

'No Comment' on Copies

Sirica Listens to Tapes

Washington

U.S. District Judge John J. Sirica spent more than four hours in a "bug-proof" room listening to President Nixon's Watergate tapes, including one with a mysterious 18-minute gap. He had "no comment" on what he heard.

Wearing earphones for privacy and with only his law clerk, Todd Christofferson, present, Sirica began monitoring "exact copies" of the subpoenaed tapes after months of White House delay.

Sirica's monitoring process came more than four months after the existence of the tapes was disclosed at a televised hearing of the Senate Watergate committee. And it began two months after the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia ordered the White House to turn the tapes over to Sirica for examination as evidence.

The tapes include recordings of conversations that Mr. Nixon had with key aides about the time of the June 17, 1972, Watergate

break-in and during the subsequent alleged coverup.

The first tape that Sirica examined included a conversation Mr. Nixon had with aides June 20, 1972 — the first full White House work day after the burglary.

Sirica's week-long hearing on an 18-minute gap that the White House said it found on one of the tapes will resume today.

Christofferson said copies of the tapes are being used for Sirica's monitoring so the judge would not inadver-

tenly erase portions of the originals.

The judge described the tapes he was monitoring as "exact copies," but he would not elaborate or disclose who made them.

Under the appeals court order, Sirica will determine whether the tapes contain evidence that should be turned over to the Watergate grand jury and what matters of national security — if any — should not be disclosed.

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