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WASHINGTON — An angry President Nixon wanted to fire Adm. Thomas Moorer, chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, in 1971 after the White House Plumbers found evidence that military agents were spying on Henry Kissinger.

Kissinger, now the secretary of state, was Nixon's national security adviser at the time.

It is not known what changed the President's mind, but the answer appears to lie in facts surrounding that investigation still being kept secret by the White House as a national security matter.

Although it would not deny the reports of a military spying and eavesdropping operation within the National Security Council, which Kissinger then headed, the White House suggests that a Navy enlisted man, identified as yeoman 1/c Charles Radford, was solely responsible for deliberate leaks of classified information. Radford, now in an Oregon Naval Reserve unit, could not be reached for comment.

Some of the information obtained by military spies later leaked out to the press. It was to find the sources of these leaks that Nixon established the "Plumbers" unit in 1971.

The White House explana-

tion about the enlisted man also does not say why Moorer's representative to Kissinger's staff, Rear Adm. Robert O. Welander, abruptly left the National Security office early in 1972. Some officials had suspected him of leaking classified information to columnist Jack Anderson.

At the time, in 1971, administration officials apparently feared all the leaks might be coming from one source or related sources. Several persons have said that John Mitchell, then the attorney general, was convinced there was a centralized conspiracy going on and so informed the President.

By the administration's own accounts, there was no such conspiracy.

Most of the former NSC staff members said they always assumed that when Gen. Alexander Haig was Kissinger's top aide, he was filtering information back to the joint chiefs. Haig, now White House chief of staff, denied taking part in a spy operation.

But when he was asked whether he encouraged anyone else to convey information back to the military brass, he was quoted as saying: "Not intentionally. But I cannot be responsible for others misreading my position."