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by JACK ANDERSON

WASHINGTON — Not long after Archibald Cox was appointed special Watergate prosecutor, he turned down a recommendation that he subpoena White House telephone tapes.

This was several weeks before the prosecutors learned that President Nixon had secretly taped all conversations inside his oval office. They knew, however, that his two top aides, Bob Haldeman and John Ehrlichman, had taped their telephone conversations.

The original prosecutors subpoenaed some telephone tapes from Ehrlichman. When Cox took over the prosecution, they recommended that he subpoena other Haldeman - Ehrlichman tapes in White House custody.

Sources close to Cox say he turned down the suggestion because he was still in the process of reviewing the case. He didn't want to take any action, they say, until he had completed his assessment. He has now issued a subpoena for selective White House tapes.

Footnote: Cox's office gave us this statement: "It is improper for any prosecutor to discuss communications or recommendations made among the prosecution team in any case. On the general subject of how we have proceeded, Mr. Cox has pointed out that he tried to establish very early at the White House that he had no desire to simply rummage through files. The subpoena issued last week was as specific as it could be to make it clear the special prosecutor sought information clearly relevant to the investigation of the case."

Naval Negligence: More than ever, the Navy seems to be made up of steel ships and wooden men.

Documents intended for the eyes only of top Navy brass tell how the fleet has been measurably weakened by mismanagement of ship repairs, which keep vessels in port far longer than necessary.

In shipyards run by the Navy

itself and in others operated by private industry, Navy inspectors have found strong evidence of inefficiency, waste and greed.

In Norfolk, Va., where ship repairs are handled by private shipyards under the direction of the Navy, the inspectors found:

The Navy is unable to compel the contractors to pay for extra shifts or have employees work overtime as long as the contractor says work is on schedule.

The Navy has been unable to collect damages from shipyards for delays "although there have been completion delays as the result of contractor negligence."

Shipyards are understaffed. Part of the blame, according to the Navy, belongs to its own supervisor who has failed to tell shipyards of estimated workloads. The contractors "do not have adequate manpower available and little capacity to expand to meet the workload available," allege the inspectors.

Shipyards that already have too much work are given more, although other Chesapeake yards at Baltimore are not used.

There is a general snafu on scheduling repairs, with some requests being made too late and others being made early but ignored by the brass until the deadline.

Some repairs are grossly underestimated when ordered by officers. Reported the inspectors: "Results have been

excessive work growth from time of initial bid award, at times exceeding 100 per cent."

Late awards of repair contracts — sometimes only 10 days before work is to begin — makes it impossible for contractors to have adequate supplies on hand. The inspectors note: "Material is difficult and expensive to obtain on a crash basis."

Equipment needed for many older ships is no longer available, forcing contractors to make parts as they go along.

Reports on progress of the

repairs often fail to warn officials of developing trouble. "Often," the inspectors found, "the situation is one of being in extremis before notifying all concerned."

The shipbuilding supervisor's office is understaffed, many of the officers assigned are not competent and others are inexperienced.

In their wide - ranging critique of the Norfolk operation, the inspectors said they did not want to single out Norfolk for rebuke.

"The nature of the problems

are such," they said, "that they are undoubtedly present in every location where repair work is being accomplished on ships in private shipyards under the cognizance of a supervisor of shipbuilding."

Inside the Navy, there is widespread knowledge of failure by naval facilities as well. In a stern admonition to the Navy's Design Services, the top brass barked about "the need for markedly improving the entire design services program."

Inspections of a number of naval shipyards showed that the problems were just as bad as in those operated privately. At Long Beach, Calif., for example, the Navy found a "lack of adequate planning." Citing changes in plans after work on ships has started — sometimes as high as 50 per cent — the Navy admitted: "Continual changes are expensive in dollars and waste limited manpower."

While the admirals continually beg Congress for more ships, they have been unsuccessful at keeping the ships they already have afloat.