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Technicians Doubt Tape Gap Theory

By George Lardner Jr. and Timothy S. Robinson
Washington Post Staff Writers

Technical experts told Judge John J. Sirica yesterday they do not think that the 18¼-minute buzz on a subpoenaed Watergate tape could have been caused in the fashion suggested by the White House.

They said in a preliminary report that neither the high-intensity lamp nor the electric typewriter used by President Nixon's personal secretary, Rose Mary Woods, was "a likely cause" of the noise on the recording.

White House special counsel J. Fred Buzhardt said last month that the desk equipment Miss Woods used while reviewing the tape might have been responsible for the obliterated segment.

The two-toned humming noise drowned out a June 20, 1972, conversation about the Watergate case between Mr. Nixon and then-White House chief of staff H. R. (Bob) Haldeman — three days after the scandal broke. Haldeman's notes show they discussed a "counterattack . . . for diversion."

Miss Woods testified last month that she pushed the wrong button while monitoring the tape for Mr. Nixon on a Uher recording machine in her White House office.

The experts said there were "some" indications that the Uher recorder could have produced the buzz," but they said more tests are needed to confirm this possibility.

The court-appointed panel voiced doubts that any conversation recorded "under the buzz" could be retrieved, but they said further study was needed to confirm that, too.

Judge Sirica announced the preliminary findings in open court after a private session in his chambers yesterday morning. He said a conclusive report on the June 20 tape should be ready early next month.

Among the questions the panel has been trying to resolve, the judge said, are:

- "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"

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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?"

In testimony last month, Buzhardt said he was convinced there was "no innocent explanation" for the 18¼-minute erasure when he first reported it to the court Nov. 21.

He said he later resolved "some" of his apprehensions when he managed to approximate the two-toned noise on another Uher machine — although admittedly not in the

manner that Miss Woods described.

She said she accidentally flicked the "Record" key and "must have" kept her foot on a floor pedal when she was distracted by a phone call in her White House office last Oct. 1.

Buzhardt did not use a foot pedal in his test. He said he got the first loud "hum" by pressing the Uher's "Start" and "Record" keys simultaneously and turning on Miss Woods' IBM Executive typewriter and her Tensor desk lamp.

He said he then got a lower hum by turning off the typewriter.

Miss Woods, however, has insisted that she could have caused only part of the gap. She said she was on the phone for only about five minutes and caught her mistake as soon as she hung up.

The humming noises on the recording drops noticeably in pitch and volume at the 5½-minute mark.

Judge Sirica summarized the experts' preliminary findings that were submitted to him in a longer, sealed report. Alluding to Miss Woods' testimony, he said:

"Test made with sophisticated instruments have failed to give any indication that the electric typewriter or the Ten-

sor lamp, if used in the arrangements described in the testimony, would have produced the buzzing sounds observed on the tape."

The six-member panel of experts has been conducting tests with the June 20 recording in both New York City and Cambridge, Mass. Sirica said the work involves the use of spectrum analyzers, computers, graphical displays and other advanced equipment.

Yesterday's report was submitted by acoustics experts Richard H. Bolt of Cambridge, Mass., and James L. Flanagan, head of Bell Laboratories' acoustics research department in Murray Hill, N.J. Both White House lawyers and

Watergate prosecutors attended the session.

Buzhardt indicated in hurried remarks to reporters after the hearing that he was still sticking to his theory despite what the experts said.

"We got the sound working with the lamp, the typewriter and the Uher recorder . . . we did," he said as he rushed to his car outside the courthouse.

Judge Sirica spent the afternoon listening to the final three Watergate tapes in his possession, including the June 20 recording. The White House has claimed executive privilege for it, on the grounds that it no longer contains any conversation about Watergate.