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Witness Says He Was Asked to Be Silent on Watergate

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By WALTER RUGABER

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WASHINGTON, May 18 — James W. McCord Jr. testified today that an Administration official, who said that he was acting with President Nixon's knowledge, had offered him executive clemency, financial aid and eventually a job to win his silence in the Watergate scandal.

The White House quickly denied that the President knew of any such efforts.

McCord, testifying before a

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hushed audience in the second day of hearings by the Senate Watergate committee, said that John J. Caulfield, a former White House official then in the Treasury Department, invoked the President's name at a meeting in January.

Mr. Caulfield pleaded with McCord for silence, the witness said.

"Caulfield stated that he was carrying the message of executive clemency to me 'from the very highest levels of the White House,'" the convicted Watergate conspirator said in a statement read to the Senators.

Nixon in Florida

"He stated that the President of the United States was in Key Biscayne, Fla., that weekend, had been told of the forthcoming meeting with me and would be immediately told of the results of the meeting," McCord said.

"He further stated that 'I may have a message to you at our next meeting from the President himself,'" McCord said in describing a clandestine meeting with Mr. Caulfield on Friday, Jan. 12.

Ronald L. Ziegler, the White House press secretary, said at a news briefing that Mr. Nixon "did not participate in any way or have any knowledge regarding the cover-up and at no time authorized anyone to represent him in offering executive clemency."

Mr. Caulfield, who was immediately subpoenaed by the Senate committee and scheduled to appear after McCord, could not be reached for comment. He took administrative leave from the Treasury Department early this week.

Some Unprepared

The seven-member panel, headed by Senator Sam J. Ervin Jr., Democrat of North Carolina had been informed by its staff two days ago that McCord would quote Mr. Caulfield on Presidential involvement.

But others in the Caucus Room of the Old Senate Office Building, where the Watergate investigation got off to a slow start yesterday, were unprepared for the abrupt change.

There was no audible reaction by the spectators, who filled all the seats and standing room in the chamber.

Senator Ervin broke into the silence to say that McCord's statement "would not be accepted in a court of law to connect the President with what Mr. Caulfield was doing," because it was hearsay.

Senator Herman E. Talmadge,

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Democrat of Georgia, said later that if what McCord had told the committee was "authentic," it would still require "a good deal of corroboration."

Mr. Talmadge, in his Georgia farmer's voice, also laid out in one blunt sentence the thrust of the testimony by the convicted Watergate conspirator. The Senator said:

"Mr. McCord, you have made some very serious charges implicating the President of the United States probably as an accessory after the fact, the former Attorney General of the United States as probably an accessory before the fact and perhaps guilty of a conspiracy involving the Watergate bugging."

McCord, testifying for the first time in a public forum, also repeated charges made during closed-door appearances in various proceedings that John N. Mitchell had approved the conspiracy in advance.

The witness said that co-conspirator, G. Gordon Liddy, had told him, that the Watergate wiretapping was approved by the former Attorney General, John W. Dean 3d and Jeb Stuart Magruder in early 1972.

Mr. Dean, then the White House counsel, was forced to resign on April 30. Mr. Magruder, then deputy director of the Committee for the Re-election of the President, resigned a Commerce Department job last month.

Convicted in January

McCord, who had worked as security coordinator for the re-election committee, was convicted in January of conspiracy, burglary and wiretapping. Free on \$100,000 bail, he is scheduled for sentencing on June 15.

McCord was among the five men arrested on June 17 in the Watergate offices of the Democratic National Committee while trying to repair a telephone wiretap and to photograph committee files.

Today's charge by McCord was the most spectacular of a series that began on March 23 when he said in a letter read in court that there had been pressure on him to "plead guilty to keep silent."

Since then, reports on his assertions of high-level involvement in the bugging operation and subsequent cover-up have leaked from a Federal grand

jury investigating the case and from secret Senate committee sessions.

More formally, McCord gave extensive pretrial testimony in civil litigation that has grown out of the break-in. A transcript of his deposition was made public earlier this month.

In public—his testimony was also televised nationally—he appeared calm and precise, thoughtful and unhurried, largely poker-faced. He has a dry, somewhat high-pitched voice—he described it as "hoarse"—and two sets of microphones were finally placed before him as he rested his elbows on the witness table, taking his glasses off and replacing them now and then.

When today's session opened, a Washington policeman, Carl M. Shoffler, again described how he and two colleagues captured McCord in the Watergate early on the morning of June 17.

McCord was called—he had been sitting behind Mr. Shoffler with one of his attorneys, Bernard Fensterwald Jr. of Washington—by Samuel Dash, the committee counsel, at 10:23 A.M.

Senator Howard H. Baker Jr., Republican of Tennessee, broke into McCord's testimony on statements about high-level involvement in the bugging to ask that hearsay testimony be identified as such.

Mr. Ervin said—he repeated it a number of times—that "at the present stage of this hearing" the testimony would not show involvement by Messrs. Mitchell, Dean and Magruder.

McCord said:

"... I am not a lawyer, I am a layman. I will try to give the information of my knowledge, whether it is first-hand or second-hand, for the benefit of this committee, and you can stop me at what point you may feel it is proper to do so."

There were reports of the Caulfield-McCord meetings—the most recent was published by The Los Angeles Times on Monday—at the time McCord was on trial in the United States District Court here.

That paper said that Mr. Caulfield had informed Government prosecutors that he had offered clemency to McCord on the instructions of Mr. Dean. The newspaper said that one source had also implicated John D. Ehrlichman, the resigned White House domestic adviser.

But there had been no hint by McCord of any statements by Mr. Caulfield to him that had involved the President. The witness said that he had delayed so as to be "as accurate as I could" about it.

McCord said that the pressure to keep silent and plead guilty began in late September or early October and continued through "the night before my conviction" on Jan. 29. In addition to Mr. Caulfield, he said, it came from:

¶E. Howard Hunt Jr., one of McCord's fellow conspirators who pleaded guilty as the January trial began, and Hunt's wife, Dorothy, who was killed in a plane crash in December.

¶Gerald Alch, a Boston lawyer in the law firm of F. Lee aBiley, who served as McCord's counsel during the trial.

¶William O. Bittman, a member of the Washington firm of Hogan & Hartson, who represents Hunt.

Mr. Alch refused to comment on the charge, when it was reported in the past, on the ground that to do so would violate the lawyer-client privilege. Mr. Bittman has denied any improper activity.

McCord testified today that after his arrest on June 17 he received \$46,000 in cash from Mrs. Hunt, \$25,000 of which was used for legal fees. McCord said that he thought the funds had come from the Nixon campaign committee.