

McCord Tells How Break-in Was Foiled

By Robert L. Jackson

© 1974, Los Angeles Times

An all-too-terse message from E. Howard Hunt Jr., whispered over a walkie-talkie, led to the arrests of the five Watergate raiders in June 1972, James W. McCord Jr. says in a new book on the case.

McCord, the squad leader of the Watergate break-in who later helped expose the coverup, says Hunt inadvertently failed to relay the exact warning he had received from Alfred C. Baldwin III, a lookout stationed across the street from the Watergate office building.

Hunt, who monitored the break-in from the safety of a nearby hotel room, may not have realized he was the sole link between Baldwin and the raiders, and therefore failed to pass along Baldwin's specific warning that "four men were searching the building with drawn guns," McCord wrote.

A walkie-talkie carried by Bernard L. Barker, another of the raiders, had been switched off temporarily to reduce noise. Thus Baldwin's alert, picked up by Hunt, was not heard by McCord and Barker.

A month later, Hunt "apologized to me for this mistake," McCord said.

"I passed off his apology. It was too late by then," he wrote.

McCord's 100,000-word account of the raid and its aftermath is to be published later this month under the title, "A Piece of Tape." It will be brought out by Washington Media Services Ltd. of Rockville, Md., a family-owned firm which McCord formed last summer.



JAMES McCORD
... "A Piece of Tape"

McCord, who once taught a junior college course on security and detection devices, said the 3.95 dollars paperback book will be aimed at college students, among others. Aside from his first-person story, the book includes a detailed chronology of the Watergate coverup as drawn from the testimony of witnesses before the Senate Watergate Committee.

During the past 13 months, since he helped expose the Watergate scandal by writing a letter to U.S. Dist. Judge John J. Sirica and testifying before the Senate Watergate Committee, McCord has worked steadily on the book, he said.

He said he has also attempted to answer 400 to 500 letters—"all but a half dozen have been supportive"—which have been delivered to his suburban Maryland home.

He continues to maintain his security consulting firm, called Security International Inc., and has helped his wife Ruth put out a monthly newsletter that

mainly deals with Watergate-related developments.

In the book, an advance copy of which was made available to the Los Angeles Times, McCord says the Watergate raiders held a post-midnight meeting to discuss whether to scrub the planned break-in after finding that the locks they taped on stairwell doors had been untaped, perhaps by a guard.

But Hunt, then a White House consultant, and G. Gordon Liddy, then financial counsel of President Nixon's re-election committee, decided that the operation should go forward, he said.

Describing the troubles encountered by Barker and his locksmith, Virgilio Gonzalez, in opening the rear door to Democratic National Committee offices, McCord wrote:

"The lock on it was rusty and the door did not fit properly, jamming the lock so that it was almost impossible to be opened. For 30 to 45 minutes they worked on the door. They worked steadily and the concrete stairwell echoed like a cave with each noise."

He continued:

"We heard noises of the elevator going up and down which was disturbing, and a static last come on Barker's radio, the only radio we had. Reception was difficult within the building and Barker turned off the radio to keep from attracting attention from the radio's static. Sweat was running down the backs of the men from the tenseness of the situation, and from the labor involved in trying to get the door open."

McCord said he then heard "muffled shouting as though someone were in a restroom, searching," and suggested the group should flee. But the door was forced open at that moment.

"With a sigh of relief to be out of the stairwell,

Barker turned on the walkie-talkie and reported that we were inside DNC," McCord said. "Hunt came back with a message that was to be fatal. The message: 'be advised that the guard is making his two o'clock rounds on the eighth floor (two floors above).'

"We were not told what Baldwin could see and what he had a few minutes before warned Hunt and Liddy about—that four men, three of them in civilian clothing, were searching the building with drawn guns, turning on the lights as they went. Baldwin had seen the men pull up and go into the building from an unmarked car and had warned Liddy and Hunt by walkie-talkie — these were in one of the messages we did not receive.

"The message that 'the guard was making his two o'clock rounds' as it came from Hunt was basically innocuous. We had known from the previous operation in May, 1972) that he patrolled outside . . . and up to the various floors. Had we been warned of what Baldwin actually had seen and had reported to Liddy and Hunt, we could have immediately exited."

Elsewhere in the book, McCord says he purchased some wiretaps and equipment to be used in the Watergate from a dealer in Chicago, and had to talk his way out of being searched when he boarded a plane to return to Washington. He was the Nixon campaign's security director at the time.

He said he also believed, while doing personal security work for former Attorney General John H. Mitchell in the spring of 1972, that Mitchell "was referring the entire matter of campaign espionage) for decision to the President, whom I knew he either saw or talked with daily by telephone from his residence."

"Both Martha Mitchell and her maid had told me at the Mitchell apartment that John Mitchell talked nightly on the White House telephone one of two special lines) with the President," McCord said.

The tape of a conversation between Mr. Nixon and Mitchell on June 20, 1971—three days after the Watergate breakin—was subpoenaed by federal prosecutors. But the White House said such a tape does not exist because the president had spoken on a phone not connected to his taping system.

McCord related that John J. Caulfield, a friend and former White House aide who later offered him executive clemency, had told him in 1971 about Campaign espionage allegedly performed by John D. Ehrlichman, Mr. Nixon's former domestic affairs adviser.

"Jack Caulfield) said that at the August, 1968, Miami Republican convention, Ehrlichman, who had prior experience with the Rockefeller campaign, walked into Rockefeller's headquarters at Miami and 'lifted' from one of the secretary's desks 'the entire plan and strategy document for the forthcoming presidential effort' by Rockefeller," McCord wrote.

"Jack said Ehrlichman took it straight to Nixon who 'was beside himself in elation' over the theft. Jack added that, as a result of having the plans, Nixon was able to anticipate and counter Rockefeller's moves in 1968, neutralizing and negating his campaign strategy at the convention."

Caulfield, reached for comment, denied he had told McCord any such story, calling it "absolutely wrong and false." He said a rumor was prevalent that the Nixon campaign had received information on Rockefeller's organization in 1968, "But who, what, when or where I never knew."

Hugh Morrow, a top aide in Rockefeller's 1968 organization, said he knew nothing about any strategy documents having been taken by anyone.