

McCord Gets Immunity, Is Talking

By Carl Bernstein
and Bob Woodward
Washington Post Staff Writers

Convicted Watergate conspirator James W. McCord Jr. was granted immunity yesterday from further prosecution, clearing the way for him to disclose whatever knowledge he has of illegal political espionage activities to a federal grand jury, a Senate investigating committee and the press.

Shortly after the immunity had been conferred by Chief Judge John J. Sirica of U.S. District Court, McCord began answering questions before the same grand jury that indicted him in the Watergate conspiracy last Sept. 15.

Saying that "the story should be told" publicly about the Watergate bugging and perhaps other illegal activities, McCord told reporters he would meet with them some time next week in an on-the-record press conference.

McCord is also expected to be an early witness in public hearings held by the Senate's select committee investigating the Watergate bugging and other political espionage and sabotage activities.

In a closed-door hearing before the committee last week, McCord said his superiors in the conspiracy told him that high presidential aides had advance knowledge of the burglary. However, he invoked his Fifth Amendment right not to answer the senators' questions about additional illegal activities he may know about.

Yesterday morning, McCord

appeared before the Watergate grand jury and again invoked the Fifth Amendment this time in response to such questions as whether he had attempted to plant electronic bugs in Sen. George McGovern's campaign headquarters.

At the request of the prosecutors in the Watergate case, he was taken before Judge Sirica for a brief hearing in which he was granted immunity from further prosecution and ordered by the judge to answer the grand jury's questions. McCord was still before the grand jury early last night and is expected to be recalled today.

During the immunity hearing, Assistant U.S. Attorney Seymour Glanzer read to Judge Sirica a list of nine questions McCord had refused to answer, most of them relating to attempts to bug McGovern's offices.

Sirica, who was openly critical of the prosecution's presentation during the Watergate trial, asked: "Are those all the questions you're going to ask him?"

"Oh no, Your Honor," replied Glanzer.

Following the hearing, McCord said he felt "relieved" at the grant of immunity and—in answer to a question—said he obviously hoped his cooperation with investigators would bring him a lighter sentence for his role in the Watergate conspiracy.

Judge Sirica has postponed sentencing McCord until June 15, after receiving a letter in

which McCord told the judge that he knew of "perjury" at the Watergate trial, "political pressure" on the defendants to plead guilty and remain silent and the involvement of others in the Watergate operation.

Three of McCord's co-conspirators—former White House consultant E. Howard Hunt Jr., Virgilio R. Gonzales and Frank Sturgis—also appeared yesterday before the grand jury, which reopened its inquiry last week.

McCord's principal superior in the conspiracy, former

White House aide G. Gordon Liddy, refused to answer questions before the panel—even after being granted immunity—and was sentenced last week to an additional incarceration by Judge Sirica.

Liddy, described by the Watergate prosecution as the "boss" of the conspiracy, appears to have been the principal source of McCord's assertion to Judge Sirica that "perjury" occurred at the trial and that persons not indicted in the case had prior knowledge of the bugging of Democratic headquarters.

In his testimony to the Senate's investigating committee, McCord said he had been told by Liddy that the plans and budget for the Watergate operation were approved in February, 1972, during a meeting in the office of then-Attorney General John N. Mitchell that was also attended by presidential counsel, John W. Dean III

and former presidential assistant Jeb Stuart Magruder.

According to reliable sources, Magruder testified before the grand jury last year that he attended a February meeting in Mitchell's office at which Liddy, Dean and Mitchell were also present, but denied that the bugging was discussed.

McCord, in his testimony before the Senate committee, offered only hearsay evidence—statements purportedly made by Hunt, Liddy and others—to support his assertions that the presidential aides had advance knowledge of the bugging.

According to Senate sources, he has no documentary evidence to support his testimony.

However, the same sources said McCord provided the committee with several important leads that, if accurate, could corroborate his hearsay knowledge.