

# AN EXPERT HINTS AT TAPE ACCIDENT

## Report to Nixon's Lawyers Theorizes That Buzzing Was Not Deliberate

By ANTHONY RIPLEY

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Feb. 18—An electronics and counterintelligence expert, in a report that has gone to White House lawyers, maintains that the 18½-minute buzzing on the key Presidential tape recording may have been caused accidentally rather than deliberately.

Allan D. Bell Jr., president of Dektor Counterintelligence and Security Inc., of Springfield, Va., told The New York Times today that he had volunteered to help Charles S. Rhyne, a lawyer for President Nixon's secretary, Rose Mary Woods.

He produced a five-page report on Jan. 29 for Mr. Rhyne, who said today that he thought it was "so important" that he sent copies to Federal Judge John J. Sirica, the White House and the special Watergate prosecutor, Leon Jaworski.

The Bell report appears to contradict the findings of a panel of experts that were widely interpreted as indicating that the erasures on the recording were deliberate.

Mr. Bell said today that "we are involved" and "probably the source" of a portion of a statement issued yesterday by

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James D. St. Clair, Mr. Nixon's special counsel for the Watergate affair. However, he said he had not talked directly to Mr. St. Clair.

The St. Clair statement said in part that "our technical investigation" of the 18.5-minute buzzing "has determined that the erase marks identified by the panel of experts in the gap could well have been and probably were caused by the "admittedly defective recording machine" that Miss Woods used.

An attempt to reach the President's lawyer at the White House this afternoon was unavailing. An aide said the Bell report had been received.

### Panel Suggestion

The panel of experts that Mr. St. Clair referred to are the six men chosen jointly by the White House and Mr. Jaworski. They were appointed by Judge Sirica last Nov. 16 to study the authenticity and integrity of seven tape recordings produced by subpoena from the White House.

In Mr. Bell's analysis, he noted that the experts had found a defective part in Miss Woods's recorder—a diode called a bridge rectifier.

This part, he said, might have produced the marks on the tape recording that were identified as at least five separate erasures and re-recordings in the buzzing gap.

The panel unanimously reported that they thought the erase and record marks required "hand operation of keyboard controls" of Miss Woods's tape recorder. The panel report



The New York Times/George Tames

Allan D. Bell Jr., an electronics expert, with a magnifying device he used in examining the tape.

suggested deliberate erasure and re-recording of the tape.

Mr. Bell's analysis suggests an accidental cause.

He said that if the electric power to the recording and erasure heads had wavered, the record and erase heads might leave such marks.

The panel reported that the part in question had apparently caused the buzzing sound. It eventually failed and had to be replaced.

Only one of the six experts reached by The Times would comment on Mr. Bell's report, which he said he had not yet seen.

When the report was outlined to him by telephone, the expert, who asked not to be identified, commented:

"If you had the full story in your hands, you might choose to underplay the Bell report."

Mr. Bell said that members of his firm had become "in-

stinctively indignant" when the panel reported its findings on Jan. 15.

He said Mr. Rhyne was reached and the company volunteered to undertake a study. Mr. Rhyne said he had provided Dektor with a copy of the 18.5-minute gap recording and rented a Uher Universal 5000 recorder for his use. It is similar to Miss Wood's machine.

### Tapes Developed

To study tapes, a magnetic fluid is applied to them and the tapes are developed much like a photograph, showing the erase and record marks. Mr. Bell said his company used a more advanced technique than "dipping or painting."

He said his company had developed a "tape viewer" that allows a clear view of the tape without wetting it.

"Certain of our findings completely support those of the panel," the report noted.

But it added, "Based upon the information available to us, we cannot accept the conclusion that manual manipulation of the keyboard controls was required to produce the erase-head-stop signatures."

It continued that the panel had "afforded little significance to the malfunction of the power supply." It insisted it was "at least feasible" that "an intermittently defective power supply" could have been the cause.

It stated Dektor could not state that the power supply problem was specifically the cause nor could it state specifically that the manual operation of the tape recorder keys was not the cause.

Mr. Bell is a retired lieutenant colonel who served in Army intelligence. In 1968 he

set up his firm for research and development of special equipment of counterintelligence and security work.

Some of the firm's work has included the controversial "voice prints" that attempt to detect lying through analyzing the elements of sound and observing them from traces of stress.

Last week, in a recently declassified report, the Army land warfare laboratory sharply criticized the voice analyzers. They are used in hundreds of police and private organizations in the United States and abroad.

The study said these devices were "inferior" to polygraphs (conventional lie detectors) "but also to judgments made on the basis of simply observing subjects' behavior."

The device is called the "psychological stress evaluator"

Mr. Bell said he was willing to test his machines against a polygraph.

Mr. St. Clair's statement yesterday was issued after a report appeared in The Washington Post that two of the subpoenaed tape recordings were not authentic.

### Angry Denials

The report brought quick angry denials from the White House, and Mr. St. Clair, called the Presidential compound at Key Biscayne, Fla., called the reports "utterly false." He said a "technical investigation" had been made of the tapes after one member of the panel "expressed the opinion that two of the President's tapes could be re-recordings."

Mr. Bell said his investigation had nothing to do with the re-recording controversy but only with the additional remarks by Mr. St. Clair on the 18½-minute gap.

NYT  
2/19/74