

A Private White House Phone to Probe 'Leaks'

Washington

The White House acknowledged yesterday that a private telephone was installed for use by two White House staffers to investigate news leaks involving "national security affairs."

Presidential press secretary Ronald L. Ziegler would not say who authorized the use of a private phone, or where it was located but he did say the concern regarding the leaks "reached into the highest levels of this administration."

He was referring to 1971 news leaks, a time when the Pentagon Papers and memos regarding the India-Pakistan conflict were obtained by news representatives.

However, Ziegler would not specify exactly what leaks were under investigation by the two presidential aides he identified as Egil Krogh and David Young.

Ziegler denied any connection, which had been reported by the Washington Post, with former White House consultants E. Howard Hunt Jr. and Bernard L. Barker, two of the defendants in the June 1972 Watergate case involving the bugging of the Democratic National Committee headquarters.

The Post said last week that a special private telephone in the Executive Office Building, billed to the private home of a secretary, "was used almost exclusively" for conversations between Hunt and Barker. Ziegler said the telephone was taken out in January 1972 and that it was "folly to associate it late in 1972."

Ziegler said the private telephone was put in so that sources reporting to Krogh and Young "could do so on a private basis."

As to whether the two White House investigators were able to plug the leaks,

Ziegler said: "Pretty much so."

He would not comment on whether any individuals were prosecuted or removed from their posts as a result of the probe.

Ziegler said it was his understanding that neither Hunt nor G. Gordon Liddy, another Watergate defendant, was involved in this project. He added that John D. Ehrlichman, President Nixon's chief domestic adviser, was aware of the investigation but not of the private phone operation. Krogh and Young were on his staff.

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