

Secret Inquiry

Report of 1971 Pentagon Spying On Kissinger

By Seymour M. Hersh
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Washington

The White House investigative unit known as the plumbers uncovered evidence in late 1971 that a "ring" of military officers was relaying highly classified information on the China talks and other matters to off-

officials in the Pentagon, well-informed sources report.

The secret inquiry, headed by David R. Young Jr., then a co-director of the plumbers, was said to have determined that at least two military officers had participated in apparently illegal activities — including the ransacking of classified files and the unauthorized photocopying of documents — in an apparent attempt to keep high Pentagon officials up-to-date on White House negotiations.

The sources said the passed-on information apparently came from files of the National Security Council, headed by Henry Kissinger, and was transmitted to the high Pentagon officials.

Although no charges were filed formally, the sources added, as many as six military men were reassigned after the investigation.

Sources said that Young's inquiry initially was begun in response to the December 1971 publication of secret National Security Council documents on the India-Pakistan war by columnist Jack Anderson but quickly spread into a broad investigation of possible widespread military spying.

It was this investigation, reliable sources said, that has been repeatedly cited by President Nixon as the "national security" matter that justified his initial attempt

(Radford later denied to a Post reporter that he was the source of the leak.)

Neither Welander nor Laird could be reached yesterday, but Mooror denounced the allegation that he had received classified information through indirect channels as "ludicrous."

During Young's investigation, sources said, he was ordered to report periodically to General Alexander M. Haig Jr., then Kissinger's key deputy in the National Security Council and now the White House chief of staff. This was the first indication that Young, a former aide to Kissinger, maintained a professional relationship with the council while serving with the plumbers. Kissinger has repeatedly denied any knowledge of the activities of the plumbers.

An account of the secret White House investigation was initially published yesterday by the Chicago Tribune, which said that the case was the "mysterious" national security matter so often cited by the President in an attempt to keep the operations of the plumbers secret.

In a statement issued yesterday from Mr. Nixon's home in San Clemente, the White House said that the published news accounts "convey in incorrect impression of the knowledge and action of the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; that the matter was investigated at the time; that the source of these leaks was a low-level employee whose clerical tasks gave him access to highly classified information and that today's news stories are based on fragmentary accounts of the incident."

A New York Times investigation, however, had previously established that there was a wide diversity of opinion among high-level White House aides over the significance and accuracy of the plumbers' findings.

One group — while acknowledging that some military men assigned to the National Security Council had copied documents to which they did not formally have access — described the incident as "just plain in-house rinky-dink stuff" and

said that no link had been made between the officers and any public dissemination of classified papers, including the India-Pakistan documents.

Another group, which includes some of Young's former colleagues and personal acquaintances, said that the plumbers "really did uncover a ring of some sort inside the NSC."

One source said one of the military men working in the council was "actually going through other people's files."

The sources all agreed, however, that Young's inquiry into possible wrongdoing inside the council did not begin until late 1971. This was after the publication of the Anderson papers on the India-Pakistan war, and could not have been involved, as reported, in Mr. Nixon's decision to set up the plumbers unit six months earlier — which he has at times given as his reason.

One clue to the incompleteness of the plumbers inquiry was provided by Mr. Nixon during a news conference on Feb. 10, 1972, three months after publication of the India-Pakistan papers by Anderson.

"We have a lot of circumstantial evidence" on the identity of Mr. Anderson's sources," the President said, adding that "as a lawyer, I can say that we do not have evidence that I consider adequate or the attorney general considers adequate to take to court."

"You can be sure that the investigation is continuing," Mr. Nixon said. "If the investigation gets a break which provides the kind of evidence which will stand up in court, we will present it. But we cannot go to court on circumstantial evidence."

Five days later Anderson publicly declared that the White House in effect had fired the wrong man by "banishing" Welander from his position with the Joint Chiefs of Staff to sea duty. "I never talked to Welander. He gave me nothing," Anderson said.

last spring to limit the Justice Department's investigation of the plumbers.

The sources said that Young and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, who also heads the National Security Council, both suspected then that reports on the White House's closely held negotiations with China, North Vietnam and the So-

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viet Union — were being leaked to Defense Secretary Melvin R. Laird and Admiral Thomas H. Mooror, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Details of the negotiations were officially limited to a few officials in the White House and the National Security Council staff.

The highest ranking officer reassigned, sources said, was Rear Admiral Robert O. Welander, who was then serving as the liaison officer between the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the National Security Council.

(The Washington Post reported that Yeoman First Class Charles E. Radford, an aide to Welander, was found to be making copies of National Security Council documents regularly. It added that its sources said that Radford was also suspected of leaking documents to columnist Anderson.