

McCord - Soft-Spoken and Meticulous

Washington

His voice seemed too small and grainy to have any resounding impact and his bearing was reminiscent of an accountant reciting from a balance sheet.

But James W. McCord Jr. electrified the second day of hearings of the Senate Watergate investigating committee as he read with meticulous — almost monotonous — care his charge that he had been offered clemency from the White House if he would remain silent about the scope of the 1972 presidential campaign conspiracy.

“Could you raise your voice a little, if you can?” urged Samuel Dash, the committee’s chief counsel.

McCord, 49, a former agent of the FBI and a 19-year veteran of the Central Intelligence Agency and an expert on electronic sur-

villance, apologized for being hoarse and suggested that the volume be turned up on the public address system in the Senate caucus room.

ALLEGATIONS

With his voice amplified, he outlined in a ten-page prepared statement a **and** more than four hours of responses to questions allegations that the White House had been involved in a “game plan” designed to cover up the involvement of officials in the Nixon administration and the Committee for the Re-election of the President.

The charges, by themselves, were heady enough to cause the atmosphere in the high-ceiling caucus room to become one of suspended animation.

But the precision and detachment of McCord as he testified, and the caution of the investigating committee,

appeared to heighten the impact of what McCord was saying.

HEARSAY

The witness and the senators underscored — repeatedly — the fact that much of what McCord was asserting was second-hand information — hearsay — that would not be admissible as evidence in a courtroom.

“I am not trying to exclude it,” Senator Howard H. Baker Jr. (Rep-Tenn.) said more than once of the hearsay accounts. “I wish simply to identify it as we go along.”

McCord labeled what he knew himself and what others had told him. He consulted on occasion with his lawyer, Bernard Fensterwald Jr., before replying to some questions. He looked at notes and memorandums to refresh his memory. He kept the professional agent’s poker face intact when the hear-

ing erupted in cynical laughter at some of what he said he had been told by government officials.

He declined, “respectfully,” to tell Baker in detail what he had done before retiring in 1970 from the CIA, saying that he did not wish to violate the national security act by spilling spy secrets.

CREDIBILITY

McCord’s credibility as a witness was crucial to the charges he made in public for the first time. Some of the committee’s Democratic members appeared eager to reinforce the believability of the convicted conspirator; at least one of the Republicans anxious to discredit it.

Senator Herman E. Talmadge (Dem-Ga.) cautioned McCord at one point in a way that emphasized the allegations.

“You have made serious charges, implicating the

President of the U.S., probably as an accessory after the fact, the former attorney general of the U.S. as probably an accessory before the fact, and perhaps guilty of a conspiracy involving the Watergate bugging.”

By contrast, Senator Edward J. Gurney (Rep-Fla.) in sarcastic tones, voicing incredulity at McCord’s statements that he had joined in the espionage in the belief, at first, that it was legal.

INFERENCES

“You have all kinds of inferences here that are inaccurate and are casting aspersions that are going to damage a large number of people’s reputations,” Gurney said.

All around him spectators were fidgeting and perspiring in the heat of the television floodlights, but McCord sat passively at the center of it all, serious, professional, respectful, and above all precise.

McCord talked of the Watergate burglars as a “team” and their first, successful, clandestine visit to Democratic National Committee offices an “operation.” But coming from him in his flat tones, the jargon of the espionage world had the ring of everyday conversation.

He described, as if it were hardly curious at all, a series of alleged instructions to leave his home in Maryland to discuss the purported offer of executive clemency in a telephone booth “near the Blue Pountain Inn on Route 355.”

He recalled the use of an alias, “Mr. Watson,” in some telephone conversations. He recounted alleged meetings at “the second overlook” — a scenic vantage point overlooking the Potomac river and the Capital on the George Washington Memorial Parkway.

His testimony in the nationally televised proceed-

ings will resume Tuesday. Nothing that he said yesterday, the committee chairman, Senator Sam J. Ervin Jr. (Dem-N.C.) emphasized, would be “relevant to prove any connection within the White House or the President.”

Baker remarked as the hearing concluded yesterday that he had seen many witnesses on many subjects but few who seemed so meticulous as McCord. It concerned him, he said, how much McCord might know that the committee hasn’t even asked about.

“Would it be possible,” Baker asked, “for you and your attorney to return on Tuesday and supply us any of the information you think relevant to the scope of this inquiry, whether we have got enough sense to ask it or not?”

McCord said that he would.

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