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Bonn Admits Bugging to Assist U.S.

From News Dispatches

BONN, Aug. 2—Chancellor Willy Brandt's government announced today it has bugged private citizens at the request of its American, British and French allies.

But an official investigation turned up no evidence that the U.S. Army's counter-espionage service carried out illegal wiretapping, chief government spokesman Ruediger von Wechmar said.

The statement broke a week-long silence by the government over newspaper reports that the U.S. Army used illegal phone taps to identify Germans who reportedly encouraged desertions among the 200,000 American troops stationed here.

Results of an official Bonn investigation into the charges were made public by a high-level committee of undersecretaries representing Brandt's chancellery and key ministries.

A 1968 German law permits the three Western former occupation powers, Britain, France and the United States, to ask West German authorities to tap local telephones if breaches of Western security are suspected.

"The three powers have repeatedly made use of the above-mentioned possibility to request a surveillance measure," von Wechmar said. "In a portion of these cases, the request has been granted."

He added:

"The committee has established . . . in no case has there been an infringement of basic rights."

Von Wechmar said: "As far as we are concerned, the matter is now closed to our complete satisfaction." He said U.S. intelligence had been informed of the committee's findings.

Informed sources close to the committee said the inquiry had also discovered that U.S. agents, fearing that a Protestant mission in Mainz was harboring anti-Army American nationals, had "from time to time" observed the building. But this, too, had been within the bounds of agreements covering troops stationed on West German soil.