

Gap in Tape May Not Be Reparable

By William Chapman
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An academic authority on electrical engineering said yesterday he doubts that the missing 18¼-minute segment of one of President Nixon's taped conversations can be made intelligible again.

Prof. Barry A. Blesser of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology said he was "pessimistic" about the chances of "resurrecting the conversation."

However, experts would have a better chance of determining whether it was Rose Mary Woods' error that caused the blotting out of all or part of the conversation.

Blesser was one of the engineers who helped prepare a memo for District Court Judge John J. Sirica on procedures for examining the subpoenaed White House tapes. He has not worked on the tape in question and spoke yesterday from general knowledge of tape technology.

The tape is of a conversation between President Nixon and his former chief of staff, H. R. Haldeman. An 18¼-minute segment, believed to include talk of the Watergate break-in, is obliterated by a humming tone and Miss Woods, the President's executive assistant, testified she thinks she accidentally caused at least four to five minutes of it.

Blesser said the chances of reviving the conversation depend to some extent on the efficiency of the mechanism.

"If it was a poor mechanism—dirty or in poor condition—the chances of resurrecting the conversation would be raised," Blesser said.

He said sophisticated methods may be able to detect whether the tape was marred while it was on Miss Woods' tape recorder. "The chances are pretty fair that you could tell whether the testimony given in court about how it happened was accurate," Blesser added.

The tape was being examined last weekend by the Cambridge firm of Bolt, Beranek, and Newman, Inc.