

**'Leak' Probe****Phone Taps on Reporters Told****Washington**

The Nixon administration tapped the telephones of at least two newspaper reporters in 1971 as part of the investigation reportedly ordered by President Nixon into the leak of the Pentagon Papers to the press, according to two highly placed sources in the executive branch.

The wiretapping was supervised by Watergate conspirators E. Howard Hunt Jr. and G. Gordon Liddy, who were then working in the White House, and it was authorized by John N. Mitchell while he was Attorney General, one of the sources said.

That source said two reporters from the New York Times, which published the Pentagon Papers in June, 1971, were among those whose phones were tapped. Another source confirmed that the telephones of Times' reporters were tapped but could not identify those placed under surveillance.

**LEGALITY**

It is unclear whether the wiretapping was legal. The Attorney General has power to order electronic surveillance without a court order in cases of national security involving "foreign" subversives.

Both sources said that the White House conducted earlier wiretaps of other reporters in investigating leaks of information to the news me-

dia about the strategic arms litigation talks.

During the first Nixon administration, the office of home telephones of at least ten White House staff members were also tapped in the course of investigations into the new leaks, the sources said.

In late 1971 or early 1972, it was decided at a Nixon campaign strategy meeting that some members of the same vigilante squad responsible for the Pentagon Papers wiretapping would be used to wiretap the telephones of Democratic presidential candidates, according to one of the sources.

Although the activities of the squad were authorized by then Attorney General Mitchell, the source said, they were more closely supervised by Assistant Attorney General Robert C. Mardian, who later became the political coordinator of the Committee for the Re-election of the President, the sources said.

**DOCUMENTS**

According to the sources, the wiretapping in the Pentagon Papers case began shortly after the times started publication of the classified multi-volume history of the Vietnam war. The Times had obtained the documents from Daniel Ellsberg, the former Defense Department analyst now on trial in Los Angeles.

In June, 1971, the govern-

ment moved unsuccessfully in court to permanently halt the publication of the Pentagon papers on the grounds of national security.

At the time, a White House team known as "the plumbers" was attempting to determine how the Times had obtained the papers.

That project, which was under the direction of former presidential special counsel Charles W. Colson and John Ehrlichman, then President Nixon's former principal deputy for domestic affairs, was undertaken on orders from the President, according to a statement given to the FBI last week by Ehrlichman.

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