
164. Editorial Note

At 6:07 p.m. on December 21, 1971, 10 minutes after arriving at the White House by helicopter, President Nixon met in the Oval Office with Attorney General John Mitchell and Presidential Assistants H.R. Haldeman and John Ehrlichman. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Central Files, President's Daily Diary) Mitchell and Ehrlichman insisted on the meeting, Haldeman noted in his diary, because in their investigation of leaks in recent Jack Anderson columns in *The Washington Post*, "they had uncovered the fact that a yeoman in the NSC shop, assigned to liaison with the Joint Chiefs, was the almost certain source of not only the leaks, but also the absconding of information from Henry's and Haig's and other people's briefcases, which were turned over to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The P was quite shocked, naturally, by the whole situation and agreed that very strong action had to be taken, but very carefully, since we don't want to blow up the whole relationship with the Joint Chiefs of Staff." (*The Haldeman Diaries: Multimedia Edition*) Mitchell warned the President during the meeting "as to what this would lead to if you pursued it by way of prosecution or even a public confrontation. You would have the Joint Chiefs allied on that side directly against you. What has been done has been done and I think the important thing is to paper this thing over. First of all, get that liaison office the hell out of the NSC and put it back in the Pentagon." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Recording of conversation among Nixon, Mitchell, Haldeman, and Ehrlichman, Oval Office, Conversation No. 639-30)

Investigations of the episode revealed that Navy yeoman Charles Radford, assigned since September 1970 to the JCS liaison office at the

National Security Council, had purloined a huge quantity of documents which were passed on to the Joint Chiefs of Staff through the liaison office heads: Rear Admirals Rembrant Robinston and his successor, Robert O. Welander. Radford illicitly duplicated documents at the NSC and stole them while accompanying Kissinger and Haig on trips. During one trip, Kissinger noted in his memoir, Radford "used the occasion to make himself generally useful, in the process—as he later testified—going through my briefcase, reading or duplicating whatever papers he could get his hands on, and sometimes retaining discarded carbon copies of sensitive documents that were intended to be disposed of in the 'burn bag.'" (*Years of Upheaval*, pages 806–807)

The textual files in the Nixon Presidential Materials at the National Archives contain very little material on the JCS spy operation and the White House handling of it. Included in the White House tapes, however, are audio recordings of the series of Presidential meetings commencing on December 21 at which the President and his aides discussed the accumulating evidence and deliberated how they should deal with the problem—in particular with the JCS officials directly involved and with JCS Chairman Moorer. At a December 23 meeting with Nixon, for instance, Haldeman recounted an earlier meeting at which Haldeman and Ehrlichman told Henry Kissinger about the spying. According to Haldeman, Kissinger asked "what do you do, what do you do on that, and John [Ehrlichman] said, well, that's most of the question now. It's in the hands of the Attorney General and he's got to determine what we do obviously. He said Admiral Welander thinks we should put the yeoman in jail. Admiral Moorer thinks we should put Welander in jail." Kissinger "said I think Moorer should be in jail. John and I both laughed; he said as you go up the ladder everybody's going to crucify the guy under him and nobody will take the blame himself." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Conversation between Nixon and Haldeman, Executive Office, Conversation No. 310–19) At a meeting the next day, December 24, Ehrlichman told Nixon that Alexander Haig and Kissinger "both agree in very strong terms that Moorer should go. They're both now satisfied that Moorer is heavily implicated. They're doubly concerned because they've been using Moorer's back-channels for all kinds of communications and they're afraid that they've been compromised." Nixon commented that "Moorer's too good a man" and "I don't feel that way at all." (*Ibid.*, Conversation 309–1) The President's telephone conversation with Haig later that day is Document 166.

The Radford episode is treated briefly in Nixon's and Kissinger's memoirs (Nixon, *RN*, pages 531–532; Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, pages 806–809) and at greater length by Ehrlichman in *Witness to Power*, pages

302–310. Discussions in secondary works include Walter Isaacson, *Kissinger*, pages 380–385; Seymour Hersh, *The Price of Power*, pages 465–479; and John Prados, *Keepers of the Keys: A History of the National Security Council from Truman to Bush* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1991), pages 315–317.

