

White House Denies Ford Lacked Candor in Statements on Nixon Pardon

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WASHINGTON, Dec. 18—The White House denied today a published report that President Ford had not acted in accordance with his public statements when he pardoned former President Richard M. Nixon, "The President has dealt with candor and truthfulness at all times on this matter."

The White House statement, made by the deputy press secretary, William I. Greener, was in response to questions about an article in the Washington Post today. The Post said that the President had pardoned Mr. Nixon after listening to pleas from former Nixon aides, including Gen. Alexander M. Haig Jr.

According to The Post, General Haig, then serving as chief of staff for Mr. Ford, as he had for President Nixon, made "urgent" requests to Mr. Ford to pardon the former President.

The Post article, written by Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, who broke many of the major stories of the Watergate scandal, went on to report that, according to reliable sources, President Ford assured General Haig that Mr. Nixon would be pardoned.

This assurance was given, according to The Post, on Aug. 28, 1974, 10 days before the pardon was announced.

The New York Times, in a dispatch filed on Sept. 16, 1974, from San Clemente, Calif., Mr. Nixon's home, reported that General Haig, having been ad-

vised of the "alarming" state of Mr. Nixon's health, was reliably said to have persuaded President Ford to grant an immediate pardon.

The report said that a longtime friend of Mr. Nixon had identified General Haig as the person "primarily responsible" for the surprise pardon, which the President announced on Sept. 8, 1974. General Haig, according to The Times account, had warned Mr. Ford that unless a pardon were quickly forthcoming, there might be what he called "a possible personal and national tragedy."

The article published in the Post today said that the information obtained by the reporters appeared to contradict testimony by President Ford before a House Judiciary subcommittee on Oct. 17, 1974. Mr. Ford then said, "At no time after I became President on Aug. 9, 1974, was the subject of a pardon for Richard M. Nixon raised by the former President or anyone representing him."

He also testified, "Nobody made any recommendation to me for the pardon of the former President."

Today, Mr. Greener said, "The President stands on that testimony. The President's testimony remains valid, true and truthful."

Mr. Greener said he spoke to the President about the article today and that Mr. Ford said that The Post account was not true, that General Haig had not recommended a pardon and that he had not assured the general or any other former Nixon aide that a pardon would be granted.

Mr. Greener reported that the White House staff chief, Richard B. Cheney, called General Haig, now commander of the

North Atlantic Treaty Organization forces in Brussels, today to ask him about The Post article. General Haig reportedly confirmed the President's account.

The day after the article appeared in The Times in 1974, The Post carried an article saying that The Times report was "quickly and strongly denied" by the White House. The Post quoted General Haig as calling The Times article "totally untrue."

More Allegations

The report by The Post today gave essentially the same account of General Haig's role as had the original report in The Times. However, it contained additional allegations about former Nixon aides' playing a role in the pardon decision.

It said that Leonard Garment, a former legal counsel to President Nixon, wrote an "impassioned" three-page memorandum on Aug. 28 urging a pardon and implying that Mr. Nixon might take his life unless a pardon were forthcoming.

The Post also reported that a former Nixon speech writer, Raymond K. Price Jr., had drafted a pardon statement for President Ford to read but that the statement had not been used.

Today, Mr. Greener said that Mr. Ford had discussed the question of a pardon with his own staff in preparation for his news conference of Aug. 28, 1974, because the matter was likely to be raised by reporters.

But Mr. Greener added, "There was no impassioned plea by General Haig or any other member of the staff to the President to pardon President Nixon."

He also said that Mr. Ford had never seen the memo prepared by Mr. Garment.