

THE NATION

plied candidly: "Nope. No way."

Haldeman added a new puzzle. He said that he had requested a single recording on April 25 (of the March 21 talk between Nixon and John Dean), but Ben-Veniste noted that White House records indicated that he was given 22 tapes. Haldeman agreed with the record and said that the number of tapes he got was not surprising, although he could not explain it. (At least 25 times in the course of his three-hour testimony, he used the phrase "I do not remember" or "I do not recall.") He said that he returned all of the tapes on April 27 or 28, and was "very surprised" to learn that the Secret Service did not log them as returned until May 2. Haldeman also indicated that he thought his former White House colleague John Ehrlichman knew about the President's recording setup well before it was mentioned in public testimony; Ehrlichman had testified flatly at the Watergate hearings that he did not know.

The most disturbing testimony, however, centered on the possibility that the tapes that do exist may prove to be of such poor quality that key portions may be inaudible. No less than seven microphones, for example, had been hidden in the President's Oval Office, and noises near any one of them apparently could obscure spoken words. When a china coffee cup was placed on Nixon's desk, said Haldeman, it became "an ear-splitting problem for anyone listening to the tapes." Smiling, he turned to Judge Sirica, who is expected eventually to hear seven of the tapes, and said, "I warn you in advance." Sirica smiled too.

Very Dull. Miss Woods, answering calmly but testily, said that she had labored for more than 31 hours to type a transcript of the contents of a single 90-minute recording ("A very dull tape, frankly," she said). At first she had no foot pedal to start and stop the playback machine. "I don't think anyone knows what a hard job this is," she said. Overall, she claimed, the "quality was very poor." When the President put his feet on his desk, it sounded "like a bomb hitting you in the face. Boom!" Sometimes Nixon whistled, sometimes four people talked at once. She said that it was impossible for her to catch every word, "and I don't believe anyone else could either."

That was the first hint that the tapes might prove unreliable. Alexander Butterfield, the former White House aide who had first revealed the system's existence, had told the Senate Watergate committee that the microphones picked up conversations in Nixon's two main offices with great clarity; even "low tones," he said, were audible.

As last week's sessions proceeded, Judge Sirica warned that no inferences should be drawn until technical experts analyze the various claims about the tapes. "This may well be the most important and conclusive part of these hearings," he said. Both sides are now preparing for technical testimony.



ROSE MARY WOODS & BOSS WORKING IN OVAL OFFICE (1971)

Rose Woods: The Fifth Nixon

When Rose Mary Woods met Richard Nixon in 1947, she was a secretary for a House committee studying the Marshall Plan and he was a freshman Congressman serving as a committee member. She noticed him because, after a committee junket to Europe, Nixon turned in the only expense account "titled, totaled, signed and all properly done."

Miss Woods obviously made an impression on Representative Nixon as well. In 1951, after he had gone to the Senate, he asked her to become his personal secretary. Now 55, Rose Woods has held that position (now elevated in title to executive assistant to the President) ever since. She is on such intimate terms with all of the First Family, in fact, that she is often called "the fifth Nixon."

Miss Woods' cruel working hours and scant personal life have gradually been rewarded with increased responsibilities, a staff of her own (three sub-secretaries work in her office) and occasionally a chance to influence the thinking of the President. Nixon is said to regard her as a shrewd judge of politics.

Her most important clout is in helping exercise the gatekeeper function of deciding who should get through to the Boss—and woe to anyone who tries to interfere with her preserve. Among those who did early in the Nixon Administration was White House Chief of Staff H.R. Haldeman, who tried but failed to proclaim his total control over the White House staff by having her office moved farther away from Nixon's.

The third of five children born to an Irish-American family in Se-

bring, Ohio (pop. 5,000), she remains especially close to Brother Joseph, a member of Illinois' Cook County board of commissioners. After joining Nixon's staff, she began to share in no small way the ups and downs of his career. A member of the vice-presidential motorcade that was stoned by Venezuelan Communists in 1958, Rose quickly donned dark glasses "so those people wouldn't see me cry." In California, after Nixon's losing presidential race in 1960, she bought a convertible and began to live a more relaxed West Coast life. Then, when Nixon joined a New York law firm, it was another unquestioning move and a cozy Manhattan apartment. In Washington, she bought a co-op in, of all places, the Watergate complex.

Fiercely loyal to Nixon, she has dressed down more than one newsmen for stories that were critical of him; last week, asked by a reporter if she still considered Nixon an honest man, she replied in her best Irish temper: "That is a rude, impertinent question. And the answer is yes." But she is normally good-humored, especially during the occasional evenings of ballroom dancing and other social affairs that she loves. Though she has never married, a regular on the party circuit says that "she has gone out with lots of fellows." Other evenings, including many Thanksgivings and Christmases, are spent at quiet family dinners with the Nixons. Yet all these bonds of closeness have still not completely solved the enigma of her boss. "After 22 years, I still don't know Richard Nixon," Rose recently confided to a friend. "I don't think anybody does."