

Nixon Didn't Do It, White House Says

Washington

The White House yesterday flatly denied that President Nixon deliberately or accidentally erased the missing segment of a taped conversation with former aide H. R. Haldeman, but it declined to provide any information on what might have happened.

When he was asked directly whether the President erased the tape, White House spokesman Gerald L. Warren said: "There has been a great deal of testimony and there will be other testimony. The answer to your question is no, and I am not going to take questions on this matter."

Asked how he knew that the President was not involved in the tape erasure, Warren replied that there have been "many discussions about this matter with the President."

Warren was then asked whether his denial of an erasure by the President covered both deliberate and accidental erasure, and he said that it did.

Usually calm in the face of tough questioning, Warren became impatient with the persistent attempts to draw him out on the question of the erased tape.

"You are spending time which could be spent on other matters," he said with unusual irritation.

Obviously shaken by the report on the tape by a technical panel it helped choose, the White House distributed a prepared statement from James D. St. Clair, the President's coun-



JAMES ST. CLAIR
President's lawyer

sel, at the beginning of Warren's press briefing.

The statement made it appear that Warren would answer few if any questions on the matter that has raised anew speculation about Watergate and the president's role.

"Further discussion would be improper while this mat-

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ter is in the court," the statement said.

Declaring that the hearing in Judge John J. Sirica's court "has only begun," the statement said that "other technical testimony has yet to be heard. Cross-examination has hardly been initiated.

"Thus, premature judgments about the causes of that gap in the White House tape are altogether unwarranted."

Warren would not say what "other technical testimony" might involve or whether the White House had employed its own technical advisers to study the 18½-minute erasure of the June 22, 1972, tape.

On Capitol Hill, the critical comments that began Tuesday when news of the panel's report on the erasure was first reported continued unabated.

Senator William E. Brock (Rep-Tenn.), head of the Senate Republican campaign committee, said he was "just completely frustrated."

Brock, who headed the Nixon campaign's youth drive in 1972, said in a CBS news interview that he felt "we keep getting hit with new shoes . . . I feel like I've been dealing with a centipede this last year."

"How many new revelations or disclosures are going to be required to break the camel's back?" he asked. "I just can't predict any more. I've given it up."

Asked specifically for his reaction to the new disclosure about the tape, Brock said he was "depressed and concerned." The GOP has been "wounded severely," he said.

When asked what he was telling prospective candidates, he replied: "I'm saying don't run on the basis of any label, be it the Nixon Administration or the Republican party or the Democratic party. Run on your own merit. Run on your own platform."

On the other hand, Senator William L. Scott (Rep-Va.) defended the President.

In a dispatch from Norfolk, the Associated Press quoted him as saying that if he were President and if there was anything incriminating on the tapes "I'd have burnt the darn things up long ago."

Even if the President erased the tape, he said, it would not be an impeachable offense.

"I don't think that's treason," Scott said. "I don't think that's a high crime or misdemeanor; I don't think it's bribery."

In Boston, House Majority Leader Thomas P. O'Neill (Dem-Mass.) said he would not be surprised if Vice President Ford becomes the next president — "and I don't mean elected president."

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