FBI Taps In Area Set At 50 to 100

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A local telephone company executive has estimated that between 50 and 100 national security wiretaps were in operation in the Washington area as recently as January and that the number of such wiretaps has remained relatively constant here for the past several years.

Earl A. Connor, staff supervisor of security for the Chesapeake and Potomac Telephone Co. and the only C&P official who handles requests here for FBI national security wiretaps, made the estimate in a January deposition in a civil lawsuit here. His deposition was filed Friday in U.S. District Court.

The testimony by Connor and other C&P officials indicates that the telephone company has responded immediately and without question to such FBI requests for wiretaps during the past three decades. Only in the past four years has the telephone company even required a written confirmation of such requests from the director of the FBI, Connor said.

The written confirmation may not arrive until after the tap already has been placed on a telephone line following a telephonic request for such services by an FBI official, Connor added.

The only other recent change in the procedure for handling national security wiretaps is C&P policy to bill the FBI for such services, Connor said. Before 1971, the services were provided free of charge.

See WIRETAPS, A4, Col. 2

WIRETAPS, From A1,

[illegible] like those outlined [illegible] by Connor's predecessor [illegible] previous deposition [illegible] the same civil lawsuit.

[illegible] gives a telephone [illegible] to Connor, who is [illegible] a telephone company employee who secretly [illegible] the tap—sometimes [illegible] Connors keeps the [illegible] record of the tap [illegible] his office, and erases [illegible] from that list [illegible] FBI tells him to dis[illegible] the tap.

[illegible] of Connor [illegible] by attorneys [illegible] National Security [illegible] Halperin, who is [illegible] former government officials and the telephone company for invasion of [illegible] violation of U.S. [illegible] statutes. The suit [illegible] of an alleged national security wiretap placed [illegible] residence with the approval of President [illegible] May, 1969.

[illegible] who were tapped with the approval of the former President as part of an investigation into alleged leaks to the press of classified government documents. The tap on Halperin's phone remained active for 21 months, after he left the National Security Council and became a worker in the unsuccessful presidential campaign of U.S. Sen. George McGovern (D-S.D.).

Halperin's attorneys [illegible] tend the number of national security wiretaps at any given time is relevant to the suit in that it might show an indiscriminate use of such procedures without proper verification by the government and the telephone company.

Connor gave this answer when asked how many taps were in place in 1971:

"My best present estimate—and it would be an estimate—I would say it could have been between 50 and 100—and it is an estimate. I really can't hit it exactly."

He said he would make the same estimate for each year up to now. "I think it is an average trend," said Connor, the only C&P official with regular daily access to the list.

He said no review is made of the taps, no reports are made to any of his superiors about the taps, and that he has never turned down an FBI request for a tap.

The FBI official who normally makes request for a national security wiretap is James Gaffney, according to Connor, whom he said he met through former C&P official Homer Hampton, who preceded Connor in handling wiretaps.

In a deposition filed in the Halperin suit last month, Hampton outlined for the first time his 22 years of handling FBI national security wiretap requests. He said 100 such wiretaps were in operation at one time here during most of the last three presidential administrations. Connor succeeded Hampton upon his retirement.

Connor said he was given the handwritten list of existing taps by Hampton in 1971, and that he makes erasures and additions on that same list.

Former FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, in his reports to Congress, regularly reported that the number of national security wiretaps in place throughout the country never exceeded 100.

However, information disclosed during the House Judiciary Committee impeachment hearings last year confirmed what had been a longtime Washington rumor—that Hoover would order certain taps disconnected shortly before his appearances on the Hill so the number of such taps would appear small