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Washington Merry-Go-Round by JACK ANDERSON

WASHINGTON — The secretive National Security Agency, which specializes in gathering foreign intelligence, once tried to get the late J. Edgar Hoover to break into foreign

embassies to steal their spy codes.

This was too much for the intrepid old FBI director who vetoed the project, according to a top-secret summary, "because of risk."

The summary digests the testimony last year of Tom Charles Huston, a young White House aide, behind guarded doors of the Senate Armed Services Committee. The senators questioned Huston about his notorious plan, endorsed by President Nixon, to root out radicals through housebreakings, wiretaps and intimidation.

Some of Hoover's top aides, testified Huston, had wanted him to use teen-age informers on college campuses. At first, Huston refused to employ anyone under 21. But "after the voting age was lowered to 18 by Congress," said Huston, "Hoover permitted FBI campus informers to be lowered to 18."

Hoover apparently felt anyone old enough to vote was old enough to spy.

Some of Hoover's aides were privately skeptical of the old crime fighter's grasp of revolutionary activities, Huston told the committee. He said the dissident FBI aides "believed Hoover didn't understand the difference between the Communists of the '30s and '40s and the present - day revolutionaries."

Huston testified that, before Hoover scotched the secret scheme, federal intelligence agencies plotted the housebreakings and other criminal acts without concern for "the exact lines to be drawn" or for "their legality."

"There was never a discussion," he added, "as to limiting the activities of foreign inspired activities." In other words, relates the top-secret summary, Huston "assumed the group would deal with both foreign - inspired and purely domestic threats to national security."

A mysterious "NSID-6" plan, mentioned in the summary, would have allowed federal

agents to listen in on "communication of U.S. citizens using international facilities." This presumably means wiretaps would have been permitted on overseas phone calls.

There was talk, too, of mail covers to develop foreign intelligence in the United States. But Huston insisted this might "entail the identification of contacts of Soviet bloc intelligence sources." In other words, the mail cover might interfere with U.S. informants.

The idea of breaking into foreign embassies to steal their

codes was proposed by the former National Security Agency boss, Adm. Noel Gaylor, who is now U.S. military commander in the Pacific.

"Huston said that NSA (Gaylor) wanted the FBI to conduct surreptitious entry for foreign cryptographic material," states the summary. "Hoover didn't because of risk."

FOOTNOTE: At the NSA, a spokesman declined comment. Huston, now practicing law in Indianapolis, also would not comment for the record.

WASHINGTON WHIRL: Intelligence reports warn that Arab terrorists are plotting to kill or kidnap Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. Kissinger and his new wife are guarded wherever they go by the Secret Service... Ex-Attorney General John Mitchell's tax returns show he is living on income from his former law firm, which removed his name from the door but is continuing to pay him. Mitchell, in turn, is paying the bills of his separated wife, Martha, including her telephone bills which run several hundred dollars a month... Watergate Sen. Edward Gurney, R-Fla., now on the receiving end of an investigation, will face a federal grand jury in Jacksonville, Fla., on May 13. The prosecutors will ask him to account for funds that were collected by his political organization. Unless he comes up with the right answers, the prosecutors are considering charging him with graft...

Of all the indicted Watergate defendants, the special prosecutors admit privately that their weakest case is against former White House aide Charles Colson. They debated up to the last minute whether to include him in the indictments... The Marriott hotel-restaurant chain, whose founder J. Willard Marriott ran both the 1968 and 1972 inaugurals for President Nixon, has removed some of the Nixon portraits from its hotels. The expensive pictures had been defaced with graffiti....

The House folding room, which

is located in a poorly lit and ventilated basement called "The Hole" by workers, operates in gross violation of the Occupational Safety and Health Act which the Congress passed and expects commercial firms to obey... John Volpe, the U.S. ambassador to Rome, has written to President Nixon congratulating him on his choice of James St. Clair to defend him against impeachment charges. When Volpe was governor of Massachusetts, he said, St. Clair did a "brilliant" job directing a state investigation of police corruption...