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Miss Woods Says Tapes Contain Inaudible Parts

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 8—President Nixon's personal secretary, Rose Mary Woods, said today that some of the tape recordings of White House conversations are of such poor

quality that the President and his visitors are inaudible or drowned out by extraneous noises.

Miss Woods told Federal District Judge John J. Sirica that she had been unable to prepare a full transcript of the tapes subpoenaed by the Watergate prosecutors because the recordings were so difficult to understand.

"The quality is very bad on some, depending on the room," she reported. "There are a lot of funny things. If the President puts his feet up on the desk, it sounds like a bomb hitting you right in the ears."

Speculation Over Value

At various points, Miss Woods explained, the tapes are obscured by the noise of dishes being picked up, the President whistling, his guests shuffling their feet during lulls in the conversation and a band playing outside the White House.

Miss Woods, who also has the title of executive assistant to the President, was asked by Mr. Nixon late in September to transcribe the tapes. Her testimony today aroused immediate speculation over the value of the tapes as evidence for the

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Watergate grand jury.

During her appearance, Miss Woods spiked a day-old report that she had discovered a "gap" in the tape of an April 16 conversation between the President and John W. Dean 3d, then Mr. Nixon's counsel. John C. Bennett, deputy assistant to the President, quoted Miss Woods to that effect yesterday.

Just before she left the White House for court this morning, the witness said, J. Fred Buzhardt Jr., special counsel to the President, found a tape covering the first part of that day, including the Nixon-Dean meeting.

"Are you satisfied there is no gap in the tapes?" Samuel J. Powers, a White House attorney, asked Miss Woods.

"Perfectly satisfied," she replied.

Miss Woods, who has

worked for Mr. Nixon for more than 22 years in public and private life, sprinkled her testimony with some insights into the President's habits, candid observations on her own court performance, and, as the questions continued, some expressions of irritation.

Jill Vollner, an assistant special prosecutor, asked Miss Woods if she had taken some precautions to avoid erasing any of the White House tapes while she attempted to transcribe them.

"Everyone said to me: 'Be terribly careful,'" she replied. "I don't think I'm so stupid that they had to go over and over it. I used every possible precaution."

"What precaution?" Miss Vollner inquired.

"I used my head, the only one I had to use," Miss Woods snapped back.

One Meeting in 30 Hours

The President's secretary said that the quality of the first tape she attempted to transcribe, in a cottage at Camp David on Sept. 29, was so bad that it took her more than 30 hours for a meeting that the White House logs list as lasting 90 minutes.

H. R. Haldeman, former White House chief of staff, characterized the quality of one of the tapes he had heard as "quite adequate for getting a report of the conversation" despite some "ups and downs" and "some bad intervals." Mr. Haldeman, tanned, with his once-short hair combed back over a bald spot, testified under subpoena by the Watergate prosecution.

Mr. Haldeman, who resigned under pressure during the Senate Watergate hearings, said he thought he had returned 22 tapes on April 26, the same day he took them out. The Secret Service logs indicated, however, that the tapes were not returned until May 2.

Mr. Haldeman said that the one tape he listened to involved a conversation on March 21 between the President and Mr. Dean. Mr. Nixon had asked him to review "specific points raised in the meeting," the former White House official said.

Miss Woods's testimony raised an apparent discrepancy in White House testimony. She said she had been given eight tapes for the Sept. 28-29 working weekend at Camp David. Stephen B. Bull, a Presidential aide, said earlier this week that



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H. R. Haldeman arriving at court in Washington.

13 tapes had been taken to the mountain retreat.

Prosecution Undecided

Richard Ben-Veniste, an assistant special prosecutor, told Judge Sirica in midafternoon that the prosecution force had not decided whether to accept or reject the White House contention that two of the nine originally subpoenaed conversations had never been recorded.

The prosecution lawyer said he might propose later in the proceedings that some of the tapes be copied and the originals placed in Judge Sirica's custody. The judge has indicated it might be another month before the White House turns over the tapes to him for screening, pursuant to Federal court order.

When the fact-finding hearings continue next week, both the White House and the Watergate prosecutors are expected to call technical electronics experts to testify on the malfunctioning of recording equipment and the editing of tape.

Under questioning by Mr. Powers, Miss Woods denied that she had edited or changed the tapes or added words when she was typing them up. She observed, however, that "I could not get every word."

Early in her two hours on the witness stand, Miss Woods observed: "I hope I'm doing this right. I've never been in

See WXP 9 Nov 73, Lardner, who makes clear that "the one tape" is the one tape of the 22 that Maldeman said he listened to.

court before." Later, in response to a question about her movements in the White House earlier this year, she said: "I don't know what happened last week, much less on June 4."

Asked about the President's files, she observed: "He's a saver. He saves menus from dinners — small things — and gives us those to file."



The New York Times/Mike Lien

Rose Mary Woods, the President's personal secretary, arriving at court to testify about Presidential tapes.