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Wiretap Orders Reported Gone From Hoover Files

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WASHINGTON, May 6—Official documents authorizing wiretaps on the telephones of reporters and White House aides disappeared from the personal files of J. Edgar Hoover, director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, in the spring of 1971 after he threatened to disclose the existence of the taps, according to Time Magazine.

The wiretapping authorizations, reportedly signed by Attorney General John N. Mitchell over a two-year period from 1969 to 1971, were ordered by President Nixon in an attempt to discover the source of "leaks" of Government secrets to the press, the magazine said.

In its issue that will be on newsstands tomorrow, Time reports that the late Mr. Hoover, anxious over what he believed were attempts by Nixon Administration officials to force him into retirement, threatened to reveal the taps.

In the late spring of 1971, Time says, Mr. Hoover "suddenly discovered that all of his records on the taps had disappeared." W. Mark Felt, now the bureau's No. 2 official, was asked to investigate the disappearance.

Mr. Felt reportedly asked

Robert C. Mardian, who at the time headed the Justice Department's Internal Security Division, if he knew who had taken the files.

"Ask the President. Or ask Mitchell," Mr. Mardian is said to have replied.

Neither Mr. Mitchell, who left the Justice Department in March of last year, nor Mr. Mardian, now a resident of Phoenix, Ariz., could be reached for comment on the article. The bureau said that Mr. Felt was in California.

One Justice Department official, who denied firsthand knowledge of the alleged wiretapping operation, which reportedly involved at least two reporters of The New York Times, said that under rules in force at the time the only authorization necessary for such an operation would have been that of the Attorney General.

A Supreme Court decision last spring, a year after the documents reportedly vanished, held that court orders were required for the previously exempted "national security" wiretaps unless they involved individuals with foreign connections.