

Wiretapper Says He Thought It Was Legal

Washington

A former FBI agent, the star prosecution witness in the trial of two men accused of bugging the Democratic party's headquarters, said yesterday he thought his eavesdropping actions were legal.

Baldwin, who has been granted immunity from prosecution, had testified earlier that he listened to bugged conversations at the Democratic party headquarters at the Watergate Hotel complex from a hotel room across the street.

NAMES

Asked why, the witness, Alfred C. Baldwin III, said it was because of a letter he saw from the Federal Communications Commission giving James McCord, one of the accused, authority for a broadcast license and because McCord was then security chief of President Nixon's re-election committee.

Baldwin said again yesterday that he could not recall the names of re-election officials who were receiving logs of the conversations, except for McCord, who, with Gordon Liddy, another former re-election committee official, is on trial on charges of wiretapping the Democratic headquarters last June.

The trial yesterday went into its third week before U.S. District Judge John Sirica and a jury of eight women and four men.

Five other men similarly charged have already pleaded guilty and are awaiting sentencing.

QUESTIONS

Judge Sirica dismissed the jury yesterday while he questioned Baldwin personally, asking again if he thought his actions were legal, especially since he had used an assumed name for his eavesdropping work.

The judge also pushed Baldwin further to recall a person to whom he said he

turned over some special data. But the witness said he could not identify the man.

Last week, Baldwin said that McCord, for whom he was working, telephoned him from Miami one day and told him to deliver two days of telephone logs to a person at the re-election committee.

LETTERS

He said he wrote the person's name on a manila envelope which contained the logs, and turned it over to a guard at committee headquarters. But he was unable to recall the identity of the person in question.

Baldwin told the court yesterday he saw letters between McCord and the Federal Communications Commission in which the FCC granted permission to McCord to operate television equipment, presumably to monitor entrances at the Watergate, although this was not spelled out.

McCord has also asked the FCC for a broadcast band to operate walkie-talkies in the Watergate vicinity, Baldwin testified.

Last week, Baldwin told the jury that he monitored 300 telephone conversations made by Democratic party officials inside their Watergate headquarters.

Reuters