

Sirica Report on 18-Minute Buzz

Washington

Neither the high-intensity lamp nor the electric typewriter used by President Nixon's secretary, Rose Mary Woods, was the "likely" cause of a gap with 18 minutes of buzzing on a key tape recording, Judge John J. Sirica said yesterday.

The judge said that this finding was the "preliminary result" of a study of the disputed tape by a panel of experts. The recording was made in Mr. Nixon's office June 20, 1972, three days after five burglars were caught in the Democratic National Headquarters in the Watergate complex here.

Sirica said there were "some indications" that the Uher Universal 5000 tape recorder used by Miss Woods "could have produced the buzz." However, he added, these "indications" are "yet to be confirmed by further study."

He said there were also "indications" that any voices that might have been on the tape appeared lost beyond retrieval, but that this, too, was "yet to be confirmed."

The obliterated sequence on the tape recorded a conversation between Mr. Nixon and H. R. Haldeman, then his chief of staff, about the Watergate case.

Yesterday, in an unusual action, the chief judge of the U.S. District Court here convened his court, with lawyers for the special Watergate prosecutor and the White House on hand, and appeared in his black robes to read a news release on the tapes from the bench. Then he adjourned the court.

Sirica said that a full re-

port on the June 20 tape is expected after the end of the year.

The panel of experts, named November 21, will continue its work after that report is filed, studying "the authenticity and integrity of the tapes in general," he said.

He said that the six-man panel, aided by "several other specialists," had spent much time setting up "instruments and procedures and making preliminary tests.

"The work, which involves use of spectrum analyzers, computers, graphical displays and other advanced equipment, has been conducted in several facilities," Sirica continued.

For the first time the judge listed the specific questions being asked of the panel:

- "Is this tape the original one that was recorded on June 20, 1972? Does it contain erasures or splices? Or is it a copy that has been edited by operations such as cutting and splicing before re-recording?"

- "How was the 18-minute section of buzzing sounds produced? Was all the buzzing produced continuously at one time?"

- "Can speech sounds be detected under the buzzing? If so, to what extent can the speech be recaptured and made intelligible?"

The White House lawyers at first said that it was believed that the buzzing had been caused "by the depression of a record button during the process of reviewing the tape, possibly while the recorder was in the proximity of an electric typewriter and a high-intensity lamp."

A few days later, J. Fred

Buzhardt Jr., special counsel to the President, downgraded that version saying it was "just a possibility."

Miss Woods testified that she had inadvertently pressed the record button on her tape recorder and pushed down on a foot treadle advancing the tape while stretching to answer a telephone call. She called that action a "terrible mistake," but said it would account for only about five minutes of the 18-minute buzz.

(A reporter for the New York Times experimenting with a high-intensity light and a Uher recorder, managed to generate a sustained

buzzing close to that heard on the tape.)

After the unusual court session, Buzhardt commented, "We'll accept whatever they find."

New York Times