Eyewitness Bares Watergate Details

Phone Monitored for 3 Weeks

The following account of the June 17 Watergate raid is by a key government witness before the grand jury that indicted seven men in the break-in-and-bugging case. He spoke out for the first time in a five-hour interview with the Los Angeles Times.

By Alfred C. Baldwin III
As told to Jo Eber Nelson
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NEW HAVEN, Conn. — Across the street in the Democratic national offices I could see men with guns and flashlights ooking behind desks and out on the balcony.

It was a weird scene at Washington's Watergate complex. men were looking for several persons, including my x—James W. McCord Jr., who was security director for the President Nixon's re-election committee and the Re

iculous National Committee.

A short while later, McCord and four other men, all in cuffs, would be led by police to patrol cars and taken to the hotel room across the street from the Democratic offices. I could see men with guns and flashlights ooking behind desks and out on the balcony.

He felt that because of my age, background and marital status—I am 36 and single—I was best suited for the

He said they (the committee) needed someone immediately so I took a plane to Washington that night and registered at the Roger Smith Hotel where we met the next morning. He emphasized that although the job was temporary, it could be a stepping-stone to a permanent position after President Nixon's re-election.

We walked a block down the street to the re-election committee headquarters at 1701 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W., a block from the White House, and McCord took me on a tour of committee offices on several floors. As different persons passed, McCord would say things like, "That's so and so, he's from the White House" or "There's another one who's on loan from the White House.

We went to the office of Fred La Rue to get approval for my employment and McCord said, "Mr. La Rue is over from the White House. He's John Mitchell's right-hand man." La Rue was friendly enough, but like myself, McCord is an ex-FBI agent. But he also served 20 years in the Central Intelligence Agency and he is one of those ex-CIA men who do more listening than talking. When he wants you to do something else, he just tells you to build or anything.

When McCord was ready to switch me from protecting John Mitchell's wife to other security work, he simply told me that the President's re-election committee had other work for me. Contrary to some press reports, I got along fine with Mrs. Mitchell during the days I protected her. She is a viva-cious person and I found working with her fascinating.

But I never questioned McCord's orders.

I felt he was acting under orders and with full authority. After all, his boss was John Mitchell, the committee director and former Attorney General of the United States.

If that was not enough to impress me with McCord's authority and official standing, we were surrounded by former White House aides McCord said were "loan" to the committee.

My involvement with the committee began May 1 when McCord telephoned my office in Hamden, Conn. He had secured a resume I had filled with the society of ex-FBI agents in New York and had reviewed it and several other resumes on file with this society. He felt that because of my age, background and marital status—I am 36 and single—I was best suited for the

He said he had other security work for me and he advanced me another $500—five brand new $100 bills—and said it was for food, drinks and inc

From Michigan we went to New York City. One of the FBI's bullet-proof limousines used by the late J. Edgar Hoover met us at Grand Central Station and took us to a suburban off where we stayed for two days. When we left, the same limousine picked us up and carried us back to Grand Central Station. I was impressed.

After the election in November, I was called up to the Mitchell apartment in the Watergate where Mitchell thanked me for the job I had done.

McCord said there was a feeling among Mrs. Mitchell and former Attorney General and the Democratic Party Chairman, Lawrence O'Brien, and anything having to do with political strategy.

I had expected to leave town the next day, but McCord said he was not feeling well and the situation was so "dilicate" that Fred La Rue was accompanying her.

I had heard about the FBI's bullet-proof limousines and I was impressed.

As told to Jo Eber Nelson
array of electronic equipment, including walkietalkies and the debugging case that had been in his office at the re-election committee.

A sophisticated receiving set, which McCord later said was worth approximately $15,000, was in a large blue Samsonite suitcase. There was a portable radio with shortwave band and an array of tape recorders and other pieces of equipment.

"You'll Be Doing Some Monitoring" McCord said, "I want to show you some of this equipment and how we're going to use it." Just like that, no preliminaries and no explanations of why we would use it.

"You'll be doing some monitoring on telephones," he said. "I don't need to show you how to do it; I need to show you how to operate the monitoring unit.

