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TELEVISION PROGRAM TO "CBS NEWS' FACE THE NATION. "***

CBS News

FACE THE NATION

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GUESTS: General ALEXANDER HAIG
Former Ford White House
Chief of Staff

BEN BRADLEE
The Washington Post

JAMES CANNON
Ford Historian and Author,
"Time & Chance: Gerald Ford's
Appointment with History"

TOM DeFRANK
Washington Bureau Chief,
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***FACE THE NATION - CBS NEWS
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BOB SCHIEFFER, host:

Today on FACE THE NATION, President Gerald Ford: the life, the legacy and the man. President Ford, our 38th president, died last week at the age of 93, and is lying in state at the US Capitol. How will history remember our only unelected president? Why did he pardon Richard Nixon? And what did he think about the Iraq war? All questions for his former White House chief of staff Alexander Haig, biographer James Cannon, Tom DeFrank of The New York Daily News and Ben Bradlee, the former editor of The Washington Post.

I'll have a final word this morning on the Gerald Ford I knew, as we remember a president on FACE THE NATION.

Announcer: FACE THE NATION with CBS News chief Washington correspondent Bob Schieffer. And now, from CBS News in Washington, Bob Schieffer.

SCHIEFFER: And good morning again. Here in Washington, President Ford was remembered fondly last night at a memorial service at the US Capitol. His body will lie in state beneath the Capitol dome until a funeral at the National Cathedral here on Tuesday.

Half a world away in the Iraqi village just outside Tikrit where he was born, Saddam Hussein, who will be remembered as one of history's worst mass murderers, was buried after being hanged. Several thousand people showed up there, but there was not much reaction one way or the other. The violence continued. At least 80 Iraqis died, as did six American military people, just another awful day in a war that shows no sign of abating.

We're going to spend most of this morning talking about President Ford. And we are joined now by former White House chief of staff Al Haig, former President Nixon's chief of staff, and for a month President Ford's chief of staff; James Cannon, the author of "Time and Chance: Gerald Ford's Appointment with History"; Tom DeFrank of The New York Daily News, who covered President Ford; and from Drayden, Maryland, Ben Bradlee of The Washington Post. He directed the coverage for his newspaper when President Nixon resigned and Gerald Ford became president.

I want to start this morning with Tom DeFrank. You and I covered President Ford. We were White House correspondents in those days, when he was president. You were also, Tom, one of the last people to interview him. You interviewed him what, in last May?

Mr. TOM DeFRANK (Washington Bureau Chief, New York Daily News): I interviewed him in May, and as it turned out, that was the last interview, Bob.

SCHIEFFER: And then you saw him in November.

Mr. DeFRANK: I saw him six weeks ago on the 14th of November. It was very poignant, very painful, but I was really glad to have seen him.

SCHIEFFER: I want to ask you, because Bob Woodward really surprised a lot of people last week when he said Mr. Ford had told him back in 2004 that he was very opposed to the war in Iraq. He thought it was not justified, according to Bob Woodward, and he had some tough things, also, to say about former Secretary of Defense Don Rumsfeld and Vice President Cheney, who both worked for President Ford as young men. Were you surprised at that? And did he talk to you about that?

Mr. DeFRANK: Well, I was very surprised about it, Bob, because I had four interviews with Gerald Ford after the war in Iraq began: '03, '04, '05, and then May of '06, as you mentioned. And in every one of those interviews, he told me he supported the war in Iraq. Now, the one--the one instance where my reporting and Bob Woodward's reporting intersects is the question of weapons of mass destruction. President Ford told me in May that he thought it was a big mistake for President Bush to have pegged the invasion of Iraq to the WMD issue. He thought that was a serious mistake. But he never said that he was opposed to the war. Quite the contrary in four different interviews.

SCHIEFFER: Did he--what did he say about Vice President Cheney and Mr. Rumsfeld?

Mr. DeFRANK: Well, he was very defensive about them, curiously or not. Now, in previous interviews, he, every once in awhile, would shake his head on a couple of things. But he was very supportive, very defensive. As a matter of fact, I asked him whether the famous op-ed piece that he wrote about Rumsfeld after the generals had said Rumsfeld should resign, I asked him whether anybody had asked him to write that article defending Rumsfeld. And I thought he was going to get out of his chair and grab me by the throat. He said, 'Nobody has to tell me to defend Rummy.' So he was very, very supportive of both of them. And I'm such--one of the reasons why I was surprised at what Bob got from him.

SCHIEFFER: James Cannon, you worked for the president in the White House. You're also a former Newsweek editor. In some of the recent interviews, one I think in Newsweek today by Michael Beschloss, Mr. Ford lamented that the Republican Party was moving too far to the right, and he suggested that former President Bush, the first President Bush, could have done something, should have done more to halt that trend, moving to the right. Does--does that surprise you?

