

The original documents are located in Box 15, folder “Nessen - Clippings: General (3)” of the Ron Nessen Papers at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library.

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The club

There is, it seems to us, a fundamental misconception in the National Press Club's survey of White House relations with the press. The survey, as reported here a week ago, assumes that Presidents ought to be unfailingly candid and accessible and their press secretaries fountains of objective information to be turned on at the approach of any deadline.

Those conditions may prevail some day, but not while humans inhabit the White House.

The press club, as noted, has conceded that Gerald Ford and his administration are a welcome contrast to the Nixon regime which engaged in calculated efforts to manage news and discredit news media. Still, things could be much better, in the press club's eyes. A yearning is expressed for more "openness and candor" from the President. Ron Nessen, the press secretary, is criticized for ignorance in foreign affairs and inadequate knowledge of other subjects.

There is in all of this an addled idealism that ill suits professionals who are supposed to be telling the public what really goes on in Washington. Journalists are losing touch with political realities if they begin to hope that Presidents will answer every question fully or that information officers in presidential employ will suddenly begin acting like disinterested gatherers of unadulterated news. However high minded a President or his press secretary, their perceptions of the public good will often differ from the journalists'. It is often the conflict between those perceptions that makes news.

For the National Press Club's next study of White House news coverage, things might usefully be turned around. How much hard grubbing are reporters doing in the White House outside the oval office or Mr. Nessen's briefing room? Is television devoting enough time to the reporter's unillustrated report, based on sources that cannot be pictured? Is the abrasiveness of questions and answers at daily briefings distracting reporters from their basic job of getting at the facts?

Is the press club ready for that survey?

Star performance

Washingtonians, bureaucrats and ordinary citizens alike witnessed a unique demonstration of adversary journalism at its best at the year end. It was unusual because the opponents are under the same corporate tent.

On Dec. 30 the *Washington Star* in a lead editorial laid it on the government, National Association of Broadcasters and the networks for throwing blocks in the path of pay television. It was an inaccurate, outdated and inept portrayal of the existing conditions, although correct in the premise that most broadcasters oppose siphoning of programs.

Came Richard S. Stakes, president of the Washington Star Station Group, who also happens to be chairman of the NAB Committee on (against) Pay Television, with an op-ed rejoinder using double the space occupied by the *Star's* eruption. It answered the newspaper's attack with arguments largely familiar to all broadcasters—and cable operators.

The *Star's* new owner—Joe L. Allbritton—is under FCC mandate to dispose within three years of all broadcast properties whose ownership involves him in violation of the commission's ownership rules. These include WMAL-AM-FM-TV Washington, Va. These, plus

WCVI(TV) Charleston, S.C., are the properties directed by Mr. Stakes.

What happened here does not establish precedent. These days it isn't unusual for newspapers and stations under the same top ownership to take opposing positions on local issues or even on candidates for public office. Most newspaper ownerships have completely separated broadcast operations from their newspapers with separate corporate entities in separate buildings.

That was not how it was two decades ago. While it is perhaps after the fact, it is now evident that whatever misgivings government might have had about concentrations of media in the same market have to a great degree been voluntarily dispelled.

Hardy perennials

Television soap opera was discovered all over the press last week, as though it had suddenly emerged as a new quirk on the cultural scene. *Time* had a cover story of unusual length of the whole genre. Newspapers coast to coast were full of previews of Norman Lear's new *Mary Hartman! Mary Hartman!*, starting in syndication.

If any significance can be read into this, it is that television itself is always a dependable subject for journalistic treatment. In a slow news week, how better to sell magazines than with a cover piece headlined "Sex and Suffering in the Afternoon"? Almost as sure-fire as that sex-and-violence-in-prime-time speech that politicians have used so dependably in slow legislative periods.

N for nothing

Now that the laughter has subsided after the discovery that NBC paid "well under \$1 million" for a corporate symbol that a stalwart artist ran up for the Nebraska educational television network while working on company time, an accommodation must be reached. If the Nebraska people are as smart as they seem to be they will abandon their use of the logo in exchange for one cession from NBC.

In its promotion accompanying its introduction of the new logo, NBC asserted that Lippincott & Margulies submitted 1,000 designs before the N was ultimately chosen. Having already rejected them, NBC would surely be willing to let the Nebraska educational television network take its pick from the discarded 999. Designers we know say Nebraska couldn't lose.



Drawn for BROADCASTING by Jack:

"Here comes a weather bulletin."

DATE UNKNOWN

Enough Is Too Much

In discussing the tragic spectacle of the flood of refugees in both Cambodia and South Vietnam, President Ford's Press Secretary, Ron Nessen told newsmen at the White House:

"Congress apparently feels there is no need to help all those refugees."

There seems to be a dreadfully familiar ring to this highly questionable suggestion of Congressional insensitivity.

Didn't the nation hear much the same thing in the early 1960's — which resulted in our disastrous intervention in what now seems to have been an Indo-Chinese Civil War?

Nessen has stressed that he is speaking for President Ford in his recurrent descriptions of the Southeast-Asian Conflict as a "struggle for independence and freedom."

But Mr. Nessen repeatedly declines to provide any detailed evidence to illustrate why he and the President believe that the word "freedom" is very much more applicable to the Thieu and Lon Nol regimes than to Hanoi and the Khmer Rouge.

As something of an illustration of the final extremity of this position, Nessen told newsmen recently of "cables" which suggest that the Khmer

Rouge insurgents might be forced to negotiate because of "problems of manpower and supply."

This, we are supposed to believe, is afflicting the troops which have completely surrounded the Cambodian Capital.

(Certainly. It was similar problems which forced Gen. William T. Sherman to retreat from Atlanta and plead with Jeff Davis for negotiations.)

President Ford refers to what he defines as "abandoning our allies" — this in an appeal for funds to Cambodia. Yet the Foreign Assistance Act's Section 655 (G) states that aid to

Cambodia "shall not be construed as a commitment by the United States to Cambodia for its defense."

Despite this, Mr. Ford has been playing a symphony of shaming Congress in his attempt to obtain millions — and possibly billions — more, in order not to "desert" Lon Nol, and the Thieu regime in Saigon.

The United States has already sent \$135 BILLION and 500,000 troops to support a series of non-communist regimes in Saigon.

50,000 of our soldiers have died in support of these regimes whose corruption and tyranny have been spectacular.

Despite this, Mr. Ford is now contending that more money will accomplish what all these troops and all these billions have failed to do.

The President is telling an economically depressed U.S. that otherwise Southeast Asia will fall into Communist hands — when the United States is dealing in detente with communist hands all over the rest of Asia.

The Presidential plea to invest more money in either of these two governments is beginning to sound like a fund raising prospectus for a new invasion of either the Bay of Pigs, or Archangel — in order to restore the Czars.

JULY 25, 1975



BULLDOG NESSEN BITES MARY McGRORY

An original pen-and-ink cartoon by Bassett lies on a shelf just outside the office of the Press Secretary of the President of the United States.

It is apparently awaiting framing, having evoked the wistful admiration of Mr. Ron Nessen — as well, no doubt, as Mr. Nessen's Boss In The Oval Office.

The cartoon shows a grinning Gerry Ford holding a light leash on a dog, who is eagerly sinking its fangs into a reporter's leg.

In this cartoon, the President is laughing as this beast bites the struggling newsmen. Caption: "He is a little overprotective!"

As the Presidential Press Secretary, Mr. Nessen is the primary vehicle through which President Ford communicates with the world,

when he is not himself delivering an address, or answering questions.

The White House Press Corps are among the few American citizens who have an opportunity to question the President directly — which, indirectly, is an All-American pastime, guaranteed by the Constitution.

Since these questioning sessions with the President are usually limited to 30 minutes once every two weeks, there is far more questioning of Nessen, during his daily one-hour White House press briefings.

Often of late, these sessions with Mr. Ford's leg-biting surrogate have gotten rough.

For Nessen's good points he appears to try hard to prepare for certain

questions, and he does try to inject occasionally good humor into the proceedings) are often offset by his liabilities. These include his tendency to evade, or to ignore questions altogether, or the struggles to control his volcanic rage, which contests he sometimes loses, quite spectacularly.

There is also his notorious habit of striking at certain reporters, one at a time, with an attempt to humiliate with his unseemly blend of sarcasm and arrogance.

This may serve to make likeable Gerry Ford look like Uncle Santa Claus by comparison. But the President ought to realize that he is beginning to look Machiavellian by turning loose such a hound as Ron on the same press corps whom he so recently told

are "part of the White House family."

For example, during Nessen's disastrous attempt to cover up Dr. Kissinger's disastrous advice to snub Solzhentzyn, Ron decided to get rough with Mary McGrory.

"Welcome back to Mary McGrory!" roared Ron with a great grimace, teeth flashing. "Mary's been out looking for more coverups!" (No laughter.)

Pulitzer Prize-winner McGrory has a voice so gentle and soothing as to suggest a Mother's Day commercial for the milk of contented cows. This serves as a gloriously insidious camouflage for her nuclear-powered typewriter, whose ribbons are reportedly changed regularly by a Mrs. Borgia.

During the ensuing press briefing, Mary's vocal rejoinders were all sweet and gentle, in such as:

* When Nessen replied that the President would probably not speak directly to the Soviet Cosmonauts — "Because he doesn't speak fluent Russian" (Mary: "That's the reason he wouldn't see Solzhentzyn!")

* When Nessen told reporters that when there are foreign visitors, Mr. Ford likes to have "substance" during their meetings. (Mary: "Does he think Solzhentzyn is a lightweight?")

* Nessen was barely recovering from this when Mary delivered the coup de grace: "Maybe Solzhentzyn thinks Ford is a lightweight?"

JULY 11, 1975

FORD-NESSSEN CREDIBILITY GAP

Alexander Solzhenitzyn was described by AFL-CIO President George Meany as "The single figure that holds highest the torch of liberty."

But President Ford — who only one week previously extended the hospitality of the White House to two Soviet Generals — not only refused such hospitality to this Nobel prizewinner, Mr. Ford also refused an invitation to a banquet honoring this Russian exile.

Why did Mr. Ford treat Solzhenitzyn in this manner? Well for several days the White House announced that "The President's schedule is full," or "The

President had a previous engagement," or "The President was busy that night going over a speech for the NAACP," or "The President had a dinner engagement with his daughter Susan."

One week after Solzhenitzyn's classic address — with Mr. Ford's inhospitality denounced on the Senate floor — the truth finally outs in the Ford Open White House.

No, ladies and gentlemen, it wasn't a busy schedule, or a previous engagement, or a speech or even a date with Susan.

Ron Nessen, when asked by WAVA News about reports that Henry Kissinger

advised Ford to ignore Solzhenitzyn, finally said what amounts to a concession:

"I think it would be fair to say that regarding the President seeing a foreign visitor — specifically Mr. Solzhenitzyn — an appointment which would have ramifications, it is natural that the President would ask the advice of his Secretary of State.

Ah! The truth finally outs in the Ford "Open White House." The truth finally emerges from the labyrinth of seven days of either ignorance or deliberate falsehood in the White House Press Office.

This credibility gap is only slightly less disgusting than Mr. Ford's inexcusable slur of a great man who has suffered much and written brilliantly in the cause of freedom.

Why did the President of the United States do this?

Al Zack of the AFL-CIO speculated a week before the White House admitted the truth. Said Zack:

"Maybe Henry didn't want him to."

It is the President who is supposed to set foreign policy; not Henry.

Why not move Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin into Blair House so he can regularly check the White House guest list?

NOVEMBER 14, 1975

Nessen Adds Frosting To Ford Exodus Week

Within the brief time span of less than a week, President Ford has managed to infuriate or at least dismay:

(1) The Republican Conservatives — by his firing of an unusually able and conscientious Secretary of Defense.

(2) The Republican Liberals — by his apparently eager acceptance of Nelson Rockefeller's withdrawal from the '76 Veep race.

(3) The Press — by conducting an East Room news conference which for stonewalling constituted a terrifying resemblance to Richard Nixon. (On the other hand, there was some high humor — however unintended. Don Rumsfeld, we learned, is qualified to be Secretary of Defense, because among other things he was "a naval aviator").

This, the week of the Big Ford Exodus, was the same week that Mr. Ford's guest, Egypt's Anwar Sadat, conducted himself not as a guest of the United States,

but more like a touring Pharaoh — replete with assorted bricks-without-straw directives to both the U.S. and Israel.

At the same time as all of this, President Ford's press secretary, Ron Nessen, managed once more to attract National (and negative) attention — in TIME magazine. Only a few months before, TIME had reported White House Press Corps opinion that Mr. Ford's press aide "could screw up the sunset."

Now TIME has reported Nessen's astounding attempts first to ban microphones and film crews from a press conference with Sadat's press secretary Tashan Bashir — and then Nessen's getting into "a shouting match with a reporter over a question about Saudi Arabian Anti-Semitism."

Since I was the reporter, I would like to refer to the transcript, which indicates quite clearly:

(1) Mr. Nessen shouted at me first.

(2) Mr. Nessen's shout was an interruption of my question, when I asked about "the Government of Saudi Arabia, which has substantially aided your government, refuses to allow Jewish-Americans to go there without a certificate —" (I was planning to say "certificate of religion" when I was interrupted by Nessen's shout).

At this point, Mr. Nessen, his face fiery red, leaped up on the podium and shouted "Mr. Bashir is not the spokesman for Saudi Arabia, or the Senators, or the Defense Department!" (Senators Frank Church and Clifford Case).

I shouted back an opinion that this interruption was neither right nor fair and that Mr. Bashir should be allowed to answer the question. An obviously enraged Nessen then growled "shall we end the briefing or go on

with questions?" Whereupon another reporter asked:

"I would like to know why this briefing is being held when you refuse to discuss Zionism? You have somebody that will discuss it. Why is that?"

Nessen did not answer the question. The President's Press Secretary has also criticized Prime Minister Henry Kissinger. Since Ron says he has no job offers from NBC, his former employer, or any other corporation, it might be said that Ron Nessen is, if little else, fearless.

Isn't this the same Presidential Press Secretary who made cute remarks about the allegedly recent arrival of plumbing in West Virginia, as well as the President's alleged reluctance to "slosh about" in the "uncertain" snow of New Hampshire?

