

Adhesive Tape Was 1st Clue

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A simple strip on a door tape, discovered on a door lock by an alert security guard in the Watergate office complex more than 20 months ago, triggered the thundering events leading to yesterday's indictment of seven former high ranking Nixon administration officials.

Shortly before 2 a.m., on June 17, 1972, Frank Wills, the then 24-year-old private security guard, noticed a basement door had been taped so that it would not lock.

He removed the tape. Ten minutes later when he returned on his regular rounds, he discovered another piece of tape had been placed on the door. He called police.

Three plainclothes officers led by Sgt. Paul Leper came to the plush office building at 2600 Virginia Ave. NW and began a systematic floor-by-floor search.

On the sixth floor, occupied by the Democratic National Committee, the officers surprised five men wearing surgical rubber gloves and carrying an assortment of electronic bugging equipment.

Flushed out at gunpoint, the five men turned out to be a professional burglary squad headed by James W. McCord, security chief for President Nixon's re-election committee.

From then on, revelations of ever higher GOP involvement in espionage, sabotage plans, money manipulations and other intrigues began exploding across the nation, culminating for the moment in yesterday's criminal indictments of seven former administration officials.

When police arrested the five, they found them equipped with two sophisticated eavesdropping devices, lock picks, door jimmies, a short wave receiver for monitoring police calls, a walkie talkie, 40 rolls of unexposed film, two 35-millimeter cameras, three pen-sized tear gas guns and almost \$2,300 in cash, most of it in \$100 bills with sequential serial numbers.

In addition to McCord, 55, a one-time Central Intelligence Agency operative, were four men associated with the anti-Castro Cuban activist community in Miami: Frank Sturgis, 49, alias Frank Fiorini; Eugenio R. Martinez, a real estate dealer; Virgilio R. Gonzales, a locksmith, and Bernard L. Barker, 57, a real estate dealer.

They were initially charged with felonious burglary and possession of implements of crime and locked up on bail ranging from \$30,000 to \$50,000.

A later search of a hotel room rented by the men under false names netted police another \$4,200 in sequentially numbered \$100 bills, plus more burglary tools and electronic bugging gear stashed in six suitcases.

The money was traced to Nixon campaign funds and the men identified as hired hands of the President's re-election apparatus.

All the men except McCord ultimately pleaded guilty to conspiracy, burglary, illegal wiretapping and eavesdropping. McCord was convicted of similar charges in a trial. The five spent varying amounts of time in prison and are now free on appeal or parole.