



Laser 'Bug' in Nixon Office

By Austin Scott

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Penthouse Magazine said yesterday that President Nixon's Oval Office was secretly bugged before August, 1970, by a sophisticated laser beam transmitter hidden in the wall and concealed beneath a coat of fresh paint.

In an article written for the July issue of Penthouse, former foreign correspondent Tad Szulc said the device was "apparently controlled by one of the (U.S.) intelligence agencies," and, unlike a tape system could identify every individual voice in the room as well as several separate simultaneous conversations.

William Hawthorne, a Secret Service spokesman, said when asked for comment that the Secret Service knows of no such bugging and does not be-

lieve such a device was ever installed.

The article said the transmitter was removed in August, 1970, and that one or more senior officials of the Secret Service and the Central Intelligence Agency knew of its existence.

Szulc said the purpose of the transmitter, the identity of those who ordered it installed, whether the Secret Service and the CIA officials knew about it before it was removed, and whether Nixon ever knew about it are unknown.

Hawthorne said he had checked with the Secret Service officials responsible for the Oval Office at the time in question, and that they were not aware of any such device.

"We don't believe it could have been installed," Hawthorne said.

Szulc said the laser beam bugging operation went by the code name "Easy Chair."

"Highly authoritative sources" said the bug was installed by a foreign-born painter employed by the government, Szulc wrote. He said he knows the name of the painter, but withheld it from publication "to avoid causing suffering and embarrassment to persons innocently involved in this operation."

Szulc said only about a dozen past and present officials of the intelligence community know about "Easy Chair."

He said the laser bug picked up all telephone conversations, including those made over "secure" scrambler lines, as well as every conversation between Nixon and his aides, friends and visitors.

How far the transmitter

could broadcast the pickups was not clear, Szulc said, but he said experts believe it probably had a transmission range of about a half-mile, so that the conversations could have been received anywhere in the White House, the adjoining Executive Office Building, the Treasury Building a block away, or even the Commerce Department three blocks away.

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