On Sunday, President Ford finally admitted the existence of tension between Secretary Kissinger & Schlesinger had led to his firing of the Secretary of Defense. Mr. Ford repeatedly evaded this question a week ago at his disastrous press conference.

Did Nessen suggest or advise against Mr. Ford's evasion? And why, on the day after The President finally comes clean, is Ron Nessen on his way to California — at taxpayers expense?

Why? Well, according to Deputy Press Secretary Bill Greener, Nessen is out there to tell the realtors about his job. (1)

Is it possible that the invitation to Ron Nessen was arranged by another Ron, named Reagan?

LETTERS

Would You Believe?

During the week that your reporter, Aaron Latham, concluded that White House officials were ducking interviews with newsmen ["The Capitol Letter: Washington Merry-Go-Ron," May 26] the following presidential advisers had the following contacts in person and on the phone with reporters:

DON RUMSFELD:

Godfrey Sperling, *Christian Science Monitor*
The Mutual Broadcasting System
Kandy Stroud, WRC/TV
Reader's Digest representatives
Juan Cameron, *Fortune* magazine

PHILIP BUCHEN:

Don Sanders, AP
Alex Taylor, WZZM
Walt Rodgers, AP
Phil Jones, CBS
Carl Stern, NBC
Jules Witcover, *Washington Post*

JAMES LYNN:

Dom Bonafede, *National Journal*
Ed Cowan, *New York Times*
Middleton, Michigan, local reporters
White House Press Corps briefing
Joe Craft, *Field Newspapers*

JOHN MARSH JR.:

Dean Fischer, *Time* magazine (twice)
Aldo Beckman, *Chicago Tribune*
Rowland Evans, *Evans and Novak*
(columnist)
Jules Witcover, *Washington Post*

WILLIAM SEIDMAN:

Joe Kraft, *Washington Post*
Jim Gannon, *Wall Street Journal*
Phil Shabecoff, *New York Times*
Jerry terHorst, *Detroit News*
Jerry Cahill, *New York Daily News*
Two attempts were made to return Aaron Latham's calls, but there was no answer.

JAMES CANNON:

Marty Plissner, CBS
Tom Joyce, *Newsweek*
Carol Richards, *Gannett News Service*

WILLIAM BAROODY:

Jerry terHorst, *Detroit News*
Godfrey Sperling, *Christian Science Monitor*

DR. ROBERT GOLDWIN:

Jerry Schecter, *Time* magazine
Lou Cannon, *Washington Post*

Bil Safire, *New York Times*
Dan Schorr, *CBS News*
Juan Cameron, *Fortune* magazine
Martin Peretz, *The New Republic*
Victor Zorza, *Washington Post*

RICHARD CHENEY:

Jude Wanniski, *Wall Street Journal*
Bob Shogan, *Los Angeles Times*
Phil Shabecoff, *New York Times*
Rudy Abramson, *Los Angeles Times*
John Inglehart, *National Journal*
Tom DeFrank, *Newsweek*
Dean Fischer, *Time* magazine (four times)
Tom Jarriel, ABC
Aldo Beckman, *Chicago Tribune*
John Cockran, NBC
Lou Cannon, *Washington Post*
(twice)

Bruce Agnew, McGraw-Hill
Tom Brokaw, NBC (twice)
Mort Kondracke, *Chicago Sun-Times*
Lee Walczek, *Business Week*

Mr. Latham was wrong when he said that White House officials are clamming up with reporters, as the above list shows. I know you will want to make this correction.

Ron Nessen
Press Secretary to the President
The White House
Washington, D.C.



THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

TO:
FROM:

RON NESSEN
JIM SHUMAN

Here is the New York magazine article. It could have been a lot worse. In fact, it really reads like sour grapes: "they wouldn't talk to me, so I'll write a nasty story."

THE CAPITOL LETTER

BY AARON LATHAM

WASHINGTON MERRY-GO-RON

One reporter called him "the dummy's dummy." He was referring to President Ford's press secretary, Ron Nessen. Now it would seem the dummy's dummy is trying to dummy up.

Nessen recently attended a cabinet meeting on board the presidential yacht *Sequoia* at which he seemed to suggest—in informal remarks made to White House staff members who had come along for the ride—that the Ford White House had become a little too open.

What Nessen reportedly said was: "A lot of White House staff members think they have been giving too many interviews recently and are thinking of turning down all requests for a while."

Of course, Nessen did not come right out and say not to talk to reporters, to clam up and act like Nixon people, but a lot of people seemed to get the point.

The next morning shortly after 9 A.M. my telephone rang. It was Richard Cheney's secretary calling. Cheney is a deputy assistant to the president. The secretary canceled the interview I had scheduled that afternoon at 4:30. She added that there was not much hope for rescheduling it anytime in the foreseeable future. Cheney had attended the cabinet meeting.

The next call was from Philip Buchen's secretary. He is the president's counsel, which means that he has the job John Dean made famous. The secretary canceled my 3:30 P.M. appointment and did not believe it could be rescheduled. Buchen had been on board the *Sequoia*.

The next to call was Robert Hartmann's secretary. He is counselor to the president. The curious thing was that

I didn't even have an appointment with him, although I had requested one. The secretary said there was no hope for an interview anytime soon. Hartmann had been on the president's yacht.

The next to call was Roderick Hills, who spoke to me himself. Hills is a deputy counsel to the president; he is also the husband of Carla Hills, the new secretary of HUD. (One imagines that they have fascinating conversations over breakfast. "Darling, I need a half-billion for that public housing in Chicago." "I'm sorry, darling, but the president has already promised that money to Defense.") Hills said he could not make our 10 A.M. appointment.

I asked him why. He told me about what Nessen had said on board the *Sequoia* the night before.

All four calls had come within fifteen minutes.

Peter Roussel, White House staff assistant, didn't bother to call. When I showed up for our appointment at the White House at 5 P.M., he just happened to be busy.

At the White House briefing that day, I asked Nessen if he had told White House staff members on board the *Sequoia* that they were giving too many interviews. He said he had not spoken formally at the cabinet meeting, and any informal remarks to White House staff members were private.

(And what the president's men can do, the vice-president's people can do also. Rockefeller's staff have been told that they must report *all* contact with the press.)

The White House's clumsy efforts at

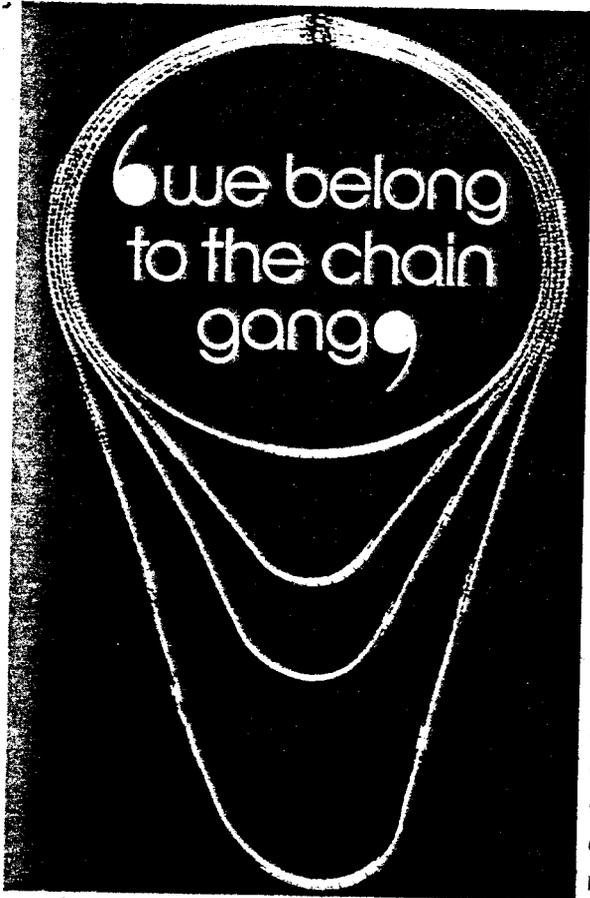
clamping up were probably prompted by its even more clumsy efforts at leaking a couple of weeks earlier. It began in earnest in Palm Springs, where President Ford played golf while South Vietnam dissolved. It was here that White House staff members began telling reporters: "Kissinger's not the only foreign-policy adviser the president has"; "We resent people saying Kissinger is the only one around here who knows anything about foreign policy"; "Ford is not a puppet on a string."

The week before the president's State of the World message, the anti-Kissinger propaganda coming out of the White House staff escalated. A White House staffer told Bob Schieffer, CBS News chief White House correspondent, that with this speech the president was going to put his "own stamp" on U.S. foreign policy. Schieffer was also told that there was a movement under way in the White House to replace Kissinger as chairman of the National Security Council.

When the CBS correspondent put the story on the "Evening News," the White House staff proved that they conformed to a domino theory of their own. Kissinger leaned on Nessen, who leaned on a press office assistant named Louis Thompson. In fact, Nessen fired Thompson and let it be known that he considered the leak taken care of. However, Bob Schieffer swears that he did not get the story from Thompson. And Thompson has been quoted as saying Nessen leaked the story himself.

If Nessen was the source, then not only did his firing of Thompson show a lack of candor, but so did his leaking of the story in the first place. For Nessen





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must have known that the story about taking the chairmanship of the NSC away from Kissinger was (1) little more than wishful thinking and (2) several months old.

The talk within the White House about finding a new chairman of the NSC actually reached its zenith last fall. Back then there was even a lobbying effort to secure the job for Elliot Richardson. But even last fall the plotters knew they had little chance of success. The White House was afraid that if the NSC was taken away from Kissinger, he would resign from the government altogether. And everyone knew that Gerald Ford was not prepared to see Kissinger go.

Perhaps the stories were actually leaked *because* the White House staff knew that Ford was not likely to take anything away from Kissinger. Perhaps they thought unflattering stories would prompt Kissinger to leave on his own. After all, the White House staff had gotten rid of Alexander Haig that way. Maybe it would work again.

It didn't work. Kissinger prevailed and even handed Nessen a kind of demotion. The NSC chairman saw to it that the job of briefing the press secretary on NSC matters was transferred from Leslie Jenka, a senior NSC official, to Margaret Vanderhye, an NSC staff assistant. Nessen's access to information had been moved down several pegs.

Ron Nessen reportedly tried to make up with Kissinger by sending him a memo saying he had solved the security problem in the press office. Nessen has denied sending such a memo, but many reporters are not convinced, and have an unpleasant sense of *déjà vu*.

On the day of the evacuation from Saigon, Kissinger held a news conference. After it was over, Kissinger was halfway out the door when a reporter caught up with him and said:

"Ron suggested we ask you why it took so long to get the people out."

Nessen interposed immediately, "I didn't suggest you ask him," although of course he had.

That day America had been totally outmaneuvered in Southeast Asia, but Ron Nessen saw no reason why he should allow himself to be outmaneuvered in the White House. America's role in South Vietnam ended with a flash of pettiness.

When President Ford learned of all the jockeying on his staff, he told his people in no uncertain terms to cut it out. Some reports say he even pounded the table. So Ron Nessen would seem to be trying to reverse his course. The leak has become the plug in the pipe. What the White House needs now is not plumbers but Drano.

Charleston (SC) News & Courier, 11/1/74

Holmes Alexander

Problems For Press Secretaries

PRESIDENT FORD had three press secretaries in less time than Richard Nixon ran through four FBI directors and five attorneys general. There were acting stand-ins (Jack Hushen at the White House and Robert Bork at the Justice Dept.) but untimely rotation in office went on, and there's no certainty that Mr. Ford's current spokesman, Ron Nessen, is there for the duration.

Nobody that I know of is finding fault with Nessen's aptitude and performance. But it's significant that when Ron is criticized, or fails to draw compliments for his work, the reason is that correspondents haven't forgotten his much-admired predecessor, J.F. (Jerry) terHorst.

THIS IS A gross unfairness to Nessen. It reminds me of what happened when George Selkirk trotted out to the Yankee Stadium rightfield wearing Babe Ruth's famous number 3 on the uniform. There was a storm of boos from Ruthville (the bleachers) and the innocent rookie played under an undeserved handicap.

Jerry terHorst, whom White House correspondents considered the nonpareil, had the good luck to follow the unpopular Ron Ziegler and at that lasted only one month. There's no way to know how well Jerry would have worn over the long haul. He left for the highest ethical reasons the day after President Ford pardoned Nixon and hit the chute in descending popularity. We know now that both Jerry and Ron were working for a morning glory, but at different times of the day.

Being a presidential press secretary is a tour of extra-hazardous duty. A person in that position could be a three-time loser. He could flub by lack of ability. He could go down on the sinking ship of a foundering president, which happened to the inoffensive Gerald Warren in the last days of Nixon. He could be stoned out of office by enemies in the press corps, which was the little-lamented fate of Ron Ziegler, another Nixon man.

THE LEGENDARY purity of a Caesar's wife must keep the White House press secretary above a host of suspicions. Does he protect his boss? Does he play favorites among former cronies? Does he treat the mighty publisher and the lowly legman just the same? Inherently, it is a razor's edge job because of the biblical axiom that no man can serve two masters.

This last is discussed in The Quill magazine for professional journalists in an article, "A Clash of Conscience," by Mike Blackman of The New York Times. Less than 48 hours after terHorst had told Blackman "I'd quit" if not allowed total access to the President's decisions, Jerry did exactly that over the question of the Nixon pardon.

In keeping with the complexity of the ethical standards of this job, Jerry had two reasons for resigning. He had inadvertently passed on misinformation to the press, and he disagreed with the President about the pardon. But no sooner had Ron Nessen stepped into the empty shoes than he nullified at least half of terHorst's absolutism. The new press secretary

said he could do the job without agreeing with the President's policies. He also vowed never to mislead the press. This caused Vermont Royster to ask in the Wall Street Journal what Ron would do under circumstances (which often happen in wartime) when absolute truth would put the President's life in jeopardy.

