

12 May 1975

HW:

Re WXPost 21apr75 story by Austin Scott, "Laser Bug in Nixon Office Reported."

We read this closely at the time it appeared but still missed the unprecedented (as far as I am concerned) fact that Penthouse released it a full month before its July issue could hit the stands. This suggests Szulc was used to send a powerful signal to someone, possibly Nixon, and that someone was determined that the signal be sent, and without delay.

We find no further apparent specific clue in it, except possibly the reference to the ~~July~~ August, 1970, date for removal of the alleged bug. This is an interesting date, inasmuch as it recalls the ~~extreme~~ curious mistake both Butterfield and Nixon made in the summer of 1973 about the date the WH taping system was activated. Before the Watergate Commission on 16 July 73 Butterfield affected a guess that the taping system was set up in the summer or spring of 1970. Before he was through testifying Buzhardt was on the horn informing the Committee that it was started up in 1971, not 1970. Butterfield readily agreed. Later that same summer, probably in August at San Clemente at that outdoor press conference, Nixon also referred to the beginning of the WH taping operation as 1970. Again, Buzhardt corrected it fairly promptly to 1971.

This raises the possibility that both Butterfield and Nixon were telling the truth when they used the 1970 date for the start-up, and that Buzhardt had to correct them publicly in order to preserve some cover story that had been concocted, possibly by Buzhardt himself as a WH attorney.

Austin's story makes the flat statement that one or more senior officials in the Secret Service and the CIA "knew of its (the laser bug's) existence. In context, however, Austin may have intended to say that they knew about it AFTER it was discovered and removed. In any case, this ^{recalls} ~~recalls~~ the old scare yarn that the WH had a CIA agent planted in it (Butterfield always has been a popular candidate for this honor), but on the whole we are more inclined to guess that the bug may have been Nixon's own, if it ever existed, and that he had it removed after he found out someone was monitoring it who wasn't supposed to. After which he may have had the more conventional Sony system installed. This is of course pure guesswork, but we feel the Szulc story ~~merits~~ justifies considerable attention. We feel this very strongly, despite the fact that we can find no plausible reason in the news of around 21apr75 for the apparent urgency of the signal it seems to have contained.

jdw 