

How Nixon Bugged Himself

One might expect a President of the U.S. to use the most advanced *Mission: Impossible* gadgetry to record his conversations for posterity. But Nixon had no need to. The Secret Service men who, on his instructions, tapped his telephones and bugged his offices, shunned such gimmicks as radios in martini olives and aimed instead for the clearest possible transmission (or "fidelity") of conversation right down to the last lisp. They tapped the Chief Executive's phones by connecting them directly to the banks of tape recorders in the White House basement. Recording began automatically when the President used a phone in any of three rooms: the Oval Office, the President's office in the Executive Office Building and the Lincoln Sitting Room on the second floor of the White House. Nixon's study at Camp David had a similar apparatus.

The Oval Office and the office in the Executive Office Building were also bugged for general conversations among persons on the premises. Alexander Butterfield told the Ervin committee that the bugs were voice-activated, a term which means that a tape starts running as soon as someone speaks. But TIME has learned that his testimony was incorrect. Voice-activated recording (VOX in the jargon of the snooper's trade) has one major drawback: a slight time lag between the beginning of conversation and the start of recording. As part of the quest for simple, sure fidelity, Nixon's mikes were activated whenever he entered one of the bugged rooms. Strategically placed locator boxes, showing seven locations in all, indicated the President's whereabouts in and around the White House or in the Ex-

ecutive Office Building at any given moment and presumably set the tape machines running when Nixon entered a room.

Four former Nixon aides, who needed to know where Nixon was at all times, had locator boxes in their offices. They were: H.R. Haldeman, onetime chief of staff; Dwight L. Chapin, onetime presidential appointments secretary; Stephen B. Bull, who assisted Chapin with appointments; and Butterfield, then a Haldeman aide. Butterfield also had on his phone a button that could turn on the microphones in the Cabinet Room. When the locator box indicated that the President had entered the Cabinet Room, Butterfield pressed a switch that started the recording device there. Under the table in the Cabinet Room were two buttons the President could use to operate the recording device himself, but Butterfield indicated that Nixon "never paid any attention to them."