MOST OF THE dilemmas and contradictions of this press secretaryship would be resolved if the post went to somebody not in the news media. The inflexible principles of a terHorst, and the ethics code of the journalists' fraternity, Sigma Delta Chi, publisher of The Quill, would be neatly sidestepped by making a press secretary out of a qualified civil servant.

President Ford considered this "from deep personal hurt" over the terHorst resignation, but was urged not to do so by Robert Hartmann, counsel and confidante. As a former newsman, Hartmann wanted to keep the appointment in the lodge.

These are matters for a Solomon's judgment. A newsman with the ideals of his profession has a short job expectancy in the White House. In the twinkling of a month for terHorst, perhaps a little longer for Nessen, there comes the inevitable clash of conscience.

For a journalist it is too cruel a test. The highest morality would be served, I think, by reserving the post for a loyal liaison officer, and delivering newsmen from temptation. (McNaught Syndicate, Inc.)



1875—A Salute to Jimmy Swinnerton—1974

SEMINAR

A QUARTERLY REVIEW FOR JOURNALISTS BY

 Copley Newspapers



Dec. 1974

Mr. Ford's Press Operation

Indications are information will be far more available than it was during the Nixon era.

THE NEW PRESS operation at the White House is still in transition and does not lend itself to firm judgments on its ultimate worth in transmitting needed information to the American people.

But it is not too early to note some of the pluses and minuses and indicated directions of development under the stewardship of Press Secretary Ron Nessen.

Nessen, 40, was appointed to the job by President Ford on Sept. 20, 1974, and promptly pledged:

"I will never knowingly lie to the White House press corps. I will never knowingly mislead the White House press corps, and, I think, if I ever do, you would be justified in questioning my continued usefulness in this job."

Despite this auspicious vocal start, Nessen had the misfortune of having to take over after President Ford's popular first press secretary, Jerry terHorst resigned Sept. 8. TerHorst felt he could not in good conscience remain, being in fundamental disagreement with Mr. Ford's decision to grant a full pardon to former President Nixon.

The upshot of this was that terHorst's performance during a short 30-day tenure was inevitably compared in favorable terms to that of his predecessor, Mr. Nixon's unpopular press secretary, Ronald Ziegler, while Nessen is being measured against terHorst.

BE THAT AS it may, a new style is slowly emerging in the White House

James Cary is Washington Bureau Chief for Copley News Service. This report was written for SEMINAR in mid-October.

press operation, and presumably it will become more clear-cut as time goes by.

MOST OF the changes are small but useful: The daily press briefing has been advanced from 11 a.m. to a more realistic 11:30 a.m., although briefings frequently do not start until noon or later. The routine White House announcements are being made available early, usually by 11 a.m., rather than being held to clutter up the briefing. Nessen, like terHorst, also is seeing the President on a regularly scheduled daily basis at mid-morning, insuring an opportunity to pin down current White House positions with the top man and transmit them to the press.

So far Ford press conferences also are being held on a fairly regular two to three-week cycle. And Nessen has improved the format by recommending newsmen remain on their feet and get in a follow-up inquiry if not satisfied with the President's initial response.

All these are pluses and in their own way important ones. So, too, apparently, is the improved attitude of White House aides in the wake of the terHorst debacle. The climate that led to his resignation was partly created by his being misled on the imminence of a possible pardon for Nixon—a misdirection he passed on to inquiring White House reporters, and had to apologize for later.

Now, the President and his staff seem more fully apprised that they must be accurate and precise in their dealings with the press secretary if he is to do his job properly.

BUT BEYOND that there are some obvious shortcomings that appear to be directly related to Nessen's newness on the job. He has been forced into a position of having to juggle complex news developments, particularly on the economy, while simultaneously reorganizing his own staff, learning the details of how to prepare himself fully for his daily encounter with newsmen, and fill in gaps in his own knowledge of White House activities.

There are some problems too with his briefing style. He comes across as a bit cocky, has a habit of racing too swiftly through important, newsworthy announcements, and seems addicted to a cryptic, barebones style that leaves information gaps unfilled. This may be a carryover from his preceeding 12 years as an NBC newsmen, a form of reporting in which all the facts of a



news development must be compressed into small fragments of time.

The result has been a constant bombardment of appeals to slow down and repeat important points, plus at least one major dust-off with newsmen over courier flights carrying briefing materials to former President Nixon and the detailing of White House-paid staffers to work with Mr. Nixon on transition problems.

It would be patently unfair to make too much of these irritations at such an early date, or to lapse too much into comparisons between the Nessen and terHorst styles. TerHorst was an affable, able, low key and highly principled professional newsmen. But his 30-day stint as press secretary was not hurt at all by the fact that it was conducted entirely during the honeymoon period for the Ford Administration.

When that ended abruptly with the pardoning of Mr. Nixon on Sept. 8, terHorst stepped down. Nessen, in the meantime, has had to make his way in the far more contentious climate of the post-pardon period.

Besides, experience would indicate that terHorst's popularity almost certainly would have subsided somewhat as the more normal state of friction and adversary relationship took over between press and White House. Certainly the more argumentative, almost hostile-type questioning of the former Nixon-Watergate period is reappearing more frequently already, indicating it was never very far beneath the surface.

NESSEN COMES across as an able man who seriously wants to do a good job and has at least some of the major attributes required to do so—intelligence, good professional news background, and a willingness to put in the savagely long hours the job demands.

But he has yet to demonstrate he has that rare type of journalistic mind that quickly and easily fits today's topical events into the vast background of past world and national affairs, that he can dredge up the essential elements of that background quickly for newsmen, and can surround the event itself with related topical developments

elsewhere in the government.

There have been such secretaries. Andrew Berding at the State Department during the tenure of Secretary of State John Foster Dulles was one. More recently Robert McCloskey at State was cut from much the same cloth. James Hagerty, press secretary to President Eisenhower, had an enviable reputation of being able to do the same. And Bill Moyers, press secretary to the late President Lyndon Johnson, was always amazing in his ability to field complex questions, address them within the limits his job permitted, yet provide newsmen with worthwhile information associated with, if not directly targeted on, their question.

In truth the White House press post is one of the most demanding and difficult jobs in government. For the most part it is a no-win proposition. The

secretary must serve two masters, both the President and the press. He has responsibilities to both and those responsibilities are as often in conflict as in harmony.

It is the knife edge in between he must traverse constantly. But Nessen has at least a number of things going for him. Mr. Ford has pledged an open administration. So far the indications are information will be far more available than it was during the Nixon Administration. The President too has recognized early the absolute necessity of making himself available to the press secretary. And he has transmitted that concept of reasonable access to other officials in his administration.

So at least there has been movement, an improvement in climate. And, so far, reasonably honest effort. All the rest is yet to come.

Benjamin Shore

News Leaks Are Not New

Leaks are motivated by a variety of reasons, some innocent, some with sinister connotations.

WASHINGTON—News leaks always have been an essential ingredient of aggressive journalism in this city. In their most innocent form, leaks have been called tips; when the leak had a grand and noble national purpose, it was called a trial balloon, an anonymous thought sent floating over Washington to see who shoots at it before it becomes official policy.

But in recent years, the word "leak" has taken on a more sinister connotation. Now it means furtively slipping to the press selected official opinions and documents designed to affect the course of legislation or political campaigns—or impeachment proceedings. Leaks are motivated by a wide variety of reasons.

Daniel Ellsberg said he was answering a higher purpose when he "leaked" the Pentagon Papers to the press; the White House set in motion the burglary of Ellsberg's psychiatrist's office hoping to find embarrassing medical information which it could then leak to the press to discredit Ellsberg.

And in those transcripts one can read Nixon's own suggestions that certain FBI and secret grand jury information be leaked to the press to damage the reputations of some well-known Democrats.

Many of the documents leaked out of the ostensibly secret Senate Watergate Committee focused attention on the use of the press leak by White House political operatives.

YET SEVERAL White House spokesmen—Deputy Press Secretary Gerald

Benjamin Shore is a member of the staff of the Copley News Service Washington Bureau.

R. W. Press

January 1975

Nessen's Credibility Slumps

By Lee Winfrey
Knight Newspapers Writer

Ron Nessen began work as President Ford's press secretary with a promise that he would not be like Ron Ziegler, who performed the same job for President Nixon. The promise, however, no longer seems to be operative.

Television newsmen are growing increasingly disillusioned with Nessen. In two major areas, keeping them fully informed and helping them get the news onto the air, they say Nessen is letting them down.

In a talk to 45 television writers in Los Angeles, ABC White House Correspondent Tom Jarriel spoke at some length about "a decline in Nessen's credibility." That means, in the wordy way they speak in Washington, that people don't believe so much in Nessen anymore.

In Washington, some things never seem to change. Newsmen always think a presidential press secretary's purpose is to provide them with honest information. Most presidents, however, use their press secretary as a propaganda instrument, a mouthpiece to put a pro-administration slant on the news.

Jarriel mentioned a case which Nessen deliberately did not read a 50-page report submitted to the White House about the central Intelligence Agency spying on American citizens. By remaining ignorant of the report, said Jarriel, Nessen was then able to avoid answering any newsmen's questions about it.

Ron Ziegler's press briefings were often on a level with the spiels he used to put forth in his youth as a Disneyland guide on the jungle boat tour. But he did have one virtue: mechanically, he knew how to help newsmen get their work done. Nessen, according to Jarriel, is not even doing that.

"We wanted a film crew on Air Force One," Jarriel related. "That's three men. Nessen put a three-man team on, then he bumped the electrician."

Obviously Nessen, who was formerly a TV newsman, must know that an electrician is an indispensable part of a film crew.

"When he took the job," Jarriel said of his old TV news colleague, "we were hopeful. Now the old, warm, Ron-and-Tom relationship is slipping into a more formal, Mr. Nessen-Mr. Jarriel relationship."

A front-page article in the Jan. 22 issue of *Variety*, the show business weekly, makes clear that it is not only ABC that is having its problems

with ex-NBC newsman Nessen. CBS is also running into friction.

Variety mentioned a press briefing at President Ford's skiing retreat in Colorado during the Christmas holidays when CBS White House Correspondent Phil Jones chuckled at something he thought was funny.

Nessen promptly snapped at Jones. "Phil, how would you answer that question if you were press secretary — a job you would dearly love to have?"

I personally don't see why Jones or anyone else would want the presidential press secretary's job. Except for the late and unlamented Vietnam War, it seems like the world's worst no-win situation.



THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

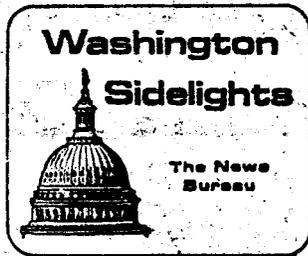
FROM: ANNE SWANSON
News Summary

FYI



Bill

Thursday, January 9, 1975



Behind the Times

WASHINGTON, Jan. 9 — President Ford was demoted by his press secretary last week.

Ron Nessen was announcing the President's schedule for the day and said that at 3 PM he would meet with "Vice President Ford."

The red-faced Nessen hastily corrected himself and said he meant Vice President Rockefeller.

'Vindictiveness' Toward Nixon Decried

BY KENNETH REICH
and HOWARD SEELYE

Times Staff Writers

SAN CLEMENTE—Declaring that he is "fed up with Richard Nixon taking it in the ear," Ronald Ziegler, in a two-hour interview here, has denounced what he termed the "vindictiveness of some in Congress and some in the Ford White House" toward the former President.

"I feel very strongly that what is happening to this man today—despite Watergate—is not right," Ziegler said in the first lengthy, on-the-record interview he has given since Mr. Nixon resigned on Aug. 9.

The 35-year-old former White House press secretary, who is about to leave his post as Mr. Nixon's chief of staff at his San Clemente estate here, characterized as absurd White House statements last week about billing Mr. Nixon \$8,440 for the part of his flight to California in Air Force One that occurred after the hour of his resignation.

And he said he was appalled that White House aides and other members of the federal bureaucracy had been refusing to forward Mr. Nixon's mail and such personal property as political memorabilia and even high school papers despite five months of efforts to obtain them.

The withholding of the former President's personal papers raises serious constitutional questions, Ziegler said, and he added that "what is happening to Richard Nixon as a human being" as a result of such treatment was "very serious."

"The fact that he has survived this period to me is remarkable," the former press secretary said.

"What severity of penalty does this society want from a leader? You know, he resigned in disgrace. He is certainly a beaten man . . .

"If society wants to put him in a cell, there is a cell out there (at the estate)," Ziegler added in the Friday afternoon interview at the San Clemente Inn. "Have you seen the size of his office? What more is wanted?"

The White House refused Saturday to comment on Ziegler's remarks.

Ziegler discussed his own plans for a nationwide speaking tour to colleges, universities and business groups beginning late in February. He has signed up with W. Colston Leigh, Inc., of New York, one of the



Ronald Ziegler

country's largest lecture firms. A New York source reported last week that his fee would be \$2,500 an appearance.

He described himself as entering a "recycling period," during which he will visit San Clemente frequently to "be a friend to this man (Mr. Nixon) or help him in any way I can." Ziegler said he planned to speak very frankly of his experiences "as a young man who became involved in government, was close to great power and was involved with a man who resigned."

He said he would welcome questions from audiences, particularly from students, at every stop "because I want to know what people have on their minds, what they feel about Richard Nixon, what they think of me, what they think about his administration."

However, Ziegler emphasized mainly the conditions of what he termed Mr. Nixon's exile in San Clemente.

"It's the first American political exile—self-imposed, certainly self-imposed, but certainly exile," he said. "You only have to be here to sense it is exile—the abandonment by friends, the isolation, the vindictiveness of some in Washington, including some in Congress and some in the Ford White House."

Ziegler pointedly exempted one of President Ford's aides, former Rep. John O. Marsh Jr., from criticism, say-

ing that Marsh and an unnamed assistant had been "extremely cooperative" in trying to work out Mr. Nixon's problems with property stored at the White House.

But he said many White House aides were not being cooperative, and he said members of the federal bureaucracy who "fell over themselves" installing all sorts of equipment and conveniences at San Clemente when Mr. Nixon was President were now "unbelievably" eager to proceed with dismantling everything.

