

Unexplained Silent Gaps On Tapes

Washington

The White House tape recordings from which the edited transcripts of President Nixon's Watergate conversations were prepared contain numerous periods of unexplained silence lasting as long as several minutes each, according to informed sources.

Because the White House tapes were recorded by a voice-activated system, the tape should have stopped automatically within several seconds whenever no sound was being recorded, thus eliminating the possibility of long silences or gaps in the replayed conversations.

Informed from persons in the White House involved in preparing the edited transcripts suggests that the cause of newly discovered

silences—in which no conversation or other sound can be heard while the tape is running—is not known.

"In dozens of instances," in the words of one source, the silences occur inexplicably in the midst of conversations. Yet the transcripts edited by the White House for the House Judiciary Committee contain no hint of such gaps in conversation.

The existence of the unexplained silences could lend weight to arguments by the House committee and the special Watergate prosecutor's office that only the tapes themselves—and not edited transcripts—can represent acceptable evidence.

According to sources familiar with the tapes, the newly discovered silences are different from the celebrated 18½-minute "gap" or erasure on one of the tapes originally subpoenaed by the Watergate prosecutors. Whereas the 18½-minute gap is marked by a buzzing tone, the new gaps of silence contain no audible sound, the sources said.

Washington Post