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White House Reports Progress In Declassifying Secret Papers

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MIAMI, April 24—The Government said today that substantial progress had been made in reducing the number of classified documents in its files.

The Interagency Classification Review Committee, which President Nixon established after the Pentagon papers dispute of 1971 brought charges of excessive secrecy in the Government, issued a progress report saying that the number of officials authorized to classify material had been reduced by 63 per cent and that millions of documents had been declassified after a review.

The report, released by the White House, came as John S. D. Eisenhower resigned as chairman to become deputy commander of the 79th Army Reserve Command. Gerald L. Warren, deputy White House press secretary, said the President had accepted the resignation with "deep regret" and had named Dr. James B. Rhoads, the archivist of the United States, as acting chairman.

President Nixon established the committee under an executive order of March 8, 1972, intended to establish a better system of classifying and declassifying documents relating to the national security.

The work of the committee has not eliminated charges that the Government is maintaining secrecy over matters that do not bear on national defense.

Newspapers, for example, have continuously experienced difficulty in obtaining documents a number of years old through the new procedures. The New York Times requested 50 documents recently and received only five, none of which

turned out to have much value.

Some were denied on the ground that secrecy was necessary and others on the ground that the request did not contain enough particulars to find the document.

Documents on the Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961 were turned down for lack of particulars, but not enough was publicly known about the documents to be specific as to date and precise about subject matter. High costs of locating the documents and taking them through the classification process have been another deterrent.

The committee cited the following:

¶ Since the committee was established, the number of officials authorized to classify material as secret, top secret or confidential, exclusive of the Central Intelligence Agency, was reduced from 48,814 to 17,883, or a 63 per cent reduction.

¶ There was a 71 per cent reduction in the officials authorized to stamp material top secret, from 3,634 to 1,056. This, too, was exclusive of the C.I.A., which never publishes numbers of its officials but reported an 81 per cent reduction in top secret classifiers.

¶ By Dec. 31, 1972, the National Archives and Records Service had declassified about 29 million of the 160 million pages from the World War II period. It is expected that this declassification project will be completed by 1975.

¶ Detailed instructions have been issued to guide departments on the proper system of classifying and declassifying material.