Ziegler said he did not believe that Mr. Ford knew about the way Mr. Nixon was being treated. He said he thought Mr. Ford, who was reported to have called to wish Mr. Nixon a happy 62nd birthday last week, had telephoned Mr. Nixon only three times since his resignation.

Ziegler appeared particularly angry at the attitude of Ron Nessen, the present White House press secretary. It was Nessen who said on Friday that \$8,440 would be billed to Mr. Nixon's transition budget for the flight in Air Force One from a point near Jefferson City, Mo. Mr. Nixon's plane was over that city when his resignation became effective.

"For anybody in the White House to say that Richard Nixon should pay for his flight from Jefferson City, Mo. to San Clemente, Calif., it's absurd," Ziegler said. "It would seem to me that any rational mind would say, 'Well, of course not.' Yet, it is suggested. It is unbelievable!"

"He was President when he left Washington. What was he going to do—alight in Jefferson City, Mo., and make his way out here by train?"

As for reports from Washington that Mr. Nixon had overspent his transitional budget, Ziegler said that for months the former President and his staff did not know what the

Please Turn to Pt. 1-A, Pg. 6

CIA ANALYZED IN OPINION SECTION

What should be done about the Central Intelligence Agency in light of recent allegations that it illegally spied on U.S. citizens at home? Three writers—a U.S. senator, a former CIA agent and the author of a best-selling book about the CIA—give their views on Page 5 of today's Opinion Section.

ditions recommended a million.

A cutback of the size the Administration and United States and nations to make a "correction" economically, but be large enough to drop in world oil prices concluded.

"The United States—the non-Communist—most serious economic depression of the 19's said. "If strong policies immediately adopted, this curbs the economic for non-Communist world our democratic form of

Sen. Frank Church man of the subcommittee imports should be "curbly imposing import quantity of foreign crude oil taxes or tax age consumption.

The Administration yet announced detail proposals, is widely leaning toward the approach.

The subcommittee-datory limits on oil have to be accompanied allocation program distributable and economic impact.

Church said gasoline bably would be subcommittee's str

Air For General

WASHINGTON (AP)—has recommended dynamics Corp.'s YF-16 new lightweight jet f the richest military ai on record, military s urday.

The Air Force's ch ed as the climax nea sive three-year comp Texas-based General the Los Angeles-b Corp., builder of the Y

The final decision is of Defense James R. expected to be annou

The Air Force and partment refused to reports that the YF- Force's choice.

ZIEGLER DECRIES 'VINDICTIVENESS'

Continued from First Page.

budget was, because it had not been set, and they were going by past—and, as it turned out, more generous—examples.

Now, he complained, White House spokesmen are listing as Nixon staff expenditures costs that relate to federal agents who are at San Clemente to dismantle and cart away government equipment there.

All he wants is for the White House press staff to state the facts and not "pontificate," Ziegler said.

"You don't even get your mail," he went on, saying that among the mail not forwarded from the White House was his own Carte Blanche membership bill.

Because he had not received the bill, Ziegler said, he could not pay it, and he was embarrassed when he proffered the card in a business establishment and was notified it had been canceled.

Ziegler said that Mr. Nixon had incurred large legal costs as a result of having his lawyers negotiate with the White House and remarked, "Richard Nixon has to pay lawyers in order to get his mail sent out."

The former President "knows he can't allow such treatment to get to him," Ziegler said.

"But this process is getting to me,

not in a bitter way, but just that it's not right."

The former press secretary expressed particular annoyance with legislation passed by Congress and signed by President Ford that deprived Mr. Nixon of papers and tape recordings he collected when he was President.

"Read the legislation," he suggested to his interviewers. "Just read the legislation. Consider the precedents that could be set for our democracy, what they are doing to the executive branch."

"My point comes to this: if the private notes of Richard Nixon's conversations with Mao Tse-tung or his notes to world leaders, if they should be made public, then Sen. (Sam J.) Ervin's conversations with (Watergate committee attorney) Sam Dash and the private discussions of Sen. (Lowell P.) Weicker with his staff should be made public, too."

What is involved essentially, Ziegler asserted, "is not Watergate-related stuff."

"It's his personal property, and he's been trying for five months to get it."

"No, it is not right," he went on. "Why hasn't it been shipped? It's been sorted."

Ziegler's replies, direct during most of the interview, were somewhat

vague when the discussion turned to whether Mr. Nixon would make any further statement about Watergate to the American people.

When asked about his own reported comment—at the time a Nixon statement responding to President Ford's pardon was being drafted last September—that "contrition is bullshit," Ziegler said he resented the fact that the remark he made privately to an aide had been so widely quoted.

"It's not reflective of what I feel," Ziegler said. "It's reflective of a passing comment in a private conversation to a trusted aide in a particular set of circumstances."

"I don't think contrition is bullshit," he said.

Ziegler did not extensively discuss Mr. Nixon's health. He indicated he believed the former President was "slowly recovering" from phlebitis attacks and an operation, and said it was a "misnomer" to say, as Rabbi Baruch Korff did Thursday, that Mr. Nixon was working on his memoirs at this point.

When the book is written, Ziegler said, it will be "a very important piece of history—not a book justifying him, but a very, very important book."

As for his own plans, Ziegler said he had had job offers but that he was

eager to make the public speaking tour as a sort of transition from full-time service to Mr. Nixon to a per-

manent new career. He refused to discuss specific offers.

As for his ties with Mr. Nixon, Ziegler said, "I'll be around. I'll be in and out. I don't think he plans to replace me. I don't think he has to replace me."

"I'm recycling," Ziegler said. "I now have to dial a telephone and pick up my own luggage at the airport, drive a car, for the first time in 5½ years, and now I want to get out and talk to people."

Ziegler said he would begin his speaking tour at two Southern universities, then go to a large university in the Midwest and then appear in the East. He asked that specific

places and dates not be mentioned. He said he had "not the slightest idea" what kind of reception he would get.

As for his reported \$2,000 honorarium fee, Ziegler said he did not know how much he would be paid. When asked if the figure was accurate, he replied, "Well, I hope it is."

"If Art Buchwald and Hugh Sidey (of Time magazine) can go out and feel they've got something to say, I can," he asserted.

He said he had not completely formulated what he would say, but added, "I'm not going to do what others have done, go out and cut people up." He said he would speak about Mr. Nixon's "exile" but not as a spokesman for the former President. Ziegler said he did not intend to

speak specifically about Watergate, although he expected it to come up in question periods and that he was prepared to answer such questions.

Ziegler, who arrived for the interview on a motorcycle and was dressed casually in a white knit sweater and work pants, looked fit. His hair is long enough to have developed a few curls.

He said that since September his wife and two daughters had been living at the permanent Ziegler home in Alexandria, Va., and he had been staying in San Clemente on a government allowance and flying east to see them every three weeks. He said he and his wife had wanted to keep the children in their regular school.

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you can't do it if you don't have the mail

Ron Nessen — Is He Fading With D.C. Newsmen?

Washington, Jan. 21

Former NBC correspondent Ron Nessen is beginning to receive sour notices from his latest role as White House press chief. Upshot appears to be a general decline in press relations all too reminiscent of his predecessor Ron Ziegler, regular scribes at the Executive Mansion contend.

Indicative of the changing atmosphere is the level of verbal pans from ringsiders at Nessen's daily press briefings. It turns out the secretary likens himself to a stand-up comic during the affairs, but a steady flotilla of sorry one-liners

(Continued on page 90)

Ron Nessen

(Continued from page 1)

goes over like a mimic between acts at a strip show. Audience is too primed for the main event to be amused.

No laughing matter, either, is the general decline in efficiency that Nessen's tenure has brought to day to day press office operations, long-timers say. During President Ford's recent globetrotting forays, for example, members of the press staff were not available when needed, basic queries went unanswered, and advance texts were not delivered before Presidential addresses. "With all the faults of Ziegler, at least his shop ran smoothly," grunted one seasoned White House newsman.

Friction With CBS?

Tales are also beginning to surface about tensions between the former White House broadcaster and his erstwhile colleagues, particularly with CBS newsmen. One verified account tells how, during shooting of an upcoming "60 Minutes" seg on White House protocol chief Henry Cato, CBS correspondent Phil Jones sought permission from Nessen to film Cato privately with the Fords before a state dinner.

But with the dinner upon him and the calls unanswered, Jones tried an end run by personally asking permission for the footage from First Lady Betty Ford — a personal friend from her husband's days as Veep. Betty Ford gladly okayed the idea, even to the point of having the camera crew escorted upstairs herself. But when the tactic became known to the press secretary, all other special shots of the evening's affair previously granted the web were cancelled.

Here's another run-in between Nessen and Jones: During a press briefing at President Ford's Christmas retreat, Nessen underwent a grilling from a newspaper reporter looking for specifics for a story. The situation was apparently humorous to Jones who was quietly chuckling from the front row. But not quietly enough for Nessen who interrupted with, "Phil, how would you answer that question if you were press secretary — a job you would dearly love to have?"

While Jones and his web brethren

Wednesday, January 22, 1975

are having their difficulties with the current press chief, they have apparently not been singled out for persecution. Even NBC White House correspondent Tom Brokaw is having troubles with his former colleague, insiders say.

"It's sad to see this so soon after Ford has taken office," lamented one broadcaster who soberly contends that Nessen is discouraging good press for his boss. "The Ford honeymoon could be pieced together with good press relations."



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Mr. Ron Nessen
The White House
Washington, D.C.

January 29, 1974

Dear Ron:

I'm still a little puzzled by your behavior the other day. But
no need to explain. I understand.

Yours cordially,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lloyd Grove".

Lloyd Grove
Editor

Getting Even— With Ron Nessen

by Lloyd Grove

"I hope the White House Press Corps is ready for another Ron. I am a Ron, but not a Ziegler, I can tell you that. Uh, I do want to say a couple of things. One is, I will never knowingly lie to the White House Press Corps. I think that if I ever do, you will be justified in questioning my continued usefulness in this job. My concept of this job is that a press secretary does not always have to agree with the decisions of the President. I think the press secretary's job is to report to you the actions of the President, why he has taken the action, how he has arrived at the action. Obviously, the press secretary needs to know what is going on to do that job; and I have been assured that I will know what is going on."

—Ron Nessen
September 20, 1974

An old Italian named Joe crouches behind the desk of Les Crystal, Executive Producer of NBC Nightly News, snapping his rag across Gucci shoe leather. For years, he's been making a fortune polishing the shoes of NBC executives. Rumor has it that Joe drives an Eldorado

to Rockefeller Center and goes up to the fifth floor washroom to change from his silk suit into the gray work-clothes he wears in the newsroom. He finishes one shoe and Crystal offers the other.

"I wouldn't necessarily call Ron's career here distinguished," he says, "but I'd call him a good reporter. He's only 40 years old and it's hard to tell where he would have gone had he stayed at NBC."

When the second shoe is done, Crystal drops some change into Joe's polish-blackened hand.

"Where's the Chancellor? Is he here today?"

"I think he's outside," says Crystal, and Joe goes to look for him.

"Listen," says Crystal, pulling his yellow legal pad across the desk and ripping out a sheet. "Let me show you something about the broadcasting business." He draws three horizontal lines.

"First, you have your superstar category—people like Cronkite, Reasoner, and Chancellor. I'll put two stars by their names.

"Then, you have the star category—Morley Safer, Eric Severeld, Tom Brokaw, Ed Newman, people like that. I'll draw one star.

"And now we have what I'll call the Number One category—Carl Stern, Bob Goralaski, Robert Pierpoint. Ron Nessen was in this category. Below that, you have the Number Two category, which I won't go into.

"Now the real money," he says, tapping the area designated by one star, "doesn't start until you get here. The Number Ones make between thirty and forty thousand a year, and the Number Twos make around twenty."

Nessen was assigned to Gerald Ford during the nine months he was Vice President, and I ask Crystal what he thought of his coverage.

"Ron's reporting was accurate, solid, tough—he called the situation the way he saw it, and he saw it very well. He didn't soft-pedal any of the times that Ford may have been taking a position that was obviously apart from Nixon.

"It's not necessarily correct to say that Ford liked Ron because he was soft on Ford, easy on him. And anyway, should we consider 'hard' as right, and being 'soft' as wrong? But obviously, Ford is a very nice, very social guy. He was friendly with all the reporters." Crystal holds his hands open-palmed above his desk. "I mean, I had lunch with the

President last week, and he's really a regular, down-to-earth guy."

Billy Boyle is a film editor at Nightly News, whose way of saying hello is "Hi there, goddamn fucking sonofabitch!" He tells me that "Ron was an easy guy to work with—self-effacing, unassuming as any reporter on TV."

"What do you mean by that?" I ask him.

"Most of them are a crock of shit," he says.

Nessen's becoming Press Secretary did not shock Boyle. "Two years ago," he says, "Ron was getting itchy and wanted to go to Hong Kong. In fact, he was all ready to go when he got the Ford beat.

"Last summer, I asked him if he was still planning to go to Hong Kong, and he told me, 'I've got too much invested in Ford to give up now.'"

I talk with another man who tells me, "It was apparent that Ron wasn't going to go any further here at NBC—he never told me this, but I suppose he knew it—so I think taking the new job was the most sensible thing he could have done. I'm happy for him—press secretaries have a habit of being very successful after leaving the job. The contacts are invaluable."

Douglas Kiker works for NBC News out of Washington. He opens a pay envelope in his modest office, and winces.

"Goddamn," he says, showing the check back in the envelope. "They're takin' more and more out every time."

Kiker worked with Nessen during the Johnson Administration, and describes him as "a good friend of mine." I ask him if it's true, as I'd read in the papers, that Nessen loses his temper easily. Kiker nods, and I ask for examples.

He expels a puff of smoke, hesitates, and says, "Alright. The best example of Nessen's hot temper that I know of was one day when he got into an argument with a desk man here at NBC over one paragraph in a script for the five-minute eight o'clock radio news, which Ron did mornings.

"The desk man, who nobody liked, and is long since gone, was arguin' with Ron about this paragraph. He was wrong. Nessen was right. He was one of these people who could irritate you about almost anything. He could say 'Good morning' and he'd irritate you.

