

## Indexed Trove of Kissinger Phone Transcripts Is Completed

By SCOTT SHANE

WASHINGTON — It was April 1972, and American B-52 bombers were pummeling North Vietnam. President Richard M. Nixon got on the phone with his national security adviser, Henry A. Kissinger, for an update on the air assault on the port city of Hai-phong. The men struggled to persuade each other that the war might still be won.

"They dropped a million pounds of bombs," Mr. Kissinger said.

Nixon was pleased. "God-damn, that must have been a good strike!" he said.

Then the president had a moment of doubt, recalling the dismal experience of his immediate predecessor, Lyndon B. Johnson: "Johnson bombed them for years, and it didn't do any good."

Mr. Kissinger reassured his boss, saying: "But, Mr. President, Johnson never had a strategy. He was sort of picking away at them. He would go in with 50 planes, 20 planes. I bet you we will have had more planes over there in one day than Johnson had in a month."

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years ago can be known with such precision today because they worked in what was, in retrospect, the golden age of White House taping. Both Nixon and Mr. Kissinger had given secret orders to record their calls, each evidently without the other's knowledge.

On Tuesday, the National Security Archive, a nonprofit research group at George Washington University, published an online edition of transcripts of 15,000 Kissinger phone calls from 1969 to 1977, fully indexed and searchable for the first time. A selection was posted on the archive's Web site, nsarchive.org, and the full collection is available to subscribers, which include many university libraries.

Some Kissinger transcripts are posted on the State Department's Web site, but for a comprehen-

sive look at the collection, researchers have had to travel to the National Archives, in College Park, Md.

"They were in 30 more-or-less chronological boxes," said William Burr, who has overseen the publication for the National Security Archive. "It was pretty daunting."

Mr. Burr said the Kissinger calls "rank right up there with the Nixon tapes as the most candid, revealing and valuable trove of records on the exercise of executive power."

The indexing, the work of three researchers for more than two years, presented some puzzles. Names dropped casually in conversation — "Hal" or "Fred" — had to be identified. And what a government transcriber had heard as "Nelson's tongue," in a 1971 call, turned out to be "Mao Zedong."

The collection covers many serious policy matters, like Vietnam strategy, but includes a few calls memorable because they are so bizarre.

In April 1971, Mr. Kissinger accepted a call from the beat poet Allen Ginsberg, who hoped to ar-

range a meeting between top Nixon administration officials and antiwar activists.

"Perhaps you don't know how to get out of the war," Ginsberg ventured.

Mr. Kissinger said he was open to a meeting. "I like to do this," he said, "not just for the enlightenment of the people I talk to, but to at least give me a feel of what concerned people think."

Then Ginsberg upped the ante. "It would be even more useful if we could do it naked on television," he said.

Mr. Kissinger's reply is transcribed simply as "Laughter."

In 1977, after completing his tenure as secretary of state at the end of the Ford administration, Mr. Kissinger left his telephone records to the Library of Congress as private papers, not to be opened until after his death.

But after the National Security Archive threatened litigation to open them up, the National Archives and the State Department asked Mr. Kissinger for copies, which he turned over in 2002.

The transcripts have gradually been declassified and released since then, although those of



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some 800 Kissinger calls from the Ford years are still being withheld by the State Department.

The presidential historian Robert Dallek, who drew heavily on the Kissinger materials for his 2007 book, "Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power," said the tapes made by Presidents John F. Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon had been an indispensable source for historians. He said there was nothing comparable from the

presidencies of Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, George Bush, Bill Clinton or, so far as he knows, George W. Bush.

The earlier tapes scared off later presidents from risking the candor of recordings, Mr. Dallek said, but at a cost to history.

"I worry that we're going to see a somewhat impoverished record on Clinton and Bush," he said. "There's no substitute for having their exact words."