

# OFFICIALS DISPUTE MILITARY SPY PLAN

## White House Aides Belittle Yeoman's Report on Ring at Pentagon as 'Ludicrous'

By SEYMOUR M. HERSH  
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Jan. 15—High White House officials sought today to minimize the significance of an alleged military spy ring inside the White House and characterized a confidential report on such activities filed by David R. Young Jr. as "ludicrous."

The officials, who would not be quoted by name, described the affair as simply the case of a young Navy yeoman who, as one put it, "was told to keep his eyes open and who went ape."

Well placed sources have previously told The New York Times that Mr. Young's report, one of his last actions as a member of the White House investigation unit known as the "plumbers," concluded that the Pentagon had been receiving National Security Council documents taken from the office of Henry A. Kissinger, then President Nixon's national security adviser.

Mr. Young's report was said to have indicated that a number of military men, including two

Continued on Page 18, Column 2

Continued From Page 1, Col. 6

on Mr. Kissinger's staff, were involved in an attempt in late 1971 to obtain information in the Administration's diplomatic initiatives with China, the Soviet Union and North Vietnam.

The Young inquiry began after the publication in December, 1971, of the White House India-Pakistan papers by Jack Anderson, the columnist, and quickly evolved into a full-scale inquiry into Pentagon spying, sources have said. The papers disclosed that the White House, while allegedly neutral in that dispute, was secretly "tilting" its policy in favor of Pakistan.

Mr. Young's conclusions, submitted in early 1972 in a report to President Nixon, were depicted today by the White House officials as being "terribly" out of proportion and far overdrawn.

As portrayed by these officials, the reported action of the yeoman, identified as Charles E. Radford of Salem,

Ore., in passing documents to the Pentagon "didn't make any difference" because the military was being kept fully informed at the time of all National Security Council activities. One official depicted Yeoman Bradford as an "eager beaver."

### Earlier Leak Reported

These officials said that the national security problems posed by the sailor's activities revolved around the alleged leaking of classified documents, including the India-Pakistan papers, to Mr. Anderson. Other extremely sensitive materials had been leaked by Yeoman Radford, these officials indicated, prior to the December publication of the White House minutes of security council meetings on India-Pakistan.

The version of events presented today seemed to conflict with Mr. Nixon's assertion last fall that the national security considerations in the military spying matter—although he did not specifically identify it as such at the time—were of even greater consequence than some of the other issues.

The New York Times reported in December that the President sought earlier last year to prevent a Justice Department inquiry into the plumbers for fear of compromising a number of Government secrets, including a Soviet spy working for the United States, a Central Intelligence Agency informant in India, and some nuclear targeting information.

### Sensitive Points

Last November, Mr. Nixon told the Associated Press Managing Editors Association that he had sought to limit the plumbers inquiry "because there were some very highly sensitive matters involved, not only in [Daniel] Ellsberg and also another so sensitive that even Senator Ervin and Senator Baker [the chairman and vice chairman of the Senate Watergate Committee] have decided that they should not delve further into them."

A number of Senate sources have acknowledged that the military spying was the other "so sensitive" matter mentioned by Mr. Nixon. Sources said it was privately discussed last summer by the White House with Senators Sam J. Ervin Jr., Democrat of North Carolina, and Howard H. Baker Jr., Republican of Tennessee, who subsequently agreed not to investigate it in connection with the then ongoing Watergate hearings.

In his November speech, the President also said, "I don't mean that we are going to throw the cloak of national security over something be-

cause we are guilty of something. I am simply saying that where the national security would be disserved by having an investigation, the President has the responsibility to protect it, and I am going to do so."

When news accounts of the military spying ring first appeared last week, one high White House official commented that public disclosure of the incident would put the "whole military command structure on the line."

The White House officials who discussed the matter today, however, cast the incident in a much lesser light. They described Adm. Thomas H. Moorer, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff who allegedly received the material, as having been kept fully informed by the White House. Asked why yeoman Radford, who has denied the unauthorized passing of any material, was not discharged from the service or in other ways punished, an official remarked "This fellow had a lot of hot stuff and if you move against him, he could pass it around."

In view of that risk, the official added, it was decided to transfer yeoman Radford quietly out of the White House. He was then serving as an aide to the military liaison officer assigned to the National Security Council.

The White House officials also confirmed that a member of Mr. Young's investigating team had attempted to blackmail his way into a high-level Defense Department position by threatening last spring to reveal publicly details of the military spy operation.

### Official Not Dismissed

Although the demand was categorically rejected, the officials said, the investigator—who still works at the Pentagon—was not discharged because the White House felt that potential national security damage he could cause by talking precluded such action.

Senator John C. Stennis, Democrat of Mississippi who is chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, has said that he will begin an informal inquiry into the matter late this week. A similar investigation was reported today to be under way in the Pentagon.

A Pentagon spokesman announced that James R. Schlesinger, the Secretary of Defense, had begun asking some questions about the alleged spy ring. The spokesman said Mr. Schlesinger "at this point has seen nothing that would impair his confidence in the professional qualities of Admiral Moorer."

Sources have said that Mr. Young's investigation concluded that the misappropriated National Security Council documents had ended up in the admiral's office. He has denied any knowledge of or involvement in the "unauthorized gathering" of such information.