"Ron was going on the air at eight o'clock, and they were arguin' at thirty seconds until eight, when Ron took his script and said, 'Why don't you take it and jafn it up your ass?' and threw the script in his face.

"And then suddenly he looked down at the paper lyin' all over the floor. The clock was then at twenty seconds till eight, and he got down on his hands and knees pickin' all the stuff up, tryin' to get in the booth and start broadcastin'. Now, I think he got the first two pages, or page three and four, and they gathered up all the rest and sort of handed it to him. So he has a temper."

Kiker rarely stops for questions. "I guess I'm rambling," he says, "but what the hell?" He puts out his cigarette and says, "This town is filled with people who belong to somebody. And I don't mean belong to an individual, but to a camp, to the McGovern Camp, to the Southern Conservative Camp. I'm talking, now, about Washington journalists. Ron's not somebody's guy, never has been."

Kiker continues: "The reason Ford was attracted to Ron was the reason, I think, that he has so many friends here. He is a genuinely sweet, compassionate guy. With a good sense of humor, a willingness to stay out on the job without any bitching, even if it takes all night. A hard-working guy.

"His reputation at NBC was excellent



White House Official Photo

because of that. Well-liked here. But he is in no way in any contact with us. We have no special relationship with him. I suppose that if I called the White House—and I never have since he became Press Secretary—if I called the white house, and gave my name, I'd speak to him quicker than somebody from the Oshkosh Daily Journal."

Kiker tells me he hasn't spoken with Nessen in six months.

The White House briefing room is carpeted in dull yellow, and, as everyone knows, is exactly the size of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's therapeutic swimming pool. If you stomp on the floor hard enough, the huge air pocket below reverberates. The room itself is appointed with a few dark wood tables, and several chairs and sofas, upholstered in green leather. Behind the podium from which the Press Secretary delivers his daily briefing, is a light blue curtain which hides a bizarre network of buttons, switches, flashing red lights, and a telephone.

On a typical day, the briefing room functions as such for about 45 minutes. The rest of the time, it serves as lounge, casino, cafeteria, or just a place where a weary White House correspondent can fall asleep. One Saturday morning in January, I walked into the briefing room and found three TV technicians and two reporters for large daily newspapers, waiting for Gerald Ford to return from his annual checkup at Bethesda Naval Hospital. The reporters, and two of the technicians, had switched on the Zenith color TV, and were thoroughly engrossed in the cartoonversion of "Star Trek." The next program was another space-age cartoon, "The Jetsons." Then came a movie, about a returned hero who goes insane and thinks he kills his wife ("Steve, Steve! You've finally come back!") Mother, mother! I'm home for good!") They watched that, too.

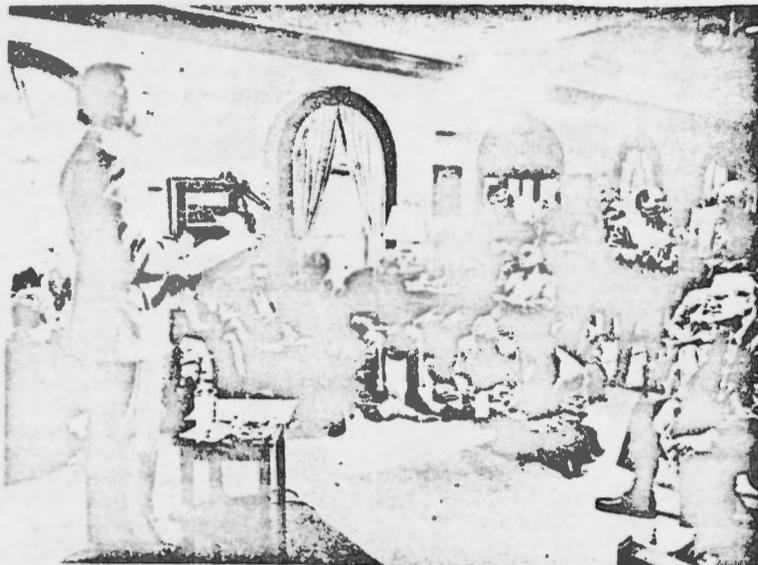
All except an NBC News cameraman named Montague. Montague was sitting at a table, reading through an electronics manual, and occasionally singing Edith Piaf songs. Once in a while, NBC's backup White House correspondent, John Cochran, would walk by (in transit from his booth to the press office) and Montague would look at him and curse to himself in French: "Pis on lit!" ("One who pisses in his bed!") Cochran had kept Montague waiting all day to do his "stand-upper" on the President's health. "Jesus!" Montague said as soon as Cochran disappeared. "He's been on the phone to New York for half an hour, screwing around. He thinks I have nothing better to do than hang around here? You should have seen the argument we had yesterday!"

At one point, Rogers Morton, the Secretary of the Interior, stepped in with his brother Thurston. "Hi there, gentlemen," Rogers said, "are you all pensioners around here?" One of the reporters stood up to shake hands with the Morton brothers, and when they left, said thoughtfully "I guess Thurston hasn't been drinking that much lately."

He looked communicative, so I walked over and asked him why I hadn't been able to find a cigarette machine either in the wire room off the TV and newspaper area, or in the basement, which houses the magazine and radio people.

"Well," he said, "we used to be able to get cigarettes from the White House mess back in the Kennedy Administration. In fact, we used to be able to go down there and have lunch. But then—I think it was early Johnson—a reporter wandered around the offices chatting with staff people, and wrote up a story. The next day they kicked us all out."

"After that, a guy from the press office



White House Official Photo

would go for cigarettes and sandwiches, but they cut that out, too. Then, when Nixon came in, they moved us out here over the swimming pool, and here we are."

"But why can't they just put a cigarette machine somewhere?" I said.

"I don't know," he told me, and that was the end of our conversation.

A young staff man from Jack Hushen's office—Hushen is the Deputy Press Secretary—came out to hand the six of us a release on the President's health. He continued passing it out in the TV-Newspaper area, to the few correspondents who had just come back from the hospital. The release, headlined STATEMENT BY DR. WILLIAM M. LUKASH, PHYSICIAN TO THE PRESIDENT, read: "As a result of President Ford's annual physical examination this morning, I am happy to report he is in excellent health. The results of all medical tests were normal in every way."

The newspapermen took the release to their typewriters, but the technicians crumbled it. About twenty minutes later, the press office declared a "lid"—no more news, period. As the two white stars above the press office door began to flash, a wire service reporter smiled and said, "Thank God." She could go home

I couldn't go home, however. For the past three hours I'd been waiting for Ron Nessen, who had promised me a "Behind-the-scenes" look at his news operation the day before.

Phil Jones, a backup correspondent for CBS, chews on the plastic bit of his French cherrywood pipe. His pudgy, mid-American face tenses in a wooden smile. I've just asked him what he thinks of Ford's new Press Secretary.



White House Official Photo

Jones is well acquainted with Nessen. As his counterpart at CBS, Jones also travelled with the Vice President. Like Nessen, he became friendly with Ford during the nine months on Air Force Two. Unlike Nessen, he is not the Press Secretary.

Nessen reminded him of this at a public briefing last month in Vale, Colorado, and Jones exploded. Nessen was being grilled intensely on the possible appointment of John Robson, a man with apparent connections to the St. Louis Metropolitan Authority, to Secretary of Transportation. Nessen saw that Jones was obviously enjoying the interrogation, and turned on him:

NESSEN: Phil, how would you answer that question if you were the Press Secretary—which you would dearly love to be.

JONES: What do you mean by that, Ron?

NESSEN: I mean that we have answered all questions on all appointments in the same way.

JONES: I am not talking about that. I am talking about the last remark you made.

NESSEN: That was an example of my sense of humor I suppose.

JONES: I would like some explanation of it.

NESSEN: Gene, do you have a question?

Jones is at first reluctant to answer my questions. But then his face takes on the happy glow of approaching catharsis. Bob Schieffer, who is sitting with us in the CBS press booth, grins and shakes his head. Earlier, Schieffer had told me had nothing to say on the subject.

Later in the day I go up to Jones on the White House lawn to check what he said to me in the morning. "Phil," I ask, "just to clear up one thing—was what you told

me this morning off the record?"

Jones takes out his pipe. "Say that I'm not involved in the machinations of the press office, because they have little to do with my job."

Then he repeats what he said to me in the press booth.

"Listen, I don't want to get into a pissing match with this guy, because he ain't worth it. What's Ron Nessen? He's nothing. Always was, and always will be. He's a schmuck."

When Nessen held a reunion of the "Air Force Two Gang" at his home in Bethesda last August, Jones and his wife were invited. So was the President, who showed up. So were John Chancellor, Les Crystal, and Tom Brokaw (NBC's White House correspondent), who also showed. Because the President attended, the party received national attention. When Jones arrived and saw the three "outsiders" from NBC (Brokaw had never even met Ford), he was furious. He saw himself in a difficult position with executives at CBS, who were not invited, and thereby missed meeting Ford. After all, if Ron Nessen can get the President at his house, why can't Phil Jones? Jones turned to his wife and said, "Let's get out of here" Friends who saw what was going on, however, persuaded him to stay.

"It wasn't unusual for the people covering Ford to have parties for him," says Brokaw over the phone. "And Ron had the party at his house. And in addition to the Vice-Presidential people he also invited some NBC people—Crystal, Chancellor, and me. That, as far as I'm concerned, is Ron's prerogative.

"The three of us—the 'outsiders' so to speak—adhered to the rules. That is it was an off-the-record, good-time only party. Because it was in Ron's house, I suppose, it did give NBC an opportunity to introduce to the President some of the people involved in the daily news programs.

"I personally think that Phil attributed to Ron some wrong motives there. But let me tell you something quite honestly. The fact is, Phil recently had the President at a reunion of the old Vice-Presidential crowd, in Vale. Nor does he have reservations about calling the President on New Year's Eve, for instance, to wish him Happy New Year. It all strikes me as sophomoric.

"I say that only in response to those two incidents. I happen to like Phil. I think that he's a good reporter. But I also think that this whole thing has gone on a little too long."

Bob Hagan wrote one-liners for Sargent Shriver during his 1972 Vice-Presidential campaign, which NBC assigned Nessen to cover.

"I remember once being holed up in Peoria with Ron and Liz Peer of Newsweek," Hagan says. "The three of us missed the bus that was going from one activity to the next, and we decided to have a cup of coffee. So we went to a cafe and talked about the Nixon Administration's attack on freedom of the press.

"I said to Ron, 'Gee, I'd like to have your peace of mind—you don't seem to worry about it.' And he said, 'Well, it'll be fun to be around to see it.' And I said, 'You might be the victim of it.' And it didn't seem to bother him too much."

Although Peer remembers Nessen as "a guy with a great sense of merriment, a great sense of humor," Hagan says, "When you're together eight weeks, you get into a certain spirit, and I don't think Ron ever joined in. Sure, some of us acted almost like fools. But I don't remember Ron ever losing a certain stiffness. Other people might call it

(continued on page 22)

Nessen (continued from page 5)

"composure." I thought he was a little aloof.

"Every once in a while," says Hagan, "you run into somebody who thinks he's above everyone else. I didn't think Ron was as conscientious as the others who covered the campaign. I thought he felt, 'So there wasn't that much of a chance—why give it a real go?'"

Hagan last saw Nessen while watching a televised Presidential Press conference recently. "The President moved away from the podium to leave," he says, "and I saw Nessen skip around someone and move rather quickly, and I thought, 'Gee, that looks unnatural to me.' I never saw him move with that much enthusiasm or energy."

Sarah McClendon writes for a string of small newspapers in Texas, and is hardly a White House regular. But she does show up at the daily briefings more often than Nessen would like. As she begins to question him on Friday, there is a hint of irritation in his voice. Soon, it is apparent to everyone up front that Nessen is shouting, "now," he begins, "the President and all officials of the government take an oath to uphold, defend, and protect the Constitution and the country, and when it comes to a question of the United States dying, he indicated last night, that he would feel it was his obligation to take some action."

"Now, this is my point," McClendon breaks in. "This is going beyond defense. Those other previous Presidents—"

"It does go beyond defense, Sarah. It goes—"

"It says in the Constitution—"

"Sarah, do you want an answer, or do you want—"

"Well, I want to explain my point before you interrupt me."

As the two try to overpower one another—one leaning into his microphone, the other clutching the chair arms—Phil Jones smiles. A newspaperman on my right turns to him and observes, "He's getting close. He's getting close." As Nessen tries to control himself, McClendon says, "I want to tell you, this is different from just defense."

"It certainly is," says Nessen more calmly. "It is survival."
"Everyone is waiting for him to completely lose his senses," a correspondent tells me after the briefing "What we really expect to see is Ron hurl his glass of water at a Heavy, say, Peter Lisagor (bureau chief of the Chicago Daily News). Then it will be all over." He does not state it so much as hope, but as fact.

"It's the little things that kill you in that job," he continues. "Ron is doing himself in. I don't think a question exists which merits a press secretary losing his cool."

"I'd say I know Ron pretty well," he tells me, "and he seems to be the type of guy who always thought he was two cuts above what he was actually doing. And now that he's achieved some success, he looks down on everyone."

Once while leaving a briefing to attend a black tie state dinner, Nessen looked back at his former colleagues and remarked, "To think that I was once one of these jerks."

"I kinda like the give and take out there," Nessen tells me in his office. It is quite an office—twenty-foot ceiling, unreplace, big view of the White House lawn, Presidential Seal matchbooks. We

sit in a far corner, bending over a coffee table. He draws a diagram of the White House press operation.

"Let's see," he says. "I'm the Press Secretary, Decair runs Special Projects, Hushen is under me, and Speakes, Roberts, Savage, and Carlson are assistant press secretaries."

He continues down the hierarchy and ends, saying, "I'm up here."

Nessen hands me the diagram, and I put it away. "Here," he says, "why don't you take this briefing transcript with you, too. I suggest you go through it and see how many questions actually solicit information (Transcripts aren't allowed to leave the White House, but Nessen has made an exception in my case)."

"And take this, too." He hands me a copy of the President's Daily News Summary. I've never seen one before, so I study it before I put it away.

"Before I took this job," he says, "I told Ford I didn't want to be his salesman, and he said, 'Ron, if I can't sell my programs to the people, neither can you.' That sounded all right to me."

