

Security Dangers Linked To White House Inquiry

Administration Sources Cite Leaks to Explain Approval of Burglary Plot in the Pentagon Papers Case

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, May 7 — In the summer and fall of 1971, President Nixon and members of his staff were disturbed and angry about a series of news leaks that they felt involved national security matters.

As a result, the White House ordered extensive investigations by the Federal Bureau of Investigation to determine the source of the leaks. Further, the White House set up its own investigative team, called the "plumbers" for closing such leaks, because those around the President did not believe that the F.B.I. was doing a thorough enough job.

White House sources confirmed today that this was the atmosphere surrounding the President and his top assistants at the time that E. Howard Hunt Jr. and G. Gordon Liddy were authorized to burglarize the office of Dr. Daniel Ellsberg's former psychiatrist.

Danger Cited

According to these sources, there was a feeling that the leaks had got out of hand and posed a widespread threat to the protection of documents that had a direct bearing on national security matters.

The fears expressed in the White House, they said, were heightened by widespread opposition in the country to President Nixon's actions that widened the war in Indochina.

The leaking of classified documents has long been a practice among Washington officials and some officials contended at the time that none of the 1971 disclosures threatened the national security, but the fear of threats to it motivated White House actions, according to Administration officials.

Thus, the telephones of reporters and Administration personnel with access to classified documents were tapped. The F.B.I. questioned or attempted to question reporters and officials. The "plumbers" employed a variety of investigative techniques, which in the case of Dr. Ellsberg, included using the facilities of the Central Intelligence Agency.

Although the White House was reported to have ordered some telephone taps on reporters because of leaks early in the Nixon Administration, its first big investigation was made after the publication of

the Pentagon papers on the Vietnam war in June of 1971. Dr. Ellsberg is on trial on charges of stealing, copying and releasing those papers.

President Nixon was angered by the disclosure and ordered subordinates to find out how they had occurred, according to some of his associates.

In July, while the Pentagon papers case was bubbling, the Nixon White House was further upset by disclosures in The New York Times and other newspapers about details of negotiations between the United States and the Soviet Union on arms limitations and about United States shipment of arms to Pakistan.

The F.B.I. questioned reporters and State Department personnel about the disclosures and were reported to have given some State Department officials lie detector tests in an attempt to learn the source of the leaks.

At a news conference last Sept. 3, Secretary of State William P. Rogers confirmed that the F.B.I. was investigating the source of these disclosures. "The law makes it quite clear," he said, "that top-secret matter, if divulged, is a criminal offense. When there's a violation of the law, the F.B.I. is the investigative arm that investigates it."

There is no Federal statute that makes it a crime to disclose top-secret information, as such. The Espionage Act of 1917 makes it a crime for a Government official to disclose defense data if the data "could be used to the injury of the United States, or to the advantage of any foreign nation."

Since last fall, no one has suggested publicly that the disclosures had any detrimental effect on American foreign policy or military movements.

The White House was further upset about leaks in December, when Jack Anderson, the columnist, reported information from classified papers regarding the Nixon Administration's position in the Pakistan-India war.

None of the disclosures was believed to have come from the White House staff. They apparently came from persons in executive departments.

Since 1971, leakers of all kinds from the Nixon Administration have been drastically curtailed.