Mr. JAMES CANNON (Ford Historian and Author, "Time and Chance: Gerald Ford's Appointment with History"): No. I think--I think he felt it very strongly, that the party had gone too far to the right for him. He--he was a true conservative, certainly a true conservative fiscally. And--but he was much more of a moderate person on social issues. The party has gone right. I think he deeply felt that the party had left him. He was still where he was, the party had gone to the extreme right.

SCHIEFFER: Was he our last moderate president?

Mr. CANNON: I think so, yes. I think he was the last one, for example,

to--I think he was the last one, really, to have an open mind about issues, and this is a man who listened to everybody. He listened to the right, he listened to the left, and then he made up his own mind.

SCHIEFFER: Ben Bradlee, you were the editor of The Washington Post during those final days when Nixon--President Nixon resigned. It's understatement to say that The Washington Post had a great deal to do with that. And then Gerald Ford, of course, became our first unelected president. What do you think his legacy is going to be?

Mr. BEN BRADLEE (The Washington Post): Well, I--I'm, I--I'm impressed in these days at reading what a compulsively decent man he was, and how--how he was so unbitter and unangry, in public, at least. And I've enjoyed reading the papers more this week, not because, obviously, his life is over, but the--the memories of him have come back so strong and so--as such a kind man, and so decent, I feel good about that.

SCHIEFFER: You know, a lot of people say his legacy is going to revolve around the pardon of Richard Nixon. At the time he did it, there was real outrage in the country. A lot of people, including me, thought it was absolutely the wrong thing to do.

Mr. BRADLEE: Yeah.

SCHIEFFER: As the years passed, I came to believe that--that it was the--was the right thing to do. Where do you come down on that?

Mr. BRADLEE: Well, I--well, I think I come down on it. I--it was such a good story. I get so, you know, when he pardoned him, I get carried away by the--whether it's a good story or not, and God knows that was a good story. But if I felt anything at all, I felt that Nixon did not deserve a pardon without explaining, without--not without saying he was sorry, but without sort of confessing a little bit, and we never got that.

SCHIEFFER: But do you believe it was a good thing, in the long run? Did it...

Mr. BRADLEE: I now...

SCHIEFFER: ..as so many people now believe, that it really gave the country a chance to move forward and get past it?

Mr. BRADLEE: I do believe that. I--I--I think I still wish it had come a little bit later, but that's nitpicking. We had to get past that. If we co--if we just bogged down in--in the rediscussing it and talking about how good or bad it was, there was no--we had to get going again. The country had to get going.

SCHIEFFER: Well, Al Haig, that brings me to you. You were the--President Nixon's chief of staff, and there've been a spate of stories, you've been asked about this at least a dozen times over the last week. You took Vice

President Ford two pieces of paper in those days before Nixon resigned. One of them was the wording of what a pardon should look like. Another one explained that the vice president--or that the president, if Nixon, if--if President Ford became president, it explained how you would go about pardoning someone, and that he would have the right as president. There've been, since that very day, suggestions that there was some kind of deal that you took to Mr. Ford, that--that in exchange for a pardon that Nixon would be willing to resign. Go through that again for us and tell us what happened.

General ALEXANDER HAIG (Former Ford White House Chief of Staff): Mm-hmm. Yeah. Well...

SCHIEFFER: Was it a deal?

Gen. HAIG: No, of course not. There was no deal. Why would a rational man, who--who had just heard that he's about to be president, risk everything by doing something like that, doing a conditional deal? He was going to be president no matter what. That was a simple fact, and he was smart enough to know it. But what really bothered me about the timing of this latest spate of what I call the hydra-headed snake, became--comes out of, and I guess one of our guests could--could elaborate a little on who the source was, for most of this stuff, and it was right within the president's own staff. And that's a shame, because what they were really saying was that he perjured himself, because he gave sworn testimony before the Judiciary Committee, and the only president to ever have done that, in which he swore there was no such deal.

So when you resurrect that story today, the suggestion is that he perjured himself, and that really, I thought, was not only inappropriate in its timing, but outrageous in its connotation.

SCHIEFFER: You wrote in some detail that...

Mr. CANNON: There was no perjury, because first, he wasn't sworn in. He was not sworn in yet. By design, he was not sworn in. But the second thing was he recounted what had happened, and as I recall, you said in your own book that you took those documents over by instruction to give to President Ford.

Gen. HAIG: I appreciate that, because that would've been the second part of my answer.

Mr. CANNON: Yeah.

Gen. HAIG: That was given to me by Fred Buzhardt.

Mr. DeFRANK: Right.

Gen. HAIG: Those lists.

Mr. CANNON: The road after dark.

Gen. HAIG: And they had six options. That's what it was. The way you

describe them is not exactly right.