Nessen tells me he is more than just a Press Secretary—he is a senior adviser to the President. "You mean you advise him on matters of policy?" I ask.

"Yes, I do," he says.
Jack Hushen and his perpetual smile appear in the door. He and Nessen discuss whether or not to issue a callback on an incorrect statement Nessen made about "Jack" Chancellor earlier that afternoon. "No, I don't think so," Nessen says. "It'll make too big a deal out of it. We can take care of that on Monday, no problem."

"Well," says Hushen, "Brokaw's out there telling everyone now."

"Then that takes care of it," Nessen says. Hushen laughs. "Yeah, that's right," he says.

"Listen Ron," I say. "It's good chatting with you about your job, but I'd really like to see how you do it. I wonder if I could follow you around back-stage, you know, following any ground rules that you set up."

Nessen is quick with his answer. "Okay," he says, "it's all right with me, but I have to ask my staff people and Don Rumsfeld (White House Chief of Staff) if you want to do it Monday."

"How about tomorrow?" I ask.
"Well, there's really nothing going on tomorrow, but I guess there would be nothing wrong with watching Dr. Lukash and me putting out a press release on the President's physical, so you could see how that's done."

"That sounds good," I say.
"Then be at the White House about eleven, Lloyd," Nessen says. He goes to the phone and tells his secretary that he'll see Newsweek's Tom deFrank for ten minutes. We shake hands and I leave.

At 12.15 the next morning, Nessen returns from the hospital. "Hi, Lloyd," he says, walking quickly past, disappearing down the hall. He's in his office before I can stand up to return his greeting.

After sitting for an hour just outside the press office, I ask Jack Hushen's secretary to find out what Nessen wants to do.

She hangs up the phone and suggests that I go to lunch. "He'll see you in an hour or so."

Two hours later, I still haven't heard from Nessen. I ask Hushen's secretary to

forms. No, I wouldn't call them autobiographical, except in the sense that all novels have some elements of autobiography in them. I admit, often I am like the pelican mother that would feed its young on its own breast if it has no other food available. I shall do the same for my books when it becomes necessary. To sum it up, if my works are truly autobiographical, I hope that I am more interesting in fiction than I am in real life."

Many critics feel that the novel genre is dying. Do you agree?

"Back in the 18th century people thought that the Jews were obsolete, yet we are still here. So it is with the novel. I do admit that the novel form is changing, the narrative element is fading, the intellectual element is taking over. It's a pity, it makes the novel more and more remote from the common man."

One afternoon about two and a half weeks ago a member of the Magazine staff was walking down Broadway when he heard the pay phone outside Brooks Pharmacy ringing. Since no one else was around, he picked it up and said hello. A male voice on the other end replied, "Hello. Are you a Yale student?"

"Yes," he answered.
"Well, that's good, because wanted to warn you."

"Warn us?"
"Yes, we're going to explode an atomic bomb in the harbor."

"What?"
"We've been stealing plutonium from the nuclear reactor in (a town in Connecticut which our staffer has forgotten). We got more than enough to make the bomb."

"Well, what are you going to do with it?"

"We're going to use it to make sure that the capitalists stop making all the money from the poor people."

"What?"
"The capitalists are stealing the poor people blind with government."

"Yes, of course."
"So we're going to explode our atomic bomb in the oil tanks near the harbor."

"Is that right?"
"Yes, that's why I'm calling you. We don't want to hurt the people at Yale."

"You don't want to hurt the people at Yale?"

"Yeah, they seem like a reasonable group. We just want to force a change in this lousy government."

"Have you considered dynamite. I mean an atomic device would not only harm the capitalists, but would kill many poor people. You know, over on the Hill."

"Dynamite?"

"Yeah, you could get enough dynamite, explode it next to a tank and the whole harbor would go without killing any of the people, the innocent people who happen to be living in the neigh-

borhood."

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PIECES

borhood."
"Hold on." (A lot of whispering and arguing in the background. He comes back on the line.) "Well, you know, I agree with you, but these extremists who are in this thing with me won't go along. They say it has to be an atomic bomb. They want it to be atomic."

"But don't you see that you'll kill a lot of poor people and people at Yale with an atomic bomb. I mean radiation will even get people in Milford."

"Yeah, well, these extremists . . ."

"Have you finished the bomb?"

"Yeah, it's finished. We got a Yale scientist to make it. You should have seen how easy it was to steal the plutonium. We just walked in and took it while the guard wasn't looking. They know it's missing, but they won't go public cause it'll make them look dumb. But we got it, yup, it was so easy."

"But the bomb's finished?"

"Yeah, we got it in an abandoned warehouse in New Haven. No one knows where except us. We're going to explode it next week."

"Next week?"

"Next week. And then after New Haven, we're going to make another one and go to New York where there are a lot of gas storage tanks."

"You're going to blow them up too?"

"Yes, the capitalists have the government in their hands, and most of their wealth is in New York."

"Well, why don't you blow it in New York first then. Why go after New Haven?"

(Again, some whispering in the background.) "Well, we think we ought to try it in New Haven. New Haven will be a small one. We'll have to make a bigger one for New York and we want to be sure that we've got it right."

"Well, Lloyd," he says, as if I have just appeared, "I think I'm gonna hang it up for the day."

John Cochran walks in as I say, "I'd hoped to see you and Dr. Lukash put out that release."

Cochran waits. "There really wasn't all that much for you to see," Nessen says, shrugging his shoulders. "Do you have any specific questions?"

"Why don't I ride home in your car, and we can talk," I say.

"Well . . ." says Nessen. There is a silence and Cochran jumps in. "Ron, I've got to see you for ten minutes."

It is almost six when Patty Precock, one of Nessen's two secretaries, comes out to the briefing room. "Ron has just been called in by the President and he'll be tied up all night. I'm terribly sorry. Ron kept saying all day, 'I'm not gonna forget, I'm not gonna forget,' but the day just went by so fast. He told me to tell you that if you had any specific questions, you should call him Monday."

I thank her, and wait twenty minutes. I go to a payphone in the basement and dial the White House switchboard.

"White House."

"Ron Nessen's office, please."

"Press Office."

"Mr. Nessen's office, please?"

"This is Mr. Nessen's office."

"Is he in?"

"No. He's just left."

Bellow

(continued from page 11)

write at a time when the world does not intrude and my mind is cleansed. I feel like a fresh human being each day. This has become my habit—as I wake up, my characters and plots are already taking over."

Are you writing something now?
"I just finished my new book, Humane's Gift. It will be released in the fall. It is the life story of two men. One is an American poet, the other a sort of 'pure' intellectual. I rewrote it many times before I was satisfied with it. I was determined to make it as objective as possible."

Is it true that all your previous novels are somewhat autobiographical?

"If so, I must be quite schizophrenic since I appear in so many different

How do you feel when you read the criticisms of your books?

"I feel like listening to a piano tuned by a deaf man. There was a time when I cared and got terribly angry, but now I am more philosophical. It does not make much sense to me what they write anyway. Also, critics too have to make a living. To tell you the truth, since Herzog the reviews have been rather favorable. I suddenly became a celebrity, so I couldn't figure out how to conduct myself. Maybe that is one of the reasons I abhor interviews."

As a last question, do you have any hobbies?

Bellow looks at the young Israeli journalist in astonishment then bursts out, "Hobbies? No, I don't have any hobbies. I don't have the time!"
The press conference is ended. Bellow leaves with his tall, elegant new wife—

this trip to Israel was supposed to be their honeymoon—she is a Rumanian born professor of mathematics at the University of Chicago where Bellow himself is teaching.

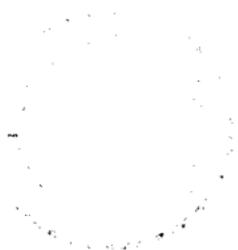
This eminent, forthright novelist is an honest, brave man who personifies the cliché, "Writers are the conscience of the world." One of his old friends once said of him, "My buddy Saul is one of the few unpolluted people left in the world."

Clara Gorgyey, native of Hungary, has been a member of P.E.N. for four years. She has written reviews for the Literary Gazette of London, the Guardian, and the New Horizon.

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

From Jon Hoornstra

FYI



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B-2

LONG BEACH, CALIFORNIA, TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 1975

Editorials

Withholding news

Ron Nessen had a hectic morning Wednesday.

First he picked up the Washington Star-News and discovered it had broken his rule against printing news of the President's budget before noon.

Then he discovered that the major wire services — the Associated Press, United Press International and Reuters — had followed suit and broken the release time, too.

Nessen announced that he would withhold from the Star-News and the wire services advance copies of the President's economic report. He said he might even bar their reporters from asking questions at the President's Atlanta press conference today.

Happily, Nessen reconsidered as far as the wire services were concerned. He apparently realized that once news has been published it is in the public domain. But he decided to meet with press service representatives Wednesday to determine "what, if any, action will be taken."

"If news organizations start ignoring embargoes," Nessen said, "we will have an impossible situation in which there will be a race to get into print or on the air first and everyone will lose."

Competition for speed can affect news coverage adversely. A document as complex as the federal budget will get more careful coverage if reporters have hours instead of minutes to study it and write their stories.

If a newspaper has agreed, explicitly or implicitly, to honor a release time, it should honor its promise. But if the promise is broken — or if a news organization gets information from an independent source who does not impose a release time — the news becomes public property as soon as it is published or broadcast.

We trust Ron Nessen came to that conclusion after an hour or two of thought, and we trust he will not ask the wire services to withhold from the nation news that readers in Washington or some other city already know.



THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

FROM: ANNE SWANSON
News Summary

FYI

Philadelphia
Bulletin
2/24/75



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Ror
My
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whet

structs the FBI...
fort: but given all the factors, I would
bet rather heavily the KGB still has its
"sa house."
Furthermore, I think I know why old
Hoover issued his ukase. For back-

tol Hill. By the...
between 20 and 30 KGB men dealing
with the U.S. Congress or with the
countless staff people the Congress and
its committees employ.

press, an academic work...
ranks of science all bristling with
people like Kim Philby, Guy Burgess
and Donald MacLean. I hope and think

has uncovered a grave in
civil liberties. But more seri
will instead perceive an ope
to the KGB.
(Joseph Alsop retired re
regular columnist. He is co
write special columns on
month basis.)

Lawrence M. O'Rourke: Lecture on economics

Thank you, Professor Nessen

Washington — Economics, like poli-
tics, is a game that everybody can
play, once provided two cents and a
platform.

Ron Nessen, whose credentials in
economics are his job as White House
press secretary, delivered a short
course last week on how the Democrats
— who have no economic plan — have
an economic plan which would drive
people out of work.

If the following sounds confusing, it
isn't to Nessen, who read most of it
from a piece of paper. He also meets
every day with the President and they
often talk about economics.

The economic plan of the Democrats
— who have no plan — said Nessen, is
dangerous because it would reduce oil
imports by one million barrels a day.

On the other hand, Mr. Ford's plan,
which is the only plan — because
Democrats don't have a plan — is terri-
fic because it would reduce oil imports
by one million barrels a day.

Even though the Democrats don't
have a plan and Mr. Ford does, there
is considerable room for compromise
between the plan the Democrats do
have and the one Mr. Ford says is "set
in concrete," said Nessen.

That cleared up, Nessen explained
how Mr. Ford wants the increase in
imported oil to show up more at the
gasoline pumps than on home heating
oil bills.

Of course, said Nessen, that has long
been Mr. Ford's position, even if he did
say it wasn't.

And, of course, White House aides
have said ever since the plan was first
announced that Mr. Ford's higher oil
fees could tax gasoline at another 15
cents a gallon, said Nessen.

That, said Professor Nessen, would
come about this way, following appro-
priate econometric models, naturally.

Under the import fee schedule which
will be in place by April 1 — unless



Lawrence O'Rourke

Congress succeeds in blocking it — the
average price per gallon of oil offered
American consumers will rise by three
or four cents.

It was the Administration plan, until
last Wednesday, that the oil companies
spread the increase among their cus-
tomers in any way they choose, except
they could not load it onto essential
home heating oil.

Now Mr. Ford wants the companies
to "tilt" in the other direction, raising
heating oil, for example, by two cents



Ron Nessen
... explains everything.

a gallon, gasoline by four cents a gal-
lon.

When the President says "tilt," the
Federal Energy Office tends to tilt. It
derives its authority over the oil com-
panies from Mr. Ford's emergency
powers.

When the full oil conservation plan is
in operation, Mr. Ford wants the tilting
continued.

Then the average per gallon increase
would be ten cents a gallon. (Nessen
said this may all be an academic dis-
cussion if the Democrats refuse to
enact new tariffs and fees on domestic
oil.)

The ten cents a gallon would be "av-
erage" under Mr. Ford's tilting at
roughly 13 cents on gasoline and seven
cents on heating oil.

Now these latter figures would be in-
creased if, as some Administration
people predict, the average increase on
oil jumped by 15 cents a gallon.

Nessen's lecture continued with this
point:

Mr. Ford is determined to cut oil im-
ports by one million barrels a day this
year, two million next. He intends to do
this by cutting consumption; by making
it more expensive to operate the car
and engage in other oil consuming
practices.

The Government has a study which
shows that the number of people who
drove to work last year dropped five
percent as gasoline became scarcer
and more expensive.

The President has said that he has
other means of enforcing the one mil-
lion figure if it is not reached through
voluntary cutbacks.

Congress should get this program
started because the nation must cut
back by one million barrels a day,
unless it is to depend much too heavily
on foreign oil, said Nessen.

But the Democratic proposal to cut
back one million barrels a day through
an import quota and allocation system
— while having the same effect in the
pipelines — would be wrong, Nessen
said.

This is because the Democrats' one
million plan would not mean a job cut
since, said Nessen, "the economy will
adjust through the price mechanism."

Nessen said that Mr. Ford's message
to Democrats in Congress is "whatever
help you can give us will be apprecia-
ted."

(Bulletin Washington Bureau)

BIBLE TEXT

Today's Text: "And they
shall say to you, the Lord

If you
t
I'm

I'm Jana. And
like you've never
I have nonste
and Jacksonville
service to Miami
Bradenton.

