

New 'Gap' in Nixon Tapes

Washington ~~WXPost~~

A presidential aide testified yesterday that a "gap" had been discovered in one of the White House tape recordings and that as a result another conversation between President Nixon and John W. Dean III might be unavailable.

John C. Bennett, deputy assistant to the President, told the court that Rose Mary Woods, Mr. Nixon's personal secretary, had told him yesterday morning she had discovered a "gap" while putting one of the recordings into written form.

"I presume that in going through some one of the conversations — I believe it was between the President and Mr. Dean — that she found some sort of gap in the recording," Bennett declared. He added that he had not inquired into her problem any further.

"I didn't think it was in the President's interest to get into the contents of that tape," he observed.

ANNOUNCE

The White House had announced last week that its recording system had failed to pick up a conversation between the President and Dean on April 15 because a six-hour tape in the Executive Office Building had run out before the evening meeting took place.

Nixon lawyers said then that there was also no recording of a call the president made to John M. Mitchell, his campaign manager, on June 20, 1972, three days after the Watergate burglary, because the telephone on which the call was placed was not hooked into the recording system.

Watergate prosecutors regard the two missing con-

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More Defects in Tapes Reported

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Portions of the seven White House tapes that President Nixon has agreed to turn over to the U.S. District Court are "inaudible" and thus will probably fail to definitively answer questions about Mr. Nixon's role in the Watergate affair, according to White House sources.

The sources said the tapes may be of questionable evidentiary value in court because of defects variously described as "gaps in conversation," "unevenness," "excessive background noise," "periods of silence," and "cut-ins and cut-outs during conversation."

According to White House sources questioned over the past three days, there is serious concern among the President's aides and advisers that the latest problems regarding the tapes will

*Compare this sentence with that in WXPost.

versations as critically important to resolving questions as to the President's knowledge of the break-in at Democratic National Headquarters at the Watergate complex in June, 1972, and his participation, if any, in the cover-up of that crime.

SAFE

The April 15 conversation with Dean could not have been the one in which Miss Woods discovered a gap because the only tape made

further strain the credibility of the White House.

Although the White House devices used to trip the tape-recording mechanism were voice-activated, another source said, the microphones used for recording apparently failed to pick up some conversation. Previously, White House officials had said the microphones were highly sensitive and capable of picking up even hushed conversation.

One source said conversation on some of the tapes appears to have been erased — either inadvertently or otherwise — or obliterated by the injection of background noise.*

Four other sources disputed that there is anything "suspicious" about the deficiencies and insisted that the tapes are marred only by "technical problems" which can be satisfactorily explained in court.

that day is now locked in a safe in Bennett's office in the White House, he said.

Miss Woods also told Bennett yesterday morning that she did not "transcribe" a number of the Watergate tapes at the President's as witnesses had indicated Tuesday. Apparently she meant that she had typed something less than a full verbatim record of them.

"That's not the right word; I did not transcribe

tapes," Miss Woods said, according to Bennett, adding that she intended to tell Judge John J. Sirica when she testifies in the fact-finding hearing on the missing conversations.

"Rose," Bennett said he replied, "when you go over there just tell them what you have done."

White House lawyers said Miss Woods would testify, but it was not clear when she would be called. Former White House chief of staff H. R. Haldeman is expected to be on the stand today.

ATTORNEY

A new attorney made his first public appearance on the White House legal team defending the president in the tapes controversy. He was Samuel J. Powers Jr. of Miami, a 56-year-old trial lawyer with considerable experience in representing insurance companies in negligence cases.

So far, all the expense of hiring outside lawyers to represent Mr. Nixon in the Watergate tapes case has been met out of public funds.

Judge Sirica opened yesterday's session by cautioning the press and the public to "withhold final judgment" on the issues raised by the missing White House conversations and "keep an open mind while the evidence is coming in."

The judge said that the most important phase of the hearings, which will not be reached until sometime next week, will deal with "the reasons that might account for the non-existence of two conversations and the integrity of the tape system itself."

Associated Press