

White House Didn't Quiz Miss Woods

Told Nothing, Her Lawyer Says

11/8/74 By Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein
Washington Post Staff Writers

Rose Mary Woods, President Nixon's personal secretary and a central figure in the inquiries about the 18½-minute erasure in one of the White House tape recordings, has not been asked a "single question" about the matter by the President or White House attorneys, according to Miss Woods attorney.

Charles S. Rhyne, her attorney, said yesterday that "I would have thought that someone would have questioned her" in the White House after the erasure was discovered. "It's hard to believe that they didn't ... They did not question her in the slightest."

Both Rhyne and the White House denied report published in The Washington Post yesterday that Miss Woods had been asked to take responsibility for the 18½-minute erasure on the June 20, 1972, tape involved in the Watergate investigation. Miss Woods has testified under oath that she could have accidentally erased 5 minutes of the tape but no more.

"Rose was not asked anything or told anything," in the White House after the erasure was discovered, Rhyne added after discussing the matter further with

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Dean Warning Sparked 'Alarm'

11/8/74 By George Lardner Jr.
Washington Post Staff Writer

A top White House aide sent up alarm signals about President Nixon's secret tapes immediately after John W. Dean's public warning last April that he would not be a "scapegoat" in the Watergate scandal.

Testifying in federal court yesterday, the Secret Service agent in charge of the taping system said the White House was promptly assured that Dean, then counsel to the President, had not been let in on the closely guarded setup.

The agent, Louis B. Sims, who heads the Secret Service's technical security division, said the question of whether Dean knew of the

system for recording Mr. Nixon's conversations was put to him by the President's appointments secretary, Stephen B. Bull.

Sims said he told Bull he "could rest assured" on that point.

Dean made his "scapegoat" statement last April 19. A few days later, on April 25, Bull checked out 22 tapes covering Mr. Nixon's meetings and telephone conversations that spring and delivered them to White House chief of staff H. R. (Bob) Haldeman.

The Secret Service testimony indicating early White

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TAPES, From A1

House awareness of the potential importance of the tapes came as U.S. District Court Judge John J. Sirica continued his hearings on the controversial 18½-minute erasure of a June 20, 1972, discussion of the Watergate scandal between Haldeman and the President.

The report of a panel of technical experts submitted to Sirica this week strongly suggested tampering.

According to Secret Service and White House records, the June 20 tape never left the storage vault in the Executive Office Building until last September when it and other subpoenaed recordings were turned over to Mr. Nixon's personal secretary, Rose Mary Woods, for summaries the President had asked her to make.

Miss Woods began work on the tape at Camp David on the weekend of Sept. 29-30 and, according to her testimony, was finishing work on it in her White House office Oct. 1 when she made "a terrible mistake" on the Uher 5000 recording machine she was using.

She said she accidentally pressed the "Record" key instead of the "Stop" key on the machine when she twisted around at her desk to answer a five-minute phone call. She said she must have kept her foot on the floor pedal at the same time.

Miss Woods said she immediately told the President what happened, but has insisted that she could have caused only a five-minute gap in the tape.

White House lawyers have testified that they did not discover the erasure lasted 18½ minutes until Nov. 14. The experts assigned to study the tape reported that the obliterated segment was the result of five separate erasures, all done manually. They said the erasures were "almost surely" produced on the Uher 5000 Miss Woods said she used, but not by any mistakes with the floor pedal.

Yesterday's testimony before Sirica by Sims and Secret Service technician Raymond C. Zumwalt included these points:

- The Secret Service had four Uher 5000 recording



LOUIS B. SIMS

... agent "assured" aide

so that it could still be used for playbacks without accidentally recording anything. This was two days before the White House has said the 18½-minute erasure on the June 20 tape was discovered. According to Sims, Bull asked for the modification on Nov. 9.

- On Nov. 26, Bull asked Secret Service agent Sims when the Uher had been purchased and was told "Oct. 1." Some two weeks later, on Dec. 7, Bull asked Sims "what time of day" the Uher had been bought.

Sims said he told Bull the machine was turned over to him "at approximately between 1 and 1:15 p.m." on Oct. 1. Asked by Watergate special prosecutors when he got the Uher, Bull testified Wednesday that it was during "the noon hour—12, 1 o'clock, something like that."