Cheers!

And for ever
have two free coc
ing but the be



The Nati Program

All my 727s
middle seat. Whi
nobody in that se
place for your fre
game of cards. No
port when you fl

Pro and Con the columnists

Mr. Joseph Kraft recently applauded
the fact that he thought Secretary
Simon would be removed from office.
He faulted Mr. Simon for two things: 1.
A prediction about oil prices and 2.
a cut in Social Security benefits. This lat-
ter cut was included in an overall
budget cut.

Mr. Kraft, however, went only into
the negative side of the budget cut

Federal Reserve has much more power
and can change the complexion of the
economy quicker than any other agen-
cy. The same man has run the Federal
Reserve for years and all we have had
is the same monetary policy and the
production of paper money that is be-
coming more worthless as more reach-
es us.

Mr. Kraft also accused Mr. Simon of

Where Governments Go to Church *Shirley Hazzard*

THE NEW REPUBLIC

A Journal of Politics and the Arts—March 1, 1975, 50 cents

Abortion & Dr. Edelin

Nathan Lewin

The PLO in Flux—*Stanley Karnow*

Manuel's Newton—*Gerald Holton*

Dealing with Liars—*Walter Pincus*

Ford's Image Machine—*John Osborne*

Ticklish Taiwan—*John K. Fairbank*



any Peking negotiators with Taipei would be at once vulnerable to superpatriotic attack. No foreign minister of the revolution can be expected to barter over the revolution's right of sovereignty. The revolution has been itself an assertion of that right. Barter would be betrayal.

It follows that the United States cannot undertake an official mediation, which could only seem like a revival of intervention in China's domestic affairs. Gen. Marshall's forlorn statesmanship during 1946 when President Truman kept him in China to mediate the civil war earned him in the end only the opprobrium of both parties. Both sides felt he had sold out their interests. Mediate in China again? Who wants it?

Taipei in its present status is a functioning regime with a developing economic base. Why renounce its claims to be a government or reduce its Washington embassy to a trade mission?

On the formal level everyone seems stalemated, stuck in a posture, however unrealistic it may seem. The Chinese say there is only one China, as though unable to count. The Americans say Taiwan is a purely Chinese problem, as though we were not parties to the security treaty that is the key issue.

Two prescriptions may be offered: 1) Washington and Taipei should recognize that time is on the side of Peking, not only in Peking's view but in fact, simply because Taiwan is closer to Shanghai than to San Francisco. Peking may be expected to sit tight.

2) The only course open is an arrangement by unilateral declarations, each party enunciating its interests, maintaining its posture with proper dignity, clinging to its principles judiciously and letting the others know its priorities. If it is true that the basic interests involved are not really incompatible, this fact should emerge for all to see. After all, the Nixon-Chou communiqué was a diplomatic success of the first magnitude because it specifically contained an agreement to disagree over the current status of Taiwan.

Essential to this way forward is the expression of views from all quarters. How about a White House statement (or even a presidential-congressional joint statement) that, "In view of Prime Minister Chou En-lai's assurances that Peking regards its relationship to Taiwan as a political question not subject to settlement by force, the 1954 security treaty is being given up as unnecessary, but the United States will continue to maintain a vital interest in the stability of the Western Pacific area"? In other words, Washington might announce that its commitment to defend Taiwan against a forcible takeover would continue, but its form of expression would be changed to meet changing circumstances. Mr. Ford needs to take something in his briefcase.

John K. Fairbank

Mr. Fairbank is the research director of the East Asian Research Center at Harvard.

White House Watch

Ford's Image Machine

This report deals with two of 19 specific actions that President Ford took and announced during the week of February 10 and with the elaborate public relations apparatus—his image machine—that exists to put the best possible appearance upon everything he does.

One of the actions discussed here, the revision of a list of prospective nominees to the board of a new Legal Services Corporation that is supposed to begin providing federally financed legal assistance to poor people some time this year, was so quickly and rightly praised in hitherto critical quarters that it didn't need the ministrations of Mr. Ford's publicists. The other action, an unprecedented gift of power and position to Vice President Nelson Rockefeller, was so baffling in its nature and implications that the President's spokesmen didn't try to explain it. Press Secretary Ronald Nessen, the President's principal image machinist, was excluded months ago from the discussions that preceded the event and privately confessed utter ignorance of how it came about.

The praise accorded the replacement of five of the 11 original choices for the legal services board was in part an expression of relief, a reflection of the suspicion among advocates of effective legal aid for the poor that the Ford administration is fundamentally hostile to such federal programs. Three of the tentative choices announced last December 19—conservative attorneys Denison Kitchel of Arizona and William Knecht of California, and former Congresswoman Edith Green of Oregon—appeared to confirm this view. Although Knecht and Mrs. Green remain on the revised list, the five "preliminary selections" announced February 14 were considered to assure a board majority that would be friendly or at least not downright opposed to adequate legal services. Two critics of the December list, President James D. Fellers of the American Bar Association and Executive Director James Flug of the National Legal Aid and Defender Association, welcomed the changes. Fellers said that the replacements "are excellent choices" with "the kind of positive approach to legal services which is so necessary if the program is to be all we hope for it." The potential nominee who is principally responsible for the plaudits is Mr. Ford's new choice for chairman of the corporation board, Dean Roger C. Cramton of the Cornell University law school. Cramton, aged 45, is remembered in Washington as a tough-minded assistant attorney general who got himself fired by Richard Nixon in early 1973 for refusing to say that Mr. Nixon's impoundment of nine billion dollars in funds appropriated to clean up waterways was legal. The US Supreme Court unanimously held on February 18, as Cramton had asserted in 1972, that the impoundment was illegal;

Cramton made his low opinion of some of the people on the December list known to the President's personnel director, William Walker, and through him to Mr. Ford's staff chief, Donald Rumsfeld. They responded by challenging Cramton to accept a nomination and the chairmanship and he rather unhappily assented. The most interesting of the other additions is Robert J. Kutak, an Omaha attorney who blends practical liberalism with ideological conservatism. He is a former assistant and still a friend of conservative Senator Roman Hruska and, in his liberal guise, chairman of the ABA's Committee on Individual Rights and Responsibilities.

The possibility that President Ford might appoint a Rockefeller man executive director of the Domestic Council and assistant to the President for domestic affairs was reported in this journal's February 1 issue. Despite misgivings and opposition among the President's senior staff to so substantial a delegation of presidential power to the Vice President, Mr. Ford announced his decision to do this and more on February 13. James Cannon, a former journalist who hitherto has been more concerned with Rockefeller politics than with Rockefeller policies and programs, was appointed council director and assistant to the President. Richard Dunham, another Rockefeller assistant, was appointed deputy director. Mr. Ford simultaneously issued a somewhat flowery restatement of the council's mission. The council itself, composed of domestic department and agency heads, hasn't met since December of 1971 and has never amounted to much. It's the council staff of 30 people, including 15 functional assistants, that matters. Along with some Rockefeller-type rhetoric about "assessing national needs and identifying alternative ways of meeting them," the Ford statement adds one thing of substance to what the council staff has been doing. Rockefeller as the council vice chairman and what will soon be his staff are given a specific role in the Office of Management and Budget's reviews of proposed legislation and in the extremely important policy aspects of budget-making. Rather uneasily and without great conviction, some of the President's people point out that James Cannon is to be assistant to the President and that Press Secretary Nessen wasn't talking idly when he emphasized in his announcement that "the President considers the Domestic Council [sic] an integral part of the White House staff." Just in case Cannon was in any doubt on the point, he was gently told to move himself out of Rockefeller country in the Old Executive Office Building and across the street into the West Wing of the White House, where Mr. Ford's senior assistants have their offices. Whatever Mr. Ford hopes to gain from the business, and what he can expect to gain apart from Nelson Rockefeller's gratitude is a mystery to me. He incurred a serious loss in the person of Phillip Areeda, since last September the second in rank among three attorneys with the title of White House Counsel.

Areeda, a Harvard law professor and specialist in antitrust law, was one of the very few people at the Ford White House who had some claim to distinction before coming there. His intention to quit unless he got a suitable assignment was reported here several weeks ago. Areeda thought he was promised the Domestic Council directorship and resigned when he learned that he wouldn't get it. My impression, unsupported by any concrete evidence or statement, is that his basic reason for leaving was more subtle and more significant than the mere denial of a job he wanted. I suspect that Phillip Areeda suffered the frustrations of a first-rate talent who found himself submerged among and subordinated to associates whom he considered second-raters.

The most cogent point to be made about Press Secretary Ronald Nessen, the mechanic in charge of the biggest part of the Ford image machine, is made in conversation by Nessen himself. He says: "I think you ought to separate my personality out from what we do here. Okay, I have a temper and I've lost it a couple of times. And so what? I don't think that should completely obscure our accomplishments." Separating and setting aside Ron Nessen's personality is a pleasure. Suffice it to say that in his public performance he is good natured most of the time, temperish and petty a little of the time, and positively cloying some of the time. His calculated displays of good humor take the form of what Nessen calls "my allegedly terrible one-line jokes." He is sensitive about any personal reference, whether it's intended to be favorable or unfavorable, and he is especially sensitive to cracks about his cracks. A recent example: "Happy Valentine Day. It even gets the press secretary out here [at the briefing-room podium] on time." Nessen is obsessed with the escapist notion that his principal problem is neither himself nor his President but the poisoned press room atmosphere that he found in the wake of Watergate and Ronald Ziegler. He furthers this idea when he says that his jokes "are not meant to be a night-club act. They are meant to relax the place. It's a delicate effort to change the mood of the place." The mood has changed, for the better. But the White House press room should never be a really happy place and, fortunately for all concerned, neither Nessen nor any other press secretary can make it so. There is a fundamental, unavoidable conflict between press secretaries and the press and Nessen frets about it more than he should.

President Ford said of Nessen in Nessen's presence the other day, "I think he's doing a helluva good job." Nessen groaned in mock dismay, "Oh, God, there goes my credibility." On the whole, though many in the press room would disagree, the facts support the President's judgment. Nine press conferences in six months, a dozen or so individual interviews, and many more background conversations, quickie chats with reporters and editors, and group sessions with television, radio and printed media news executives consti-

tute, as Nessen says, a record of presidential access that Richard Nixon neither wanted nor tried to match. The question is what of substance comes out of it all, and the answer is very little.

Nessen's establishment, including peripheral staffs and activities that were under President Nixon's directors of communication, has been reduced in personnel from 58 to 45. It includes two deputy press secretaries, six assistant press secretaries, two television advisers and five photographers. One of the deputy secretaries, Gerald Warren, four of the six assistant secretaries, and three of the five photographers are survivors from the Nixon time. Mrs. Ford's press secretary, Sheila Weidenfeld; her assistant, Patti Matson; and their office secretary, Nancy Cherdon, operate independently of Nessen but accept without exactly welcoming occasional guidance from him. Gerald Warren, two assistant press secretaries and three other assistants at "professional" levels have three principal functions. They are seeing to it that department and agency officials and press spokesmen understand and accurately reflect administration policy as it is stated and amended by the President and Nessen; correcting and countering what Warren considers to be errors of fact or judgment in printed and broadcast comment; and providing print and broadcast journalists outside of Washington with the nearest possible equivalent of the information, propaganda and official briefings that journalists in Washington get. Preparing the President's daily news summary, a Nixon service retained by Mr. Ford, may have been put in Warren's bailiwick when this is read.

Warren works closely with William Baroody, Jr., another Nixon survivor who glories in the title of "assistant for public liaison." Saying so causes shudders at the White House, but the fact is that Baroody has taken over, consolidated and more or less cleaned up the group contact function that Charles Colson developed and corrupted. Baroody and his staff of 30, including some 15 "professionals," organize White House seminars in Washington and around the country and try to maintain friendly communications with leadership types among blacks, hispanics, labor unions, women's groups, educators and any other categories that can be conveniently packaged. The Baroody operation demonstrates among other things that thousands of Americans are glad to travel at their own or their organizations' expense to Washington and to regional centers in order to hear administration spokesmen, occasionally including the President, expound and defend administration policy. Baroody would argue that he isn't a cog in the President's image machine. "What I'm doing," he says, "is not public relations, though there's a lot of that in what I do. Probably the fundamental is *process*—a process where the private sector is given access to government equal to that of the press and Congress."

Because of what it tells about Gerald Ford, the part of the Nessen function that interests me most is the White House photographic operation. Its director and the President's personal photographer, 27-year-old David Hume Kennerly, acknowledges with discernible pain that his shop is a part of the Nessen shop, structurally speaking. That's as far as he will go, in words and in practice. "I don't work for Nessen," Kennerly says. "I work for the President—period." Kennerly is a former *Time* photographer who won a Pulitzer prize in 1972 for pictures taken in Vietnam and India and covered Vice President Ford for *Time*. He was the first staffer hired by Mr. Ford when he became President last August. The President and the Ford family are extremely fond of Kennerly—as fond of him as he is of himself if that be possible. Although Kennerly exaggerates the differences, his access to President Ford is much more complete than the access of his predecessor, Ollie Atkins, was to President Nixon. "Ollie was summoned to take pictures," Kennerly says. "I'm never summoned. I'm always there. I'm probably the only guy who can walk into that office without being asked. I go in and out." He says that either he or, on rare occasions, another staff photographer has recorded literally every meeting that President Ford has had and that he stays throughout most of them. Ollie Atkins snapped a few pictures and then left. According to Kennerly, the President asked him beforehand to leave only two meetings after taking one or two pictures for the record, "and they were when he was telling a couple of guys they didn't have jobs any more." Both Kennerly and Nessen say that Mr. Ford shows absolutely no interest in the photographs taken of him, never calls for prints and never suggests that a certain picture be hung on White House walls. Nixon showed some interest; Lyndon Johnson was an avid viewer and critic of his staff photographs. Gerald Ford's alleged indifference is interesting precisely because he lets so many pictures be taken by so many photographers. Kennerly has arranged unprecedented access to Mr. Ford by other photographers. Fred Ward, a Washington free-lance, had nearly total access to the President and the inner offices of the White House for two months. The result, a picture book with text by Hugh Sidey, *Time's* White House columnist, will be published by Harper & Row in May. Kennerly says that at least 20 other magazine and newspaper photographers have had generous and unusual access to the President, though none in this or any other presidency has had the equal of Fred Ward's free and prolonged run. Photographers aiming at book and magazine publication are especially welcomed and get the best treatment. It's something to remember, as I've previously noted, when you come upon accounts of good old, plain old Jerry Ford, running around in baggy suits with dog-biscuit crumbs in his pockets and not caring a whit about his image.

