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NIXON HAD 2 AIDES FIGHT NEWS LEAKS

Ziegler Confirms '71 Role of 'White House Plumbers'

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The White House confirmed today that a two-man investigative team, known jokingly as the White House plumbers, worked during 1971 at trying to plug news leaks concerning "national security affairs" and had a private telephone.

Ronald L. Ziegler, the White House press secretary, said in response to questions that the two aides, David Young and Egil Krogh Jr., had been assigned to investigate a "series of news reports relating to a great extent to national security affairs."

A private phone—that is, one that was not connected through the White House switchboard—was put in for their use and the use of persons wishing to provide information to them, he said.

'Highest Levels'

Mr. Ziegler said that "the concert regarding the leaks reached into the highest levels of this Administration," a phrase generally assumed to refer to the President himself.

In response to further questions, Mr. Ziegler said that it was his understanding that E. Howard Hunt Jr. and G. Gordon Liddy had not been involved in the project and that Bernard J. Barker had not been called on the private telephone.

All three men are defendants in the Watergate case and have been linked in newspaper reports with a group called the White House plumbers.

Mr. Ziegler said that "to attempt to associate this with anything that happened after January of 1972, in fact, through suggestion or through association with individuals who fell into bad times later in the year of 1972, would be folly on the part of those who attempted to do that."

He also said that John D. Ehrlichman, head of the Domestic Council, had been unaware that the bills for the private telephone were paid by his office. Mr. Krogh, who was nominated Saturday as Under Secretary of Transportation, and Mr. Young were on Mr. Ehrlichman's staff.

Leaks Not Specified

Mr. Ziegler would not say specifically what news leaks the Administration had been concerned about. He declined to say whether the publication by the columnist Jack Anderson of confidential White House memos dealing with the India-Pakistan conflict was included.

He said that the problem had now been cleared up "to a great extent" and that the "project" had come to an end in "early 1972."

Earlier, Mr. Ziegler announced a series of second-term changes in the Departments of Agriculture and Defense.

He said that J. Phil Campbell would remain as Under Secretary of Agriculture and that Richard E. Lyng, Assistant Secretary of Agriculture, would be replaced by Thomas K. Cowder as Secretary for Management and Commodity Programs. Mr. Shultz would remain as Secretary of the Department of the Interior.