richard Nixon had been a fighter. Sometimes he fouled in the clinches, but he always fought on.

### Rule for living

His mother, Hannah, a devout Quaker, used to tell him repeatedly, "never give up. Never give up." And in his political career, Nixon never did. Even when Pat Brown defeated him for the governorship of California in 1962, and Nixon announced his retirement from politics, it was only a temporary surcease. He continued to battle his way to the Presidency.

Nixon coveted power. He relished it. He was obsessed with it. He used it and he abused it, and he thrived on it, hating passionately to relinquish a scintilla. His behavior in many circumstances was despotic and imperious. When he learned, for example, that Fred Buzhardt, his own lawyer, was convinced the game was over, Nixon refused to talk to him.

Nixon was determined not to resign the Presidency. Yet Haig knew that he must. If Nixon insisted on impeachment proceedings in the House and was convicted by the Senate, Haig realized Nixon would lose his pension and possibly all other post-Presidential benefits. But how does a chief of staff explain this to a President in mental extremis?

### Defenders' counsel

Haig orchestrated the resignation march through Rep. Charles Wiggins, the Southern California Congressman from Nixon's home district. Wiggins had eloquently defended the President before the House Judiciary Committee. Next he brought Sen. Robert Griffin of Michigan into the play, followed by two speech writers the President respected, moderate Ray Price and reactionary Pat Buchanan. The pair were convinced the President must and should resign. Nixon thought otherwise. So, too, did his two daughters, who tried to convince Buchanan that their father could still muddle through. Tactfully, Buchanan doubted it.

Nixon waffled. He was going to resign. No, there was no reason to resign. Perhaps he had misled the country, but the deception, such as it was, did not constitute a reason for resignation. He would fight on as he had always fought on. He would not give up. He never would give up.

*continued*

Haig saw to it that Sen. Barry Goldwater, the conservative bulwark of the Republican party, was provided with the damning tape transcripts of June 23. Perhaps that would do it. It did not. And the next and final Cabinet meeting, with at least half the members expecting him to resign, Nixon rambled on about inflation, declared his intention to stay on, ordered them to pass the word.

### Count noses

Haig and Kissinger exchanged glances. When the Cabinet meeting was over, Kissinger stayed behind. Gently he suggested that the President resign. Kissinger was followed later by William Timmons, Nixon's liaison man with Congress. Nixon asked for an accurate count. If it came to a trial in the Senate, how many Senators, men he had worked with, could he count on? Not enough for acquittal, Timmons sadly reported. Nixon still refused to quit.

He would consider resignation, he agreed, but he would not decide upon it. He ordered Haig to have Ray Price prepare a contingency speech. Next day he sent his two sons-in-law, David Eisenhower and Eddie Cox, to convince Pat Buchanan that Pat must lead the fight of constitutional process, to plead that the Nixon case must be carried through House and Senate to an indisputably clear and final decision. Buchanan said he couldn't see it that way.

Later that same afternoon of Wednesday, Aug. 7th, Haig played his final card. The President was visited by three staunch Republican leaders, Sen. Hugh Scott of Pennsylvania, Sen. Barry Goldwater of Arizona, and Rep. John Rhodes, the House Minority Leader, also from Arizona. Goldwater acted as spokesman. The meeting lasted less than an hour. Goldwater explained that whatever support Nixon had relied upon in the Senate had evaporated.

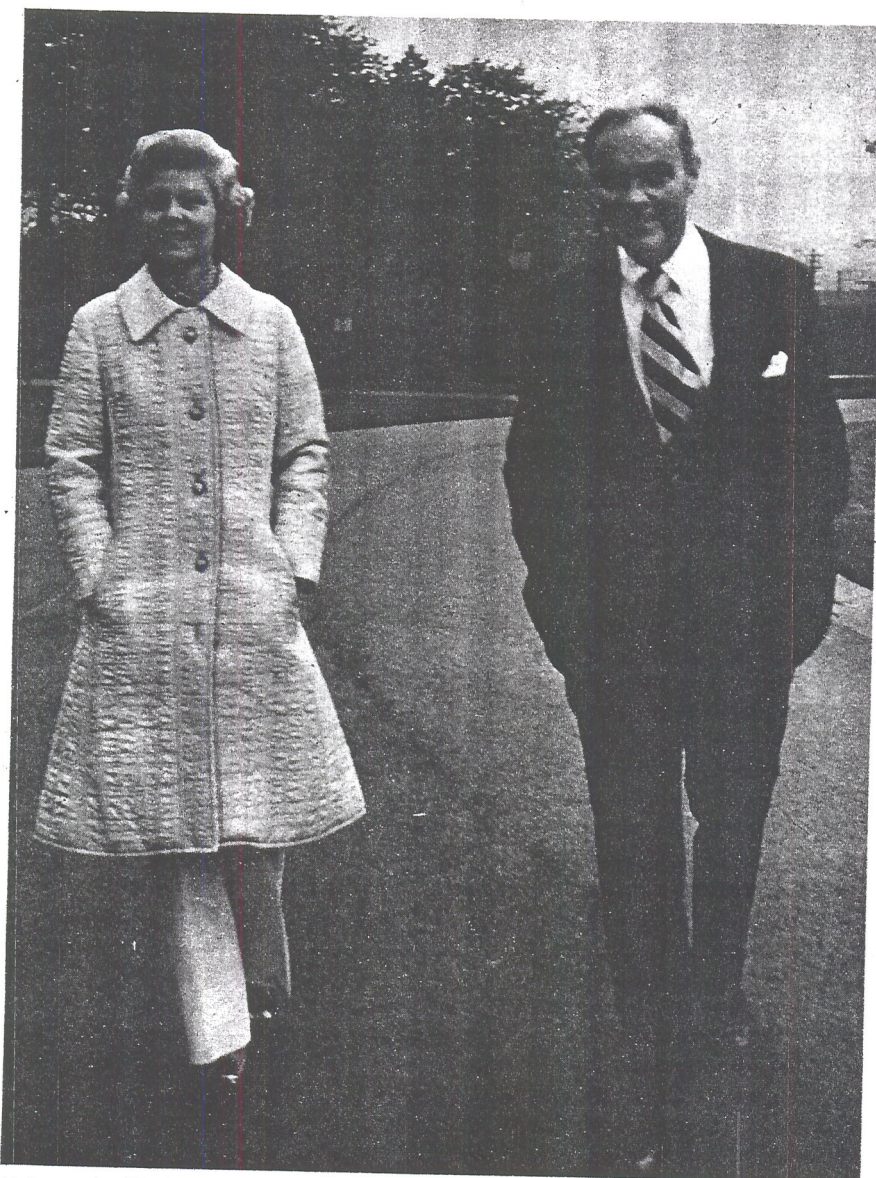
That night, after again talking to Kissinger and Haig, Richard Nixon decided to resign. He phoned Ray Price with suggestions for the resignation speech. And on Thursday, Aug. 8th, 1974, he told the nation, "... I shall resign the Presidency effective at noon tomorrow."

