

Partly Erased Tape Scrutinized at Lab

By VICTOR K. McELHENY

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Technical experts appointed by Chief District Judge John J. Sirica have begun examining a partly erased White House tape recording at a New York City laboratory.

The tape includes a conversation June 20, 1972, three days after the Watergate break-in between President Nixon and his former White House staff chief, H.R. Halde- man, in the President's Executive Office Building hideaway. Most of this conversation reportedly was obliterated because it was on an 18-minute tape gap the White House disclosed Nov. 21.

The examination started yesterday at the Federal Scientific Corporation, 615 West 131st Street, Manhattan, whose vice president for accoustical research, Mark R. Weiss, is one of the technical advisers determining the "authenticity and integrity" of subpoenaed White House tapes for Judge Sirica.

In addition to the tape, Federal marshals took to the laboratory the tape recorder, foot pedal, earphones, electric typewriter and high-intensity lamp that Miss Rose Mary Woods, the President's personal secretary, testified this week were involved in creating at least part of the 18-minute gap.

Also sent were some 20 color photographs of Miss Woods and her White House office, taken at the suggestion of her lawyer, Charles S. Rhyne, Tuesday afternoon, showing the placement of the equipment and how Miss Woods might have caused four to five minutes of the gap when interrupted by a telephone call.

Account by Miss Woods

She testified that the interruption came Oct. 1, when she was using the unfamiliar tape recorder for the first time while transcribing from the original tape. With her foot on a tape-advancing foot treadle, Miss Woods testified, she inadvertently pushed a recording key instead of a stop button when the phone rang.

Neither she nor other White House officials called to testify could explain the remaining 13 minutes of the gap.

Tape experts not on Judge Sirica's panel, consulted by the New York Times, expressed certainty that one of the panel's first efforts would be to use computer techniques to "filter" out the humming noise that now fills the 18-minute gap, and then "enhance" any residual signals left in the tape after the erasure.

According to Dr. Leo Beranek, a leading accoustical scientist who is a television

executive in Boston, the hope of such a "recovery" would depend on the quality of the original recording.

Miss Woods and the White House counsel on the Watergate case, J. Fred Buzhardt Jr., told Judge Sirica in court that they think the humming could have been caused by electrical interference from the high-intensity lamp she used on her typing table, inches from the tape recorder.

'All the Material They Need'

The White House counsel, Leonard Garment, interviewed today in Judge Sirica's courtroom, said that the technical experts had "all the material they need" for the tests. Among those present for the tests, he said, are Richard Hauser of the White House counsel's staff, and Carl Feldbaum from the office of the special Watergate prosecutor, Leon Jaworski.

Most of the items sent to New York by order of Judge Sirica and entered into the court record involved the 18-minute gap and its possible causes, but the final item is considered by tape experts to be vital to a test of authenticity. This is one of the battery of Sony TC 800-B tape machines used to record Presidential conversations for at least two years before the practice was suspended last July.