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High Radiation Reported in Nixon Room on '59 Soviet Trip

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Two former Secret Service agents say intense levels of radiation were discovered in 1959 at the U. S. ambassador's mansion in Moscow during then-Vice President Richard Nixon's trip to the Soviet Union and that Nixon may have been exposed to the radiation.

The former Secret Service agents said they detected the radiation in the quarters of then-U. S. Ambassador Llewellyn E. Thompson, who resided at the Spaso House mansion. Thompson died of cancer in 1972.

During his four-day stay in Moscow, Nixon slept there, and the agents say he may have been exposed to the rays

for one night until the radiation was stopped.

It was during this visit that Nixon and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev had their famous "kitchen debate" about the merits of capitalism versus communism.

The agents' statements come after recent disclosures that the U. S. embassy in Moscow is the target of microwave radiation that U. S. officials say is being beamed by the Soviets. It was unclear whether the radiation detected in the ambassador's mansion during Nixon's 1959 visit had any relationship to this microwave radiation at the embassy.

The report of Nixon's brush with the radiation first surfaced in a copyrighted article in this week's edition of the "Black and White," the school newspaper of Walt Whitman High School in Bethesda. Written by seniors Michael Gill and Richard Berke, it cites as its source a "highly placed government official who requested anonymity."

In separate interviews, James Golden, the former agent who said he first discovered the radiation, and John T. Sherwood, the chief of the Secret Service detail for the Nixon trip, both said Nixon's personal physician was advised of their findings at the time and that they also filed a full report with their superiors when they returned to Wash-

ington. Golden retired from the service in 1960, Sherwood retired in 1962.

According to Sherwood's account of the incident, which was confirmed by Golden, the discovery of the radiation came about by accident.

During his 11-day Russian tour, Nixon was to visit some Russian industrial cities after leaving Moscow, including Sverdlovsk, which was touted at the time as Russia's "atomic city" because of the nuclear power plants built near there.

Preparing for that stop, Secret Service agents included dosimeters and film badges, both atomic radiation measuring devices, in their security gear.

After Nixon's arrival, Golden made a routine check of his dosimeter outside the ambassador's bedroom. "It showed a reading of 18 and was climbing rapidly," Golden said. "I couldn't believe my eyes or the dosimeter."

Golden said he got a second dosimeter. "When I tested inside the ambassador's bedroom, it went off the scale," Golden said. "Additional checks of other areas in the embassy that evening proved negative. The radiation was concentrated in the ambassador's bedroom and in the staff quarters adjacent to it."

The following morning, he discussed the matter with Sherwood. Sherwood and Golden said they decided to attempt a bluff that they felt might persuade the Soviets to stop the radiation.

They said they went to an area they were relatively certain was bugged by the Soviets and in heated tones began discussing the matter. "We didn't have any idea what was going on," Sherwood said, "but we made it sound like we did."

Sherwood and Golden said that roughly three hours after their conversation, the radiation disappeared and never returned during the balance of Nixon's stay in Russia.

Sources with additional knowledge of the matter said that within weeks of the incident, a "great deal of highly sophisticated detection and monitoring gear" was sent to the U.S. embassy in Moscow via diplomatic pouch.