SCHIEFFER: There were six options, yes, that's exactly right.

Gen. HAIG: There were six options including pardoning him himself, pardoning the other Watergate people, or being pardoned by the president himself.

SCHIEFFER: Well, let me ask Mr. Cannon...

Mr. CANNON: Because this looked like a deal. Whether it may be we're involved in semantics here. It was an option to you. It was an option to the White House. But to others, to Hartmann, for example, who first saw these documents, he said, 'This is a deal.' You should've thrown the son of a bitch out of the office.

Gen. HAIG: There were a lot of things with Mr. Hartmann...

SCHIEFFER: But did he--did he believe that it was a deal that had been brought to him? Did Mr. Ford ever tell you that he thought it was a deal?

Mr. CANNON: No. He resisted that. He resisted the word deal. He said, 'I didn't think of it was a deal. I just thought it was an option.' But again, it looks to me like if you take over two pieces of paper, one of which says this is your power to pardon and this is a blank form for a pardon, that looks pretty much like a deal.

Mr. DeFRANK: Bob...

Gen. HAIG: We're all captives of our own positions on this earlier and you're a captive of yours.

SCHIEFFER: Let's hear Tom DeFrank's version of this.

Gen. HAIG: I'm a captive of mine, but I was the one that was there and I--I'm the one that conducted the discussion with the president. And I'm there was no discussion of a deal and no thought of a deal. As a matter of fact, when he called me the next night after being urged to do it by, I guess, by you and by Hartmann, I said, 'What are you talking about?' Because he said, you know, 'There was no deal.' He did that because of the pressure of his staff. You know that and I know that.

Mr. CANNON: He called you, yes he did. He called you because Harlow--Bryce Harlow told him, 'Mr. President, you can't do this. This will taint your presidency. It will look like a deal. You can't do this. So call up Al and tell him no.'

Gen. HAIG: Well, of course. There was no deal.

SCHIEFFER: Tom DeFrank, let's hear what Tom DeFrank's take is on this.

Mr. CANNON: There was no idea. I agree. There was no deal and that's

important.

Mr. DeFRANK: Bob, the only thing that I can add to this discussion, and I agree with what I'm hearing here, is that President Ford was very nice enough to talk to me for years and years and years privately about a lot of things with great candor. The one subject where his private comments were exactly the same as his public comments to me over a period of 30 years, 25 years, was the question of the pardon. He always said there was no deal and his private comments were just as emphatic about that as his public comments have been.

SCHIEFFER: All right. Well, we're going to continue this in just a minute.

(Announcements)

SCHIEFFER: We're back with our distinguished panel and we've been talking about the circumstances that led to President Ford pardoning former President Nixon. I would just add one little anecdote. I interviewed Mr. Ford in 2002 and at the conclusion of the interview, I said, 'Do you know, something just occurred to me. Did Mr. Nixon ever thank you for the pardon?' And he said, 'No, he never did.' And I said, 'Well, this is a great political sacrifice. It obviously hurt you politically, probably cost you the presidency.' I said, 'It seems to me he would've somewhere said, "Thank you." And he said, 'Well, that's Nixon for you.' And he let it go at that. Now, we now read in some of these recent interviews that he and President Nixon were great friends. Now, I know that they were close politically, but Tom DeFrank, do you think that's correct?

Mr. DeFRANK: No, I just don't think that's correct at all, Bob. They were friends. They had come to know each other in the House of Representatives. They were founding members of the Charter--Chowder and Marching Society, a famous Republican social group. But they weren't close. They just weren't close. And after Nixon left office, they only saw each other on ceremonial occasions or one time when Nixon was about to die, and President Ford went to the hospital in California to see him. They usually exchanged birthday greetings, and that was it. The notion that they were very dear friends is not correct, and the notion, in my opinion, that President Ford pardoned President Nixon because of their deep friendship is--is just ridiculous.

SCHIEFFER: Is that your take?

Gen. HAIG: Absolutely right on.

SCHIEFFER: Ben Bradlee, I want to ask you about this, because you know, we found this astonishing statistic last night that 40 percent of the people in America today were not born when Gerald Ford was president...

Mr. BRADLEE: I can't believe that.

SCHIEFFER: ...which is hard for this little group here to comprehend.

Mr. BRADLEE: Yeah, octogenarians all.

SCHIEFFER: Let me ask you this question...

Mr. DeFRANK: Be careful...(unintelligible)...

SCHIEFFER: What was it like in those days? Because I think it is very difficult to tell people what the country is going through. You were there. You saw Nixon leave, you saw President Ford come in. Did you ever get the feeling that somehow the country might fall apart? We'd gone through Watergate and then this--Vietnam had come before that. What were your thoughts, just as a citizen, in those days?

