

Church Probers Find 'Gaps' in CIA Records

by George Lardner Jr.

The Senate committee on intelligence operations has found unexplained "gaps" in [CIA] records requested by committee investigators, it was disclosed yesterday [by committee chairman, Sen. Frank Church, at a breakfast meeting with reporters].

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Former CIA Director Richard Helms, it was learned last year, ordered the destruction of various tape recordings of conversations in his office. The destruction was ordered shortly before Helms resigned as CIA director in January, 1973.

The CIA maintained it was a routine destruction of unnecessary records, but Sen. H. Howard Baker Jr. (R-Tenn.), a member of the Senate Watergate committee and the Church committee, contested the claim and said that telephone conversations with former President Nixon and top White House officials were apparently among the recordings that were destroyed.

The destruction occurred a week after Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield (Mont.) wrote Helms to ask that any Watergate-related evidence be retained.

Church said the apparently missing records he had in mind were not covered by the 1973 destruction by Helms, but he would not elaborate.

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