- Zumwalt signed Bull's name to a Secret Service receipt for the Uher and put his own initials "RCZ" next to the signature. Zumwalt described this as routine since the receipt was designed simply for Secret Service "in-house" records showing who had the recorder.

- A Secret Service plan to improve the secret taping system and eliminate unwanted sound effects was shelved, Zumwalt said, "when the Watergate break-in was exposed" in June, 1972. He did not elaborate.

- The taping system was dismantled July 18, two days after Bull's predecessor at the White House, Alexander Butterfield, publicly disclosed its existence to the Senate Watergate committee, but it was not until "the first part of November" that the wires to the hidden microphones in Mr. Nixon's offices were cut.

Zumwalt said this was finally done because the Secret Service decided it was "just not very good policy to have hot microphones" in the President's offices that could conceivably be put to work again without the Secret Service's knowledge.

In the Oval Office, Zumwalt testified, the wires were cut just beneath Mr. Nixon's desk and shoved up a foot or two inside it. They are still there, along with the hidden microphones.

machines in its supply room Oct. 1 when Bull asked for a machine with a foot pedal. Zumwalt said the Secret Service somehow overlooked the new Uher's in stock and bought a new one. It was delivered to Bull around 1 or 1:15 p.m. that day. Bull has said he then turned it over to Miss Woods. In turn, Miss Woods has said she told the President of her "terrible mistake" on the machine around 2:15 p.m. She has also said she worked on the June 20 recording some 2½ hours that day.

- On Nov. 12, the Uher machine Miss Woods got was modified by the Secret Service—at Bull's request—

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her yesterday. "She was called in, by (White House chief of staff Alexander M.) Haig and told to 'get yourself a lawyer'."

A short time before that, on Nov. 14, when the White House said it first discovered the 18½-minute erasure, Rhyne said Miss Woods was told by Mr. Nixon personally, "Look, Rose, that wasn't a 4- or 5-minute gap but 18 minutes."

Rhyne said yesterday that "was the sum and substance of the conversation . . . it was left hanging."

Two reliable sources previously have told The Washington Post, and reiterated yesterday, that the President had asked Miss Woods if she could not be responsible for the entire 18½-minute gap. Rhyne denied this yesterday after conferring with Miss Woods.

Last night, when told that Rhyne had said that the President had asked Miss Woods no questions about the erasure, deputy White House press secretary Gerald L. Warren said he was "sure that they (the President and Miss Woods) discussed it." He added, however, that the White House was not quarreling with any portion of Miss Woods' testimony about the matter in court.

Warren also called the reports that Miss Woods was asked to take the blame for the entire 18½-minute gap "false and incredible."

Miss Woods, November, 1973, testimony in the court hearing on the tape erasure, conducted by U.S. District Chief Judge John J. Sirica, has left somewhat unclear the question of whether she discussed the matter with the President.

At one portion in the testimony she specifically said "I have not" to the question of whether she discussed the question of the gap with Mr. Nixon. At another portion of the testimony however, she said, "I told him I didn't think there was any way my hitting the record

button (on the tape recorder) caused the long gap." This implies that she was asked a question about it.

Rhyne said yesterday that White House counsel J. Fred Buzhardt went ahead in November after learning of the gap and, without consulting Miss Woods, conducted tests with the tape recorder to determine what happened. At no point did the White House lawyers "imply to her that she had done more" than erase 4 or 5 minutes, Rhyne said.

Rhyne said that White House lawyer Leonard Garment "is very, very upset about what happened to her . . . he would tell you that he and Buzhardt didn't question her from Nov. 14 to the day after Thanksgiving when I came into the case. . . . I think that Len (Garment) was worn down by this." Garment, who no longer is involved directly in the President's Watergate defense, could not be reached for comment.

Rhyne said that there are matters yet to emerge in the continuing hearing on the 18½ minute gap that will help explain what happened.

Without elaborating Rhyne, a former Duke Law School classmate of the President, said: "I had to defend her when I learned what happened . . . this is a unique experience for writers as well as lawyers. It took an awful lot to get Charlie Rhyne into it . . . these are the kind of things that try men's souls."

The erased 18½-minutes on the June 20, 1972, tape had been a conversation about Watergate between President Nixon and his then chief of staff H.R. Haldeman, according to Haldeman's own notes of the meeting.

It was one of the tapes subpoenaed by the special Watergate prosecutor and was considered important in answering the question of whether the President had knowledge of the Watergate cover-up on that date, three days after the Watergate arrests.