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Following a discussion in the Oval Office on December 22, 1971 of the Charles Radford-Joint Chiefs of Staff pipeline, the following exchange took place between President Nixon and his Assistant H.R. Haldeman:

“Haldeman: The worst thing about it is you start, which we’ve managed to avoid, maybe too much, you start getting paranoid. You start wondering about everything, and everybody, and—

“President: I know. Well, don’t be too damned sure of anybody. Don’t get too sure of anybody.

“Haldeman: You can’t be.

“President: I’m never sure of anybody. The reason I am so close-mouthed is, did you notice I haven’t [unintelligible] that—let me put it [unintelligible]. Do you not now see why I don’t have staff meetings?

“Haldeman: Damn right.

“President: You agree?

“Haldeman: Oh yea.

“President: Do you think I’m right?

“Haldeman: I sure as hell do.

“President: I don’t have staff meetings. I’d rather—I know it would charge up the staff for me to sit around and talk to them direct, but who knows. First, without evil intentions some would leak.

“Haldeman: That’s right.

“President: Beyond that there might be somebody in there, like a little guy like this, that’ll get it all. But the end thing, I tell you whenever there’s anything important you don’t tell anybody. You know, it’s really tough. It’s tough. We don’t tell Rogers, Laird, anybody. We just don’t tell any son-of-a-bitch at all.

“Haldeman: It’s a horrible way to have to work, but it’s essential.” (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Recording of conversation between Nixon and Haldeman, December 22, 1971, Oval Office, Conversation No. 640–3)

166. **Transcript of Telephone Conversation Between President Nixon and the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig)¹**

Washington, December 24, 1971, 5:01–5:08 p.m.

[Omitted here are opening comments and brief discussion of Henry Kissinger and the India-Pakistan conflict.]

President: On the other thing, incidentally, on the Moorer thing,² you just couldn't even dream of having Moorer out of that thing. I mean, he's part of a system, and the damn thing I'm sure started before he was there. I think it goes back over years, and it probably went further than he ever expected it was going to go. That's my guess.

Haig: [unclear] I think that—

President: And we got to remember that basically he's our ally in terms of what we believe in, and the worse thing we could do now is to hurt the military. I tried to get that through what Henry said, but that's what, that's the line we're playing on the thing. Don't you agree? We just gotta do that. In June, of course we could take a look, but not now.

Haig: [unclear]

President: Well, after all, Moorer's a good man, and he's with us. This thing, of course, is pretty bad, it's a, understand, not sending the information over but going through briefcases, that goes too far.

Haig: [Inaudible comment]

President: It just develops. The guy thought he was, you know, doing his job. And then we got a guy that starts to leak. That of course is the worst, but that's the Ellsberg syndrome.

[Omitted here is discussion of Kissinger, his conflict with Secretary of State Rogers, the India-Pakistan war, and Vietnam.]

President: I told him [Kissinger] to forget this thing about the Moorer thing. Just forget it. Leave it to Mitchell to work out. I've already decided we're going to cool this thing. We're gonna, and I'm gonna, I told Ehrlichman we ought to keep that yeoman right here in

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Recording of conversation between Nixon and Haig, White House Telephone, Conversation No. 17–28. No classification marking. Haig's voice on the tape is extremely faint. The editors transcribed the portion of the conversation printed here specifically for this volume.

² See Document 164.

Washington. Sign him over to the Pentagon where we can watch him, 24 hours a day and then that's it.³

[Omitted here is further discussion of Yeoman Radford and closing comments.]

³ The President telephoned John Mitchell at 5:33 p.m. on December 24 and conveyed a similar message: "I think the main thing is to keep it under as close control as we can. But I—We cannot move to do anything to discredit the uniform. That's what I'm convinced of." "Our best interests are served by not, you know, raising holy hell." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Conversation between Nixon and Mitchell, December 24, 1971, 5:33 p.m., White House Telephone, Conversation No. 17–37) Yeoman Radford was transferred to the Northwest.