

Nixon Hires

New Expert

On Tapes

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LOS ANGELES, Feb. 27 —

The White House has hired a Stanford Research Institute scientist to study the controversial 18-minute gap in the June 20, 1972, tape conversation between President Nixon and H. R. Haldeman.

The scientist, Dr. Michael Hecker, a research engineer with a specialty in speech and hearing sciences, has made several trips between SRI at Menlo Park, Calif., and Washington to confer with special Presidential counsel James D. St. Clair.

The institute, a nonprofit research center not connected with nearby Stanford University, said in a statement that it had been retained by the White House on Jan. 20 "to conduct experimental work and provide consultations on the White House tape recordings."

That date would be just a few days after a panel of experts appointed by U.S. District Court Judge John J. Sirica reported that parts of the gap on the Nixon-Haldeman tape were caused by five to nine manual operations. The White House has challenged that conclusion.

The institute would give no further details, citing Sirica's instructions of Feb. 19 barring further public comment on the tapes issue. It was learned independently that Hecker and two or three staff assistants were concentrating on the 18-minute gap, but that none of the tapes had been removed to Menlo Park.

Part of Hecker's role, it was learned, is as a technical consultant, involving translating technical terms for the lawyers. But the institute's reference to "experimental work" implies that facsimile tests may be underway at SRI to determine whether the gap and accompanying hum could be the result of causes other than erasure or tampering.

The institute said that the work is still in progress.