

Tapes: How to Erase . . .

To the Editor:

One of the questions being asked these days is "How could eighteen minutes of conversation have disappeared from one of the subpoenaed tapes?" The answer, I believe, is quite simple.

Some tape recorders, particularly Sony, are not completely interlocked against running in two modes simultaneously. On these recorders, should the "record" button be pushed and then the "fast forward" or "rewind," the machine will operate in both modes.

All tape recorders erase during "record," and with such a high-speed erasure, eighteen minutes of conversation will disappear in five to fifteen seconds, depending on the speed it was originally recorded. This time span would probably correspond to the reaction time of an inexperienced operator.

Erasure is normally accomplished by means of a dc signal plus a high-frequency (80,000-100,000 Hz) bias signal. This tone is normally inaudible, but with erasure at high speed, it would appear as a high-pitched tone when the tape is played back at its normal speed.

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. . . And to Avoid Erasure

To the Editor:

If the White House were properly concerned about accidental erasures of the Watergate tapes, its wisest course would have been to buy Rose Mary Woods a playback-only machine. This machine cannot record or erase—only play back what is already recorded on tape. You can get one for reel-to-reel tape in any audio supply store for less than \$200.

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New York, Nov. 29, 1973