### Fateful decision

Three months later, having deftly eased Gerald Ford into a smooth transition to the Presidency, General Haig found himself commander of U.S. troops in Germany and subsequently of NATO. \*

The visceral Nixon-haters, unmind-

\* See letter to editor by Edward Doherty, WXP 20 Jun 75.



Haig and wife Patricia, whose father, Gen. Alonzo P. Fox, used to be General MacArthur's chief of staff, stroll the chateau grounds on a rare sunny day.

ful of how thankless and taxing a job Haig had performed in implementing Nixon's resignation, pointed to Haig's new NATO position as political payoff. Rep. Les Aspin (D., Wis.), no stranger to the art of the daily publicity release, announced that Haig had ordered his little dog, Duncan, a beagle-dachshund, transported from Frankfurt to Stuttgart in an Army car and later flown to Belgium. Haig was unaware of this "flagrant breach" in regulations and later paid \$46.92 for Duncan's transportation.

A handsome, well-balanced, take-it-in-stride man with a ready and redemptive sense of humor, a workaholic who labors 12 to 18 hours a day, Haig says, "the pinpricks of life don't bother me."

What does worry him is that as commander of all military forces in NATO, he has the job of holding together an alliance which may very well be coming apart at the seams, especially at a time when American prestige, because

of the Vietnam war outcome, has sunk to a new low.

Few people realize it but the NATO alliance, a treaty ratified by the Congress, has dwindled down into a gentleman's agreement\* which obligates 15 member-nations in the event any is attacked to undertake "such action as it deems necessary" through their own constitutional processes. In short it is a handshake agreement, and at this point the handshakes are growing progressively weaker.

For example, Great Britain,\* our strongest ally in Europe, is rapidly going broke. Britain has decided to stop all naval deployment in the Mediterranean. will also withdraw many of her aircraft assigned to NATO; and by 1979 the British military presence will be phased out of Malta, leaving the U.S. Sixth Fleet the lone major protector of that strategic area.

Haig is also confronted by the Greece-Turkey debacle.\* After the

Cyprus war with Turkey, Greece withdrew her forces from the NATO defense system, and Turkey, cut off from American arms supplies, told us to go whistle.

Portugal,\* at the western end of NATO, also posits Haig with a major problem or three. How long will Portugal remain a member of NATO? And if she does, how long will it be before NATO defense plans end up in Moscow as a result of machinations by the Portuguese Communists, who are far more influential than their number indicates? Suppose, too, Portugal invites us out of the Azores and invites the Soviet Union in? The loss of the Azores bases to the U.S. would prove a key liability

### Dealing with Spain

Another puzzler Haig has to deal with is Spain.\* For years the U.S. has quietly been pushing Spain to join NATO, but other NATO countries object. An executive agreement we signed in 1953 permits the U.S. Navy and Air Force to use Spanish bases, especially those vital ones at Rota and Torrejon, but the renewal of this agreement comes up in September, and the Spaniards are being difficult about it. Which, incidentally, is why President Ford decided to drop in on Spain.

Over the years we have given Spain more than \$3.2 billion in aid for the use of their bases which we built. But the Spaniards want more, including a full-fledged defense treaty that would obligate us to come to their assistance in time of war.

Haig these days spends a large share of his time flying from one European capital to another, making speeches, holding hands, gathering intelligence, inspecting troops, lecturing at war colleges, playing the soldier-statesman-ambassador.

### Plays tennis

When he returns to the chateau at Nimy, which the Belgian government has made available to him and his beautiful wife, Pat, he is usually bone-tired and mind-weary. He tries to keep in shape by playing tennis at 8 o'clock on Sunday mornings, but his backhand isn't what it used to be.

Haig is strong, determined, resilient and work-loving, but considering what he's been through these past two years, he deserves a lengthy vacation in some telephone-less paradise where his good friend and mentor Henry Kissinger can't get in touch with him.

Given the world's parlous state, that for Haig seems an impossibility. He is a work-driven public servant of whose high and true worth the nation will one day pridefully learn.