Then he took the room telephone apart and inserted a tap in it. To test the device, he dialed a local number for a recorded announcement. The tap picked up the message.

McCord pointed across the street to the Watergate complex. Subsequently he appeared at a window of the Democratic offices and I could see at least one other person and perhaps two with him.

McCord later returned to the motel room and said, "We've got the units over there." He then began adjusting the monitoring unit.

We were not sure whose telephones had been tapped. They had tapped one telephone, he believed, that belonged to Lawrence O'Brien and had tapped another one they hoped belonged to a man named Spencer Oliver, who happened to be coordinator of the State Democratic Party chairmen.

A number of persons besides Oliver used his phone too. Over the next two months I monitored conversations I thought were especially important.

"We can talk," a secretary would say, "I'm on Spencer Oliver's phone." McCord explained the monitoring development to some of his other electronic equipment to Liddy and Hunt. They stayed a short while, then left.

On May 26 McCord told me, "We're going into another area tonight.

"About midnight McCord and I left in his car and headed toward the Capitol. He was driving and holding a walkie-talkie, which he hooked on and held up to the window. He finally contacted another unit as we neared the Capitol and said we were approaching the area.

He told me to keep an eye open for a Volkswagen, there was someone in it who would be working with us. On a street near the Capitol we passed a small building bearing a McGovern Headquarters sign and McCord pointed and said, "That's what we're interested in right there.

Not until then did I realize the target was McGovern Headquarters. An upstairs light was on and a drunk was standing in front of the building.

McCord pointed to a row of buildings across the street from McGovern Headquarters and said, "We're trying to rent a place over there where you'll be doing the same thing you're doing in the other place.

A man parked a car about a block from McGovern Headquarters, a voice came in over McCord's walkie-talkie. "You just went by, did you see us?"

McCord replied that he had and pulled the car in the parking lot outside the McGovern headquarters building.

"You'll Be Doing Some Monitoring" McCord explained the monitoring development to some of his other electronic equipment to Liddy and Hunt. They stayed a short while, then left.

On May 26 McCord told me, "We're going into another area tonight.

"McCord finally picked up a conversation on one phone on the monitoring unit. At first we thought the phone was used by a man named Spencer Oliver, then we decided it was used by a man named Lawrence O'Brien and had tapped another one they hoped belonged to a staff official close to O'Brien.

McCord pointed to a row of buildings across the street from McGovern Headquarters and said, "We're trying to rent a place over there where you'll be doing the same thing you're doing in the other place.

I, however, became concerned about a spotlight that illuminated the back of the building and asked, "Do you think we ought to call out McCord?" McCord said he thought it would not be a problem.

McCord and Liddy seemed to be nervous because the Volkswagen had failed to show up and because the drunk was still in front of the building. McCord pointed to another unit and said, "We can't do it tonight; we'll have to do it another night.

We left Liddy out of his car and McCord drove me back to the motel where I would resume my monitoring activities. There was no set time for the monitoring. The Democrats worked with the police on Sundays and some days until 3 or 4 in the morning. And when I was in the room, I was monitoring the time I got up until I went to bed.

"How was the monitoring worked? I would keep an eye on the little TV-type screen on the monitoring unit. A constant line ran across the screen when the tapped line was not active. When someone started using the phone, the line would scatter and I would quickly jot down the number.

The first couple of days I monitored it, I wrote a log of the calls in longhand. But after the McGoverns brought a typewriter and I typed the logs from my notes, I kept them in duplicate and gave both copies to McCord.

Initially, I would write "Unit 118" in the upper right hand corner of the log. But McCord, realizing that this was the actual frequency monitored, told me to use a code number and I started using the number 418.

I would also write the date and page number in the upper right hand corner. In the body of the log on the left side I would designate the time and write "unit on." Then I would drop down a line and mark the time of the first recorded conversation and specify "call in" or "callout." I would then write the contents of the conversation.

McCord would come by once or twice a day to pick up the logs. Sometimes the logs would be only a page or two long, but on a busy day they might run to six pages.

When something important in the logs would quickly catch my eye, I would quickly sit down and type up a memo from information in the logs. I would then show it to McCord with "A confidential source reports.

