

Sirica to Call Secretary of Nixon on Tapes

11/7/73 By George Lardner Jr.
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White House aides testified yesterday that President Nixon's personal secretary, Rose Mary Woods, has had eight of his secret Watergate tape recordings for more than a month, evidently making transcripts of them. Another six tapes were turned over to her this past Monday.

Federal Judge John J. Sirica said Miss Woods would be called to testify as a witness at hearings here in an effort to determine what happened to recordings of two of nine conversations that he had ordered the President to surrender.

The White House gave no indication of whether it would oppose the call for Miss Woods' testimony. All the witnesses have testified voluntarily so far.

The hearings began last week when White House lawyers reported that they had "determined" that two of the conversations had never been recorded. White House special assistant Stephen Bull testified Friday that Mr. Nixon knew more than a month ago that the two supposed tapes could not be found.

At the time, White House lawyers were trying to convince Judge Sirica to accept Mr. Nixon's personal "summary" of all the conversations that have been subpoenaed for the Watergate grand jury here.

On the witness stand again all yesterday morning, Bull said he brought what he thought were all the subpoenaed tapes to Camp David Sept. 29 on instructions from White House chief of staff Alexander M. Haig Jr.

Bull said he gathered together those that have been subpoenaed by the Senate Watergate committee as well as those demanded for

the grand jury by former Watergate Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox.

The young White House assistant insisted that no trickery was involved in the White House's inability to find a recording of a crucial conversation last April 15 between Mr. Nixon and ousted White House counsel John W. Dean III.

"It's not a missing tape. It's an unrecorded conversation," Bull protested. "In my mind, there's no chicanery involved in this."

Judge Sirica advised Bull to stick to the facts. "Nobody's accusing anybody of chicanery at this point," Sirica told him.

Bull said Miss Woods and Mr. Nixon reviewed tapes Sept. 29 in Miss Woods' cabin at Camp David while Bull worked in another room trying to find the sought-after conversations on the reels of tape he had brought with him.

Deputy presidential assistant John Bennett, an aide to Haig, said he was told that Bull and Miss Woods were to get the tapes that weekend "for the purpose of transcribing the conversations on those tapes."

According to Bennett, who took over custody of the tapes from the Secret Service in July, Miss Woods still has eight of those re-

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cordings. In addition, he said, he gave her six others on Monday in response to directions that Haig gave him by phone from Key Biscayne.

Bennett said Mr. Nixon wanted a transcript of an April 16, 1973, talk that he had with Dean.

Mr. Nixon talked twice with Dean that day, first asking him to submit his resignation or take an indefinite leave of absence. Dean has said that he refused and that he told Mr. Nixon later that day that he would not be the "scapegoat" for the Watergate scandal. Bennett said the April 16 talks should be on one of the six tapes that he gave Miss Woods Monday.

The two missing conversations include a long talk between the President and Dean the day before that, on April 15, 1973, and a phone call from Mr. Nixon to former Attorney General John N. Mitchell on June 20, 1972, just three days after discovery of the break-in and bug-ging at Democratic National Committee Headquarters here.

Bull has said that Mr. Nixon told him at Camp David in September of remembering then that the call to Mitchell was on a White House telephone not attached to the long-secret system for recording presidential conversations.

In turn, Bull has said he told the President that he could not find any recording of the April 15 talk. Dean has accused the President of making remarks at that meeting that indicated Mr. Nixon's own complicity in the Watergate cover-up.

Bull testified that he called Bennett at the White House and asked him to try to find another reel of tape that might have contained the conversation. Subsequently, Bull said, Bennett called him back at Camp David "to say, yes, indeed, he had found another box." It was marked in Bennett's records as "15 Apr. 73."

Bennett said he brought this box of tape to Camp David personally and delivered it to Bull around 8 p.m. of Sept. 29.

Bull said he played it back but that it did not match up with the first April 14-16 reel on which he originally thought he would



ROSE MARY WOODS



JOHN BENNETT

... figures in inquiry on Watergate tapes

find the Dean conversation. That one, he said, ended in mid-sentence during a talk the President had had earlier April 15 with someone else.

As for the new reel that Bennett supplied him, Bull said, "The beginning of the tape didn't pick up where the other left off. It began late Sunday night (April 15) or maybe Monday (April 16). There was a gap of quite a few hours. I believe I reported that to Miss Woods. The President was not there."

Bull said he also told Haig Woods. The President was not on Sept. 30 that "I was unable to find recordings" of either the Mitchell phone call or the President's meeting with Dean. Bull indicated that he subsequently returned the two tapes for the April 14-16 weekend to Bennett along with several others while Miss Woods kept about eight.

The President's secretary, Bull told the court, began typing notes on the tapes at Camp David, continued working on the eight that were left with her when she returned to the White House, and then took them down to Key Biscayne the next weekend.

Bennett, who testified in the afternoon, said that Miss Woods still had them as well as the six tapes he gave her this week.

Watergate Assistant Special Prosecutor Richard Ben-Veniste contended that a third reel of tape from the April 14-16 weekend was reflected in Bennett's own notes and Secret Service logs.

Bennett said there were only two. He said he used different notations at different times to describe the same reel.

A retired Army major general, Bennett said he carefully noted any transfer of the tapes from their secret room in the Executive Office Building ever since he was given custody of them last July 18. He said he marked the transfers down on slips of paper that he then put in envelopes in his office safe, sealed in such a way that the envelopes could not be opened without his discovering it.

The reason for that, Bennett said, was that his secretary also had access to his office safe and "I wanted to be sure she didn't tamper with them."

Bennett said he was equally confident that no one could have taken the tapes from their first-floor room in the Executive Office Building without his knowing about it — "except by use of explosives."

"Nobody's been in that room but me," he said. At the same time, Bennett said he could not vouch for the accuracy of Secret Service records listing the tapes and who had access to them be-

fore July 18 when Bennett took over.

"Can you be certain that the tapes you received on the 18th of July were all the tapes that have been made?" Ben-Veniste asked him.

"Nope. No way," Bennett replied.

The testimony of Secret Service agents and technicians last week showed that only haphazard records were kept of the recordings before the secret taping system was publicly disclosed to the Senate Watergate committee last July 16 by former White House aide Alexander Butterfield.

Yesterday's session ended with an in camera (private) lawyers' conference before Judge Sirica on proposals for delivery of the tapes that do exist and suggestions for their examination by technical experts. The date for the turnover is still to be fixed.