

Dispute Over President's Tapes Started in July, 1973

By Thomas W. Lippman
Washington Post Staff Writer

On July 16, 1973, Alexander P. Butterfield, a former presidential aide, disclosed publicly for the first time that, since early 1971, virtually all conversations in the President's White House office had been preserved on tape recordings. Here is a chronology of the struggle for access to the tapes that disclosure:

July 17-23: The Senate select Watergate committee and Archibald Cox, then the Watergate special prosecutor, asked for tapes concerning the Watergate affair, were turned down by the President and then they separately issued subpoenas demanding the tapes.

Aug. 9: The committee filed suit in U. S. District Court in an attempt to secure the tapes.

Aug. 29: Chief Judge John J. Sirica ordered the President to give him the tapes so the judge could decide if they should be turned over to the Watergate grand jury. The President refused and decided to appeal Sirica's order.

Oct. 12: The U.S. Court of Appeals upheld Judge Sirica.

Oct. 19—The President announced he would not appeal the tapes decision to the U.S. Supreme Court, but

also said he would not comply with the order to give the tapes to Sirica. He ordered Cox to abandon his request for the tapes. In an effort at heading off what many viewed as a constitutional crisis, he offered to submit a summary of the tapes, authenticated by Sen. John C. Stennis (D-Miss.) to the committee and the grand jury. The leaders of the committee accepted this proposal but Cox rejected it.

Oct. 20—The President ordered Attorney General Elliot L. Richardson to fire Cox. Richardson refused and resigned. The same thing then happened to Deputy Attorney General William Ruckelshaus. The President named Solicitor General Robert Bork as acting Attorney General, and Bork fired Cox.

Oct. 23—In a startling turnabout, lawyers for the President announced in Sirica's courtroom that the President would give the tapes to the court.

Oct. 31—Fred J. Buzhardt, White House counsel, said that two of the tape recordings—of a conversation between Mr. Nixon and former Attorney General John N. Mitchell on June 20, 1972, and between Mr. Nixon and John Dean on April 15, 1973, never existed.

Nov. 21—White House lawyers told Sirica that an

18½-minute segment was erased from the tape of a June 20, 1972, conversation between Mr. Nixon and his former chief of staff, H. R. Haldeman.

Jan. 15, 1974—A panel of technical experts reported to the court that the tape gap was the result of at least five separate manual erasures.

March 25—On orders from Sirica, upheld by the Court of Appeals, the Watergate grand jury's report on the President, including material from the tapes, was turned over to the House Judiciary Committee, which had begun an investigation to determine whether Mr. Nixon should be impeached.

April 11—The House Committee subpoenaed tapes and other materials related to 42 presidential conversations relating to the alleged Watergate coverup. The materials given to the Committee yesterday and simultaneously made public were the White House's response to this subpoena.

April 18—The office of Special Prosecutor Leon Jaworski, who succeeded Cox, issued a new subpoena, for tapes, memos and other materials relating to 64 conversations of Mr. Nixon, and others between June 20, 1972, and June 4, 1973. The White House has until Thursday to respond.