

SF Examiner

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WASHINGTON — When Melvin R. Laird took occupancy of John D. Ehrlichman's old office on the fourth floor of the White House as domestic policy chief, he issued an abrupt and urgent order for interior redecoration: Get that secret bugging equipment out of here.

Laird was amazed to find in Ehrlichman's office two

concealed microphones in the ceiling and communications equipment, including tape recorders, hidden in a cabinet behind his desk.

Thus, while unseen sophisticated equipment was recording all of President Nixon's conversations, Ehrlichman also could bug visitors to his office without their knowledge.

John Mitchell recently told the Ervin committee he suspected Ehrlichman was surreptitiously taping one con-

versation in Ehrlichman's office concerning Watergate. But a check of senior White House aides, past and present, produced universal ignorance that Ehrlichman had bugged his own office. Thus, while Ehrlichman apparently was not informed by Chief of Staff H. R. Haldeman that Nixon was secretly wired for sound, he had his own secret.

Some presidential aides view Ehrlichman's hidden microphones as markedly

more sinister than Nixon's. They believe the Oval Office bugging stemmed from the same Haldeman mania for historical documentation that made him a home-movie camera fanatic. Moreover, the presidential tapes were kept under lock and key by the Secret Service. In contrast, Ehrlichman controlled his own tapes, whose purpose may well have been much more immediate than helping future historians.