

Nixon Handling of Spying By Military Under Inquiry

By SEYMOUR M. HERSH
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WASHINGTON, Feb. 25 —

The Watergate special prosecution force has begun an inquiry into President Nixon's handling of the military snooping on the White House in 1971, well-placed sources said today.

Investigators from the office of Leon Jaworski, the special prosecutor, have already been permitted to view the highly classified White House report on the spying compiled by David R. Young Jr., the sources said, and are planning to question Yeoman 1st Cl. Charles E. Radford, named as a central figure in the incident.

The New York Times reported yesterday that Mr. Nixon personally blocked the possible prosecution of Yeoman Radford and one of his superior officers, Rear Adm. Robert O. Welander, for their role in the military snooping. The President was quoted as having expressed the fear that any prosecutions would necessarily lead to the publication of national security secrets.

The Watergate prosecutors, however, are known to have tentatively concluded that the report compiled by Mr. Young, then a co-director of the White House investigative unit known as the "plumbers," was — as one official put it — "not so explosive."

It was explained that many of the general findings in the Young report had now been disclosed by newspapers and in recent hearings before the Senate Armed Services Committee with no apparent breach of "national security."

Yet White Houses sources have acknowledged that the snooping was one of Mr. Nixon's concerns last spring when he attempted to curb the Justice Department's inquiry into the plumbers' unit. Mr. Nixon eventually dropped his objections, and four members of the "plumbers," including John D. Ehrlichman, its over-all supervisor, were indicted last summer for their role in the burglary of the office of Dr. Daniel Ellsberg's former psychiatrist.

Some members of the special Watergate force are known to suspect that the military snoop-

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ing, while a serious matter of internal security, was in effect utilized, by Mr. Nixon last spring in an effort to prevent disclosure of the other member activities directed against Dr. Ellsberg following the publication of the Pentagon papers. If so, they say, this could amount to obstruction of justice.

As late as last November, Mr. Nixon publicly described the snooping as one "so sensitive" that the Senate Watergate committee, after a briefing, agreed not to mention it in public.

Yet shortly after the first newspaper reports on it in mid-January, high White House officials went to lengths to debunk the significance of the snooping, depicting it as large-

ly the work of an "overexuberant" clerk—Yeoman Radford—who worked in a military liaison office in the White House.

The yeoman has told the Senate committee that he purloined hundreds of unauthorized documents in 1971 and gave them to Admiral Welander for delivery to the office of Adm. Thomas H. Moorer, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The yeoman acknowledged the snooping after being accused of leaking classified White House documents on the India-Pakistan War in December, 1971, to Jack Anderson, the columnist.

Admirals Moorer and Welander have denied the yeoman's allegation, although they have acknowledged receiving two packets of illicitly obtained

documents from him including the transcript of one of the private conversations between Henry A. Kissinger, then President Nixon's adviser on foreign affairs, and Premier Chou En-lai of China.

At one point in December, 1971, according to Senate testimony, Mr. Ehrlichman unsuccessfully sought to have Admiral Welander sign a statement on White House stationery admitting to "political spying" against the White House. Mr. Nixon and Mr. Kissinger were known to be furious over the military snooping, and Mr. Kissinger had ordered the military liaison office in the White House abolished overnight.

Yet the President reappointed Admiral Moorer to a second two-year term as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs in mid-1972.

Sources close to the admirals have said that the Chairman was assured by the President of his reappointment in February of that year.

The Watergate prosecutors are known to be curious about that reappointment and will reportedly seek to find out as much as possible about it.

Other sources have reported that Admiral Moorer was a lifelong friend of Gov. George C. Wallace of Alabama and that the White House was known to be seriously concerned about Mr. Wallace's impact on the 1972 elections.

In a television interview on Jan. 2, 1972, shortly after he decided not to press charges in connection with the snooping, Mr. Nixon sidestepped a question about Mr. Wallace, declaring that the Governor was

"not our problem" but a problem for the Democrats.

Some White House officials have explained Mr. Nixon's not demanding prosecutions on the military snooping as a pragmatic decision based on his time the President was negotiating privately at high levels with North Vietnam, China and the Soviet Union.

"You could call this a brutally realistic exercise in Presidential judgment," one source said.

Another area of possible inquiry by the Watergate prosecutors, sources said, was the relationship between Mr. Nixon's decision not to prosecute and the then-pending trial of Dr. Ellsberg in Los Angeles.

On Dec. 29, 1971, in the

midst of White House debate over the snooping, the Justice Department indicted Dr. Ellsberg for a second time on 12 criminal charges for his role in releasing the Pentagon papers.

Some members of the Armed Services Committee have challenged Mr. Nixon's reported fear of compromising national security secrets by court-martialing Yeoman Radford or Admiral Welander, noting that military legal proceedings could easily be conducted in secrecy.

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