John Osborne

March 11, 1975

Dear Bud:

Thank you for sending me a copy of your recent article on White House press briefings.

As always, you brought perception and understanding to the subject.

I DO think the mood and tone of the briefings are gradually improving and I am pleased to see that someone I respect as much as you also has noticed.

Sincerely,

Ron Nessen
Press Secretary
to the President

Mr. Godfrey Sperling, Jr.
Chief, Washington News Bureau
The Christian Science Monitor
910 Sixteenth Street, N. W.
Washington, D. C. 20006

RN:jg





Watergate still blights White House briefings

By Godfrey Sperling Jr.

MAR 10 1975

Washington

It was a day like many other days at the White House briefing of newsmen: Presidential press secretary Ron Nessen was being bombarded with questions, and he wasn't responding at all satisfactorily in the eyes of a number of reporters assembled in front of him. Interminable questions were being asked on the same subject. Some reporters even resorted to scolding.

Said one newsman: "You don't know what you are talking about." Another accused him of "dodging" a question. Another told him to cease discussing the subject "in an emotional way and making speeches."

Mr. Nessen was low-keyed and courteous in the face of hostility. He was obviously holding tight to his temper — but he did keep his hold.

Again, it was a day like many other days in the briefing room. What did it mean? And why does it persist?

Veteran White House correspondent Peter Lisagor of the Chicago Daily News thinks Ron Nessen is doing a good job ("I disagree with some reporters who are so very critical of Ron"), but he thinks Nessen "is trying too hard to be helpful. He should just not schedule any briefings if he doesn't have anything to say."

"The way it is," says Lisagor, "I think we sometimes push Nessen into saying something that does not reflect the administration's view. So these

briefings are taking on a life of their own — where news is made from our own relentless questioning that often does not reflect the President's position."

Lisagor does not fault the hard prodding from reporters in their questioning. Tying it to the Watergate aftermath, he said: "This is a new breed of reporters. Never again will they stand still to being accomplices of an administration."

One White House reporter, giving his views on a background, nonattribution basis, saw the conduct of some reporters at these briefings in a more critical light:

"We have a lot of reporters coming along who believe in advocacy journalism. They have already made up their minds that those who are running this government are the 'bad guys' and that it is their job to expose this evil. That's their whole approach. Some of it comes from Watergate — and the fact that President Nixon and Ziegler pulled the wool over their eyes for so long. They don't want to get burned again. But some of it is just their approach to reporting. It's advocacy journalism as opposed to what I think is the proper detached approach, what we used to call 'arms-length' reporting."

St. Louis Post-Dispatch bureau chief Richard Dudman, like many other seasoned newsmen, finds these briefings, as he puts it, "a waste of time and unproductive. The problem," he says, "lies with both sides.

Post-Watergate leads to suspicion that the press secretary is hiding something. But Nessen makes a mistake in coming in and discussing substantive issues that he really isn't qualified to handle. He should bring in the experts. But, instead, we have these endless questions and answers that lead nowhere."

Bureau chief David Kraslow of the Cox newspapers also blames Nessen for trying to answer complex questions, particularly those relating to the economy — "when he clearly isn't qualified to answer such questions."

But more than anything Kraslow faults Nessen for "doing the very thing he said he was not going to do: be a salesman. He's trying to sell the President instead of merely transmitting information."

Kraslow also criticizes the "nitpicking" from many reporters in their questions: "The questions travel round and round the room like a merry-go-round, getting nowhere."

Columnist Joseph Kraft attributes the "futility" of these briefing sessions to post-Watergate, but also to the growing complexity of national problems. He says that often neither Nessen nor the reporters are sufficiently knowledgeable to cope with these complexities — and this, he believes, "adds to this feeling of futility in the question-and-answer period."

Time magazine bureau chief Hugh Sides, like Lisagor, sees the briefings

"becoming institutionalized — become a bureaucracy. So many of the White House reporters," says Sides, "are so specialized, their sole job being to watch the President minute by minute and day by day. And in their search for a story they bog down the briefings with endless questions — often when they know they have no expectation of getting an answer."

Ted Knap of Scripps-Howard says that "Watergate remains as a hang-over in our briefings. But I think it is very little Nessen's fault. He really is very skillful. But he inherited a feeling of mistrust. And while sometimes it sounds like the old bear pit, the briefings are not nearly so bitter and nasty as before — when we were being lied to, used, and flimflammed by Ziegler. There is much less hostility because Ford, himself, is so candid and open."

Different newsmen see these briefings in different ways — but none seems to like the "climate" of these sessions or the many times when much of the late morning and noon hour is spent in gaining little or no information. Says Mr. Dudman, "Maybe Izzy Stone was right. He says it's a waste of time to cover the White House — that we should just send a copy boy around to pick up the press releases."

Mr. Sperling is chief of the Washington bureau of The Christian Science Monitor.

Nessen earns high marks for credibility

By TED KNAP

Scripps-Howard Staff Writer

IRON NESSEN HAS BEEN President Ford's press secretary for nearly six months, and the credibility of both remains intact.

That may sound like faint praise. But considering what happened to the previous two presidents and their several press secretaries, it is a strong plaudit for Ford and Nessen.

Nessen deserves high marks for being a good reporter of the President's views on issues of the day, which, after all, is supposed to be the main function of a press aide. That's more important than "getting along" with the White House correspondents, which Nessen does not always do.

Nessen gives accurate and fairly detailed accounts of Cabinet meetings and presidential sessions with bipartisan congressional leaders, including quotes from the President and other participants.

HE DOES NOT INTERFERE with, and sometimes encourages, newsmen's efforts to get information from other White House officials. Under President Lyndon B. Johnson, a damper was put on such relations by requiring staff members to report any and all contacts with the press. Under President Richard M. Nixon, an even tighter lid was maintained by regarding newsmen as enemies.

There is less hostility at the daily press briefings than during Nixon's last two years, when Press Secretary Ronald L. Ziegler was transmitting lies about Watergate and the President was avoiding press conferences for five months at a time. Ford has been holding press conferences about twice a month, and is much more available in other ways as well.

The resumption of openness is due more to Ford than to his staff; his first presidential press secretary, J.F. terHorst, was every bit as open as Nessen and had a better store of knowledge about Ford and the workings of Washington.

Unlike terHorst, who quit in protest of Ford's pardon of Nixon, Nessen says it is "irrelevant" what a press secretary thinks about the President's policies or decisions.

A standard question to press secretaries is: "Whom do you serve — the President or the public?"

WHEN HE TOOK OVER last September, former UPI and NBC reporter Nessen said his primary function would be to serve the public. Later he said he served three masters — the public, the press corps and the President, adding: "It's one of the most difficult things about the job."

Now he says he serves both the public and the President, without "any occasion when I have had to choose clearly between the two."

Nessen has almost complete access to Ford, so he doesn't get his views filtered through others. And from all reports, Ford places little or no restriction on how Nessen handles the dissemination of his views.

RESTRAINTS AND PRESSURES do come from Counselor Robert Hartmann, Chief of Staff Donald H. Rumsfeld and Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger.

Nessen has a big staff of 45, and appears to have organized it fairly well. A reporter calling one of his assistants, particularly John Carlson, Bill Roberts or Larry Speakes, is likely to get information instead of a runaround. As a result the public gets more accurate and more complete information about what the White House is doing.

Nessen and his staff are no different from other flacks in that they try to put

the best face on what their boss is doing. It is up to reporters to weed out what is merely self-serving.

The low point in Nessen's effectiveness came after the meeting in Vladivostok between Ford and Soviet leader Leonid I. Brezhnev. Nessen said the press was "dazzled" by the new arms agreement and predicted Ford would "return home in triumph." Twice in the presence of newsmen Nessen said the agreement was "something Nixon couldn't do in five years, but Ford did it in three months."

Nessen's customary confidence had turned to cockiness. Days later he apologized and gave Nixon due credit for initiating the arms pact.

"I will never knowingly lie to you, never knowingly mislead," Nessen told White House newsmen on his first day.

He is more sensitive about his reputation for veracity than anything else.

WHEN THE AIRCRAFT CARRIER Enterprise left the Philippines a few months ago amid speculation it was going to Vietnam, Nessen was told by a national security aide that it was not.

"If you're lying to me," Nessen warned, "you or I are going to have to get out of here."

When CBS carried a report that the White House was publicly optimistic but privately pessimistic about Cambodia, Nessen took great pains to point out that Ford had said in public as well as in private that Cambodia could only "hope" to survive "until the rainy season" and then seek negotiations.

A crucial test of credibility came early in January when Ford had decided to abandon his plan to seek a tax increase to fight inflation and switched to a tax decrease to fight the recession.

"Isn't that a 180-degree turnaround?" Nessen was asked.

"Well, let's say 179 degrees," he replied.



Knap

March 18, 1975



"The policy of our paper is very simple — merely to tell the truth."
— Paul Poynter, publisher, 1912-1950

70-A

Thursday, March 20, 1975

Spread the word, Ron

President Ford's press secretary is a former NBC reporter named Ron Nessen, who likes to say all Rons aren't alike. And he's right about that.

Nessen told a Washington audience this week it's his goal to end the "hostility and suspicion" built up during the Nixon years. That was when his predecessor, another Ron named Ziegler, regularly was put in the position of passing out half-truths, untruths and outright lies in behalf of President Nixon.

GOOD FOR RON Nessen. As far as we can tell he is doing his best to get the facts out to the public, and President Ford is helping him do it.

"The clouds of distrust and suspicion have begun to lift," Nessen said. And he's right about that, too, as far as it relates to the White House itself.

But messages of this kind apparently take a while to filter down through the corridors and file rooms and paneled front-offices of the rest of the government.

According to current testimony by the U.S. Postal Service, federal (and sometimes state and local) agencies still can routinely request, and almost as routinely receive, reports from the service on mail received and sent by suspected miscreants of one kind and another.

Such secret "mail covers" were applied against more than 8,600 individuals in the past two years. Another 431 persons, by court order, had their mail secretly opened and read. And William J. Cotter, chief postal inspector, urged Congress this week not to restrict the surveillance procedure.

We've all read about past abuses by the FBI, now presumably ended. And we know how the Internal Revenue Service was misused to harass taxpayers listed as "enemies" by the Nixon White House. And most people had assumed that era was over.

BUT IS IT? The Miami News has just experienced a continued manifestation of that shocking abuse of government power.

News reporter Christina Sanson in a series of stories told readers recently how in 1972 the IRS in Miami hired spies to investigate private lives of 30 state and federal officials, including a prosecutor who was sniffing around the Watergate case.

IRS did not exactly deny that. What it did do, after the first story appeared, was order Chris Sanson to appear forthwith and produce records of her income for the past 11 years.

Considering that Chris Sanson is aged 27, and that until a recent promotion one of her more remunerative jobs was as a copy girl for The News, that could hardly be construed as anything but attempted harassment.

(Chris appeared as directed. Imagine the embarrassment of her official inquisitors when they discovered she was due a refund.)

SO OUR MESSAGE to Nessen is that the White House is the best possible place to start implementing a policy of honesty and fair play and openness in government. Now let's see about getting the word out through the agencies and federal buildings all over the country.



New Orleans 3-24-75

Capital Press Relations Chill

By DON BACON
(Times-Picayune National Service)

WASHINGTON — Assistant Secretary of State Philip C. Habib was holding back a bit of diplomatic information that the press wanted. Reporters badgered and bullied him at a briefing until finally in exasperation he blurted: "You can rag me. You can chew me. You can throw me on the floor and kick me. Do what you want, I'm not going to answer that question."

Playing tough with government officials — and especially with hapless White House press secretary Ron Nessen — is more or less routine for the

reporter colleagues. Inside the Ford White House he is an inexperienced observer, not a participant, in the formation of policy.

Nessen is ragged, chewed and kicked with such regularity by the press that many wonder how — or why — he takes it. Avoiding the cocky self-assurance of his predecessor, Ronald Ziegler, Nessen plays a more humble role. He does not hesitate to say "I don't know" or "I can't recall," rather than give a casual or misleading answer to a reporter's question.

A few days ago, reporters were trying to learn from Nessen whether any negotiations were under way between the warring parties in Cambodia. "I don't know of any," responded Nessen.

"Nobody is especially interested in what you know or don't know, Ron, in all seriousness," shot back a reporter. "What we are interested in knowing is whether this government is aware of such negotiations."

Nessen has tried a number of ways to avoid answering questions he cannot or has been forbidden to answer. Ford, who learned in 25 years in elected office that "no comment" is an acceptable and often the best answer to a question, has put more and more current topics off-limits for Nessen. Last Wednesday Nessen fielded 94 questions at his morning briefing. He evaded, claimed ignorance, ignored or "no commented" 44 of them. That kind of performance contributes to the frustration and hostility that pervades the press here.

Nessen described some of his feelings in a speech last Tuesday to members of the local chapter of Sigma Delta Chi, a professional journalism society.

"The clouds of suspicion and mistrust have begun to lift in the seven months President Ford has been in the White House," Nessen said. "But we have a distance to go. I'm going to work like hell as press secretary to see that we get there."



Washington press corps these days. The press' healthy suspicion of government has turned to hostility and bitterness. In the White House press room, the atmosphere verily drips with contempt.

An unwholesome testiness has crept into what was once a civil if not friendly working relationship between Washington officials and the press.

After a decade of deception by government officials, from Vietnam through all the Nixon scandals, the feeling of distrust has been etched deep in the minds of reporters here. Some have assumed holier-than-thou stances. Some have adopted scornful questioning techniques, implying in the question that whatever the official says is not to be believed anyway.

Nessen has stood up reasonably well for six months under sometimes merciless punishment from his former