Sometimes when I monitored conversations I thought we were especially important I telephoned him at the re-election committee and told him there was something of interest to him. The first couple of times I called I started to tell him about the conversation, but he said, "Don't call me up, it will give away the game." I told him this and he said, "All right then, I'll call you."

I checked us into Room 723 with a view directly across from the Democratic offices. About June 6, McCord left for Miami, advising that the would be gone only a day. The next day he telephoned, however, and we had been delayed. I replied that I had recorded some important conversations. He did not want to discuss them on the telephone but instructed me to deliver my original logs to an official at the President's re-election committee.

He said to put the logs in an envelope and to staple and tape the envelope. He gave me the name of an official and I wrote it on an envelope. It was someone I believed was superior to McCord, although I had not been introduced to him before. I kept the name, but it was not Liddy or Hunt.

That evening I carried the envelope to the headquarters. An elderly guard was on duty in the lobby of the building and he took the envelope, recognized the name on it and said he
would see to it that the official received it.

McCord's Mission in Miami

McCord told me that he was in Miami checking on security arrangements being made for the Democratic and Republican conventions. He said that during the Democratic convention he'd been in Miami for monitoring and other security work and that the State Department had already opened a suite of hotel rooms down there. FOR ABOUT TWO WEEKS WE HAD BEEN TRYING WITHOUT SUCCESS TO REVISE MINE O'Brien whereabouts. Also McCord had been in an office location of O'Brien's office since he was certain that the tap he had been unable to monitor was actually on O'Brien's phone.

On June 12 McCord told me to visit the Democratic Committee offices under my name and ask if anyone could about O'Brien's whereabouts. I went to the offices of my state chairman, John Bailey. "This is Bill Johnson of Connecticut, a nephew of John Bailey," said a secretary who introduced me around. O'Brien's secretary said, "Oh, yes, would you like to see Mr. O'Brien's office? This must be your uncle's office."

It was the first time I knew that Bailey was the national chairman of the Democratic Party. I made a mental note of the offices location overlooking the Connecticut River, and I asked if anyone knew O'Brien's whereabouts. His secretary said yes, where he was in Miami and subsequently I was furnished O'Brien's telephone number in Miami.

I returned to the motel room and gave McCord the number and we went over a sketch of O'Brien's office. He seemed extremely pleased.

There were also plans to return to McGovern's headquarters on the weekend. From McCord said, "You'll be familiar with the place we were at the other night? We've got to go back there!"

Later, Liddy and Hunt came into the motel room. With McCord they walked out on the balcony and looked over toward the Democratic offices.

Before Liddy left, he reached into his inside coat pocket and withdrew an envelope containing a thick stack of bills, $100 bills. He counted out about 15 or 18 bills and handed them to McCord. McCord put them in his wallet.

On Friday evening, June 16, McCord displayed a unit that I thought looked like door chimes. He removed the unit's cover, exposing a sophisticated envelope containing a thick stack of documents.

Moments later I was contacted on the walkie-talkie again and told: "We're on the way up. Be there in a minute." I said, "You'd better not park near this building, police are all over the place."

He said, "Okay."

Then I heard a voice from another unit whisper. "They've got us."

McCord's voice came through: "What are you people? Are you metropolitan police or what?"

Another voice demanded: "What's that?" Then the unit went silent. I tried to renew the contact, but to no avail.

A few minutes later Hunt, wearing a windbreaker, rushed into the room. He was extremely nervous.

"What do you see?" he asked.

I told him I saw McCord and some other men being led away from the Watergate in handcuffs. He walked over, looked down at the scene and then said: "I am the guard chief. Call the local number. "They've got it," he told the party on the other end, adding: "We've got $50,000 in cash with us. We can use for bond money."

Hunt, hanging up the phone, turned and asked if I knew where McCord lived. I said yes, I had been to his house in Rockville. He instructed me to pack all the equipment and take it to McCord's house and asked if I had a place to go.

I said I could go to my home in Connecticut and he said, "Well, get all this stuff out of here and you're out of here. Somebody will be in touch with you."

With that, he threw his walkie-talkie on the bed and rushed from the room. "Does that mean I'm out of a job?" he shouted after him. But he disappeared down the hallway without answering.