

# Caused Only Part of Gap---Miss Woods

## Nixon's Secretary Departs From White House Position on Erasure

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*Times Staff Writers*

WASHINGTON—The mystery deepened Tuesday over the erasure of a Watergate tape as President Nixon's secretary moved away from the White House position that she was solely responsible for the incident.

Rose Mary Woods stressed at a U.S. District Court hearing that she could not have been responsible for causing more than 5½ minutes of 18 minutes erased from the June 20, 1972, tape.

Miss Woods' version was given some weight by the playing of the tape in Chief U.S. Dist. Judge John J. Sirica's court. It was the first time any of Mr. Nixon's tapes had been heard in public. As played in the courtroom, the erased segment at first produced a loud buzz—like the sound of an electric razor. But at the 5½-minute mark the tone dropped sharply in volume.

Miss Woods has said repeatedly that she inadvertently pushed the "record" button on her tape machine, and perhaps caused a gap, while talking on the phone last Oct. 1 for about 5½ minutes. She said she could not explain the remaining 12½ minutes that are missing in a conversation between Mr. Nixon and H. R. Haldeman, then White House chief of staff, three days after the Watergate break-in.

However, an explanation of the obliterated section of tape submitted to Sirica by White House counsel J. Fred Buzhardt said the entire erased portion "was caused by the depression of a 'record' button during the process of reviewing the tape."

Unlike Miss Woods' testimony calling the erasure accidental, Buzhardt's analysis did not characterize it one way or the other.

Additional signs of a possible split between Miss Woods and White House lawyers emerged as it was learned that she was subpoenaed by Watergate prosecutors last Wednesday after Buzhardt and presidential counsel Leonard Garment met with special prosecutor Leon Jaworski in Sirica's chambers.

Miss Woods also revealed Tuesday that she had retained outside counsel. Charles S. Rhyne, a law school classmate of Mr. Nixon's, after she

**Please Turn to Page 17, Col. 1**

# MISS WOODS

Continued from First Page

was instructed to do so by White House chief of staff Alexander M. Haig Jr.

"Gen. Haig told me none of the White House lawyers would come down here with me . . . he told me to hire an attorney," Miss Woods said.

At one point, as assistant prosecutor Jill Volner questioned Miss Woods about how Rhyne was selected, the attorney jumped to his feet and said heatedly: "I've never worked for the White House or anyone. I don't want to be grouped (with them.)"

Sirica, noting that Rhyne was sitting across the courtroom from the White House counsel table, remarked: "Well, I wondered why you were sitting over there. Now I know."

Sirica said that the White House lawyers might have thought that representing Miss Woods would conflict with their service to the President.

While the playing of the first White House tape was a landmark of sorts in the long-fought battle over the recordings, the tape itself—aside from the erased portion—appeared to contribute little of substance to the Watergate investigation.

Lawyers and spectators strained forward in their seats to catch bits of conversation from the nearly 40-minute tape, which included the obliterated portion. Voices were difficult to hear because they were not amplified in the spacious courtroom and a faint hum was present throughout.

The section played in court began in the midst of a meeting between Mr. Nixon and John D. Ehrlichman, formerly his chief domestic adviser.

They could be heard discussing a Supreme Court decision that declared unconstitutional the Administration's position on wiretapping suspected subversives.

"What the hell does that show you?" Asked a voice that sounded like the President's.

At another point, the comment was made that "in 1968, the press was violently pro-Humphrey," while another voice said "the press was in love with Humphrey." It was not clear which man was speaking.

Other sounds that could be heard included someone whistling and the President asking his steward for "a little consommé."

Twice during the playing of the 18-minute erased portion, the humming sound stopped for about two seconds and then resumed. That was not explained in court.

Mrs. Volner questioned Miss Woods about her testimony that she must have inadvertently kept her foot on a tape machine pedal, after accidentally hitting the "record" button

When Mrs. Volner asked, "You had to do two things simultaneously?" Miss Woods replied:

"Yes, and I sometimes do many more than two things at once."

Asked if she did not notice that the numbers on the tape-machine meter were running, indicating that it was recording, Miss Woods said:

"I can do many things at once, but I could not take shorthand, talk on the phone and watch that little meter."

It was not clear from the courtroom demonstration that an erasure would occur from depression of the foot pedal while the "record" button was pushed

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**ATTORNEY**—Charles Rhyne, is representing Rose Mary Woods.  
(AP Wirephoto)

with her finger, in the process of reaching for a ringing telephone to the left and rear of where she sat.

As Miss Woods sought to reenact what she had done, Mrs. Volner said, "You took your foot off the pedal."

"I didn't do it that day," Miss Woods replied.

She also introduced a new element by saying that she had cradled the phone at her left ear while jotting notes during the call.

down. A tape reel revolved while Miss Woods kept her foot on the pedal and the "record" button down, but it was not shown if that erased any tape.

Miss Woods' attempted reenactment brought agreement by her lawyer and White House counsel that Mrs. Volner could inspect Miss Woods' White House office, where the erasure apparently occurred.

Later Tuesday Mrs. Vol-

ner went to the White House to see Miss Woods' office. White House photographers also took pictures, to be used in court when Miss Woods testifies again today.

In addition, Sirica agreed that Miss Woods' electric typewriter and high-intensity desk lamp should be brought to his courtroom so that electronic tests can be made to determine if they could have caused the humming

noise in the obliterated tape, as the White House suggests.

Miss Woods' phone call was not picked up by the recorder because the machine had no microphone attached at the time.

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**AFTER SEEING FOR HERSELF**—Jill Volner, the assistant Watergate special prosecutor, hailing a taxi outside the White House after looking over the office of secretary Rose Mary Woods. The latter testified on erasure of a tape during its transcribing.

Story in Part 1, Page 1

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