Mr. BRADLEE: Well, as a--as a citizen, no, I never thought the country would fall apart. As a journalist, it was the most exciting time that you could imagine. And that is--you had so much to find out, and there was so much going on under the table, that--or you thought there might be a lot going on under the table--that I spent all of my time trying to--trying to find out what the hell was going on. And--and for instance, the whole question of whether Nixon would resign or not, and when he would resign. And we had--at Newsweek, we had this strange--strange for Newsweek, anyway--source in Barry Goldwater, who was a friend of my in-laws. And I used to see him every night at the in-laws, having a martini. And we were trying to find out what Goldwater had picked up when he went over to tell Nixon that he only had a couple of dozen votes left. And it was--just as a journalist, it was a wonderful time to live.

SCHIEFFER: Well, so in addition to Deep Throat, you also had Barry Goldwater who kept you informed?

Mr. BRADLEE: We had Barry Goldwater for the--yeah, that surprises people, but there it is. And he was a pretty good source. He saw him, I think, almost every day there in the last--beginning of August. He would go over to the White House with governor--Senator Scott, and Johnny Rhodes of Arizona to report on how--what the mood of the Congress was. And you know, each day it got worse, and then finally he all but told us that Nixon had decided to resign the next day. And I got a very stern lecture about how--if we wrote it that night as a hard fact that he might not do it.

SCHIEFFER: Mm-hmm.

Well Al Haig, inside the White House what was it like?

Gen. HAIG: It was hell. But it was never a question of whether the government was going to stand or fall, believe me. You know, we had a number of people come in and serve, and even in those circumstances, but most of them were professionals, career people. I couldn't get the cream of the crop to come in and be secretary of the treasury, or whatever it was, and I had to get Bill Simon to shift jobs. We had 90 vacancies at the top level of our government, and we had to move people in. And many military men, many professional public servants filled the slots and ran the government, and it ran very efficiently.

SCHIEFFER: James Cannon, let me ask you a question, we're about out of time. We cannot end this broadcast without saying something about Betty Ford, who was a remarkable person in her own light.

Mr. CANNON: Was and is.

SCHIEFFER: Well, tell me a little about that.

Mr. CANNON: Well, this is a woman of great character and forthrightness and candor, and she had no aspiration--like her husband, she had no expectation that she would ever be in the White House. But once she was there, she made the best of it, and said, in effect, 'I am who I am. I'm not going to change, I'm going to be myself.' And she spoke her own mind, and he applauded her for it.

SCHIEFFER: A woman very much ahead of her time. She talked about her mastectomy when people didn't talk about this.

Mr. CANNON: She did.

SCHIEFFER: She later talked about her addiction. And when her family did an intervention, convinced her to go into rehab, she not only did that, whipped it, but then founded the Betty Ford Center, which literally has saved thousands of lives.

Mr. CANNON: Thousands of lives. And not just notables, but taxi drivers from Chicago and thousands of others.

SCHIEFFER: Quickly, Tom, your final impressions that you'll always remember about Gerald Ford.

Mr. DeFRANK: Well, well just an extraordinarily decent guy. An ordinary guy in the noblest sense of the phrase ordinary.

SCHIEFFER: I would add that in all the years I've been a reporter, he was the single nicest and most decent person that I ever had any contact with.

Mr. CANNON: Bob, I never met a man so easy to like or so comfortable with who he was.

SCHIEFFER: All right. We're going to leave it right there. Thanks to all of you for a fascinating discussion this morning. I'll be back with a final word in just a minute.

(Announcements)

SCHIEFFER: Finally today, Gerald Ford was an athlete in his youth, he took care of himself all his life, and he was in great shape when he came to the White House. Yet, after he took a tumble or two on the ski slopes and then slipped one rainy day and fell headlong down the stairs coming off Air Force

One, he developed this reputation for clumsiness. The joke was Vice President Rockefeller was just a banana peel away from the presidency. It was completely unfair, but partly my fault because I wrote a lot of those stories. But as someone said, 'What are you going to do if the president takes a header? Keep it a secret?'

The stories were great sight gags, but during the 1976 campaign, I found out the hard way that the gods have a way of getting even with those who tell the same joke too many times. When Mr. Ford stumbled, missed the door and bumped his head after a speech from the rear platform of a train in Kalamazoo, Michigan, I filed the obligatory story. I thought it was hilarious, but afterward, as I rushed to catch a plane for the next campaign stop, it didn't seem quite so funny. As I was boarding the plane, someone hollered at me and, momentarily distracted, I walked head-on into the overhead luggage rack, brained myself, and for an instant saw stars and actually passed out. I wasn't really hurt, but the next time I saw the president, it seemed only fair to tell him about it. He laughed out loud and said, 'By God, I just wish I could've been there to see it.' I think he meant it, too.

Please join us next week when we'll have an exclusive interview with the first woman speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi.