

Haldeman Says His Memory Of Wiretap Program Is Vague

Washington

Former White House staff chief H.R. Haldeman says he was merely a conduit during the nine months that he handled the reports of wiretaps on 17 persons considered "prime suspects" for leaks of

state secrets.

In a deposition filed yesterday in connection with a suit brought by one of the targets of the Nixon administration's wiretaps, Haldeman said he had only a vague memory of the program, although

the reports were submitted to him for review.

The suit was brought by Morton Halperin, a former aide to Henry Kissinger, then national security adviser to former President Nixon.

Halperin is suing Mr. Nixon, Kissinger and 12 others for damages, claiming the taps were an illegal invasion of his privacy.

Haldeman said he became the recipient of the wiretap summaries because many of the targets were on Kissinger's staff.

"It was my impression that there was concern ... that it was a difficult problem for Kissinger to receive these reports when he had to deal with these people and rely on these people on a day-to-day basis," Haldeman said.

In the deposition, Haldeman disclosed that he personally asked then-FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover to begin still another wiretap.

He did not name the person but sources familiar with the case said it was a member of Haldeman's own staff. The source said the target was suspected of leaking material to newsmen.

Haldeman said he was not familiar with the discussions that led to the establishment of the wiretap program in mid-May, 1969, less than four months after Mr. Nixon took office. Nor could he remember when the wiretap program was ended.

The deposition — a question-and-answer session under oath — was made at the offices of the American Civil Liberties Union in Los Angeles, on January 16.

The previous day, the lawyers took a similar deposition from Mr. Nixon at his home in San Clemente.

Mr. Nixon said he authorized the wiretap program after a series of leaks of sensitive material but said the targets were left to Kissinger. Kissinger, now secretary of state, had said in a written questionnaire that Mr. Nixon chose at least the first four targets after receiving a recommendation from Hoover.

Associated Press