

PENTHOUSE  
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ssions—which is, perhaps. Ho  
al question. cl  
known if Nixon himself was su  
nsented to the installation. If su  
er system complemented his tic  
ng devices that produced the ag  
House tapes. (In any event, Pr  
ce picked up with infinitely va  
ery word uttered in the Oval ga  
ting the "unintelligible" gaps ar  
e tapes. In addition, the laser te  
, unlike a tape recorder, the ta  
f every individual voice in a g  
separation of several simul- ai  
ersations.) It is not known  
beam signal was received, a  
experts believe that such a th  
transmission range of under a fc

BY TAD SZULC

mericans have always believed that the  
ght to privacy is sacred. We shudder at  
ories told by travelers to the Soviet Union  
nd other dictatorships who take for  
rented that their hotel rooms and phones  
re bugged and that they are followed. But  
ow we discover there is literally no place  
within the United States safe from the il-  
legal snooping of the CIA (which is re-  
stricted by law to foreign operations) and  
the many other government agencies  
nown as the "Intelligence Community."  
One extraordinary example is the tiny  
aser-beam transmitter embedded in the  
wall of the Oval Office at the White House.  
his transmitter picked up and relayed to a  
remote recording center every conversa-  
on between Richard M. Nixon and his  
ides, friends, and visitors during at least  
several months in 1970, the year the former  
resident launched his secret domestic in-  
telligence program. Presidential telephone  
versations, including those conducted  
ver "secure" scrambler lines, were also  
picked up by the laser transmitter.

The existence in the presidential office of  
his highly sophisticated device, known by  
he code name "Easy Chair," remains one  
of the most sensitive, closely guarded, and  
ntriguing secrets of the Nixon period. This  
nowledge is restricted to about a dozen  
ey past and present officials of the Intellig-  
ence Community. But the precise purpose  
of the operation, the exact identity of those  
who ordered the installation of the laser  
device under a coat of fresh paint on the  
Oval Office wall, and the ultimate dispo-  
sition of the instrument remain unclear.  
Nor do we know if tapes were made of

This is the third article in a monthly series  
on America's Intelligence Community, in-  
cluding the CIA.

half mile along a clear line of sight. The laser  
beam must be aimed out a window—it  
would be deflected by a wall. In the case of  
the Oval Office it had to go through the  
panes of the French doors leading to the  
Rose Garden.

Highly reliable sources told *Penthouse*  
that one or more senior officials of the Secret  
Service and the Central Intelligence Agency  
are familiar with the "Easy Chair" situation in  
the White House, although they could not  
say whether they learned of it only when the  
laser device was discovered and removed  
early in August 1970, or whether they knew  
at some earlier date. The sources would not  
rule out that the late J. Edgar Hoover, then  
director of the Federal Bureau of Investiga-  
tion, was also privy to "Easy Chair."

In any event, this super-bugging of the  
presidential office looms as one of the most  
bizarre episodes in the still unfolding story  
of domestic spying carried out by six suc-  
cessive administrations, but climaxing most  
spectacularly during Nixon's tenure.

*Penthouse* learned of this bugging of the  
Oval Office as a result of a lengthy investi-  
gation. According to highly authoritative  
sources, the person who installed the laser  
transmitter, possibly on a second attempt  
when an original device did not function  
properly, is a foreign-born individual em-  
ployed as a painter by the government and  
apparently controlled by one of the intelli-  
gence agencies. His name as well as a  
number of other relevant details are with-  
held from publication to avoid causing suf-  
fering and embarrassment to persons inno-  
cently involved in this operation.

Investigations by *Penthouse* have also  
produced the significant fact that officials of  
the General Services Administration, which  
is responsible for the maintenance of gov-  
ernment buildings, have been under strict  
orders from the Secret Service since 1970  
not to discuss with outsiders anything per-  
taining to the painting of the interior of the  
White House. The Secret Service also is-  
sued orders that all inquiries on the subject  
be immediately reported to it. These orders  
apply to painting foremen and their crews as  
well as to other GSA employees. *Penthouse*  
sources were unable to say, however, wheth-  
er these orders are exclusively related to  
the "Easy Chair" incident.

curity Agency, except the Chief of Staff for Intelligence of the U.S. Army in Europe; the Investigation and Police Information Division of the U.S. Army in Europe; the Army Criminal Investigation Command; and the Defense Investigative Service. It must be kept in mind that all this spying is outside normal criminal surveillance by law enforcement agencies. In addition, acting on requests from nineteen federal agencies and scores of local law enforce-