

Public figures stunned at disclosure of tape recording

LBJ Aides Disavow System

By Jules Witcover
Washington Post Staff Writer

The White House reported yesterday that the Nixon Administration system of automatically recording Mr. Nixon's conversations in several offices and on his phones is "similar" to one used in the previous administration.

But Johnson administration officials quickly said they knew nothing of it.

A spokesman for the Secret Service, which installed the system for the Nixon administration, said if there was one in place during the Johnson years, the Secret Service didn't put it there.

Harry Middleton, director of the Lyndon B. Johnson Library in Austin, Texas, said through a federal government spokesman that there is a section in the library that "reflects selective telephone conversations" between Mr. Johnson and others.

Some of them, he said, "were recorded manually by

a secretary, some by dicta- phone belt." Also, he said, there were "a limited number of meetings recorded in 1968 in the Cabinet room. Most of these concerned national security matters."

White House confirmation of the practice of automatic recording under Mr. Nixon, revealed yesterday in testimony by White House aide Alexander Butterfield, came in a short letter from J. Fred Buzhardt, special counsel to Mr. Nixon, to Sen. Sam J. Ervin Jr. (D-N.C.), chairman of the Senate Watergate committee.

Mr. Nixon's conversations have been recorded "since the spring of 1971," Buzhardt wrote. "I am advised that this system, which is still in use, is similar to that employed by the last administration and which had been discontinued from 1969 until the spring of 1971."

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Buzhardt offered no evidence of his claim that the Johnson administration also had used such a system, but said, "a more detailed statement concerning these procedures will be furnished to the committee shortly."

While several Johnson administration aides flatly denied knowledge of any such automatically triggered system of listening devices during the Johnson years, some acknowledged that Mr. Johnson did have and did use phone-connected recording devices on selected occasions.

Rep. James Jones (D-Okla.), one-time appointments secretary to Mr. Johnson, said, "There was a recording device at the (LBJ)

ranch" that was used during the Arab-Israeli War in 1967 to record messages for the President, but "to my knowledge none in the Oval Office."

Robert Hardesty, a Johnson speechwriter, said the late President "did have the capability on his telephone to record," both in his office and in his bedroom, "but it wasn't anything that went on automatically. He would push a button."

Hardesty, who later helped Mr. Johnson write his memoirs, "The Vantage Point," said that in working on the manuscript he did see transcripts of phone conversations. But none of them was worth using in the book, he said, and he couldn't recall who they involved.

Joseph A. Califano, a special assistant to Mr. Johnson at the White House, said he believed the late President "had on his White House Oval Office phone the capability, either by his doing something, or his secretary doing something, of taping a conversation."

Califano said he could also recall one occasion during the Six-Day War when Mr. Johnson waved to his secretary during a phone conversation, as if indicating it should be recorded. But he was not certain, Califano said, whether this occasion was in the Oval Office or at the LBJ Ranch.

Harry C. McPherson Jr., another Johnson speechwriter, said that "never to my knowledge" had Mr. Johnson recorded a conversation.

McPherson said he "could not write it off as a possibility," but could not conceive that he could spend four years at the White House and not know if it had been done.

McPherson noted that it is "common practice" in government to have secretaries take down conversations in shorthand while listening in on an extension phone, and "on really crucial matters it is quite possible he would have someone take it down."

All of these Johnson aides said they had never heard of any bugging of White House offices and it was inconceivable to them that Mr. Johnson would have sanctioned such a system.

"I think this is an outrageous smear on a dead Presi-

dent," Califano, now a Washington lawyer, said.

George Christian, who was Mr. Johnson's press secretary in his last presidential years, said he also had heard of no automatic system but he "assumed" that important national security meetings were recorded somehow. He never saw any transcripts or tapes, he said.

Jones said there was a black box installed by the Secret Service that showed where Mr. Johnson was in the White House at all times "but there was no bugging done and no room bugging."

Butterfield testified yesterday that a similar box used in the Nixon administration to show Mr. Nixon's location triggered the automatic taping device, and it was then activated by the sound of a voice.

During his testimony, But-

terfield was asked by Sen. Daniel K. Inouye (D-Hawaii) whether he had "any information to indicate this taping was practiced in other administrations."

Butterfield replied: "Well, in all honesty, Senator Inouye, I have heard the rumor. I could not begin to identify the source. But I have heard those rumors for several years, and . . . when I called in the Secret Service people, and gave them this particular instruction, there was the intimation by their gestures, by their response to me, they know how to proceed. From that, I would guess that it had been done, but I'm only guessing when I say that."

One open use of a tape recorder by Mr. Johnson in the Oval Office is reported in a forthcoming book, "Lyndon," by Richard Harwood and Haynes Johnson

of The Washington Post. The account says that in 1964, at the opening of the conversation in which Mr. Johnson advised then-Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy that he would not be Mr. Johnson's running-mate that year, the President reached out and turned on a recording device on his desk.

Buzhardt, in his statement yesterday, alluded only to the Johnson administration in terms of an automatic recording system. But David Powers, curator for the John F. Kennedy Library and former appointments secretary to Mr. Kennedy, said he knew of no such telephone monitoring system in the Kennedy White House.

No tapes of White House phone calls or face-to-face conversations have turned

up in the Kennedy archives, he said.

"I cannot recall this ever being done," he said. "If it had been done, I would have known it. I was in the President's office everyday."

Another Kennedy White House aide, Arthur Schlesinger Jr., said such a system never had been used and it was "inconceivable" that Mr. Kennedy ever would have approved of such an "incredible" system.

8 Persons Wounded In Italian Shootout

Agence France-Presse

NAPLES, July 16—A family fight in a small town near here has left eight people with gunshot wounds.

Two groups in a single family started shooting at each other in the street with revolvers and shotguns.