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High Drama in Quiet Testimony

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WASHINGTON, May 18—His voice seemed too small and grainy to have any resounding impact. 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's 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, a former agent of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and a 19-year veteran of the Central Intelligence Agency, an expert on electronic surveillance, apologized for being hoarse and suggested that the volume be turned up on the public address system in the Senate Caucus Room.

With his voice amplified, McCord outlined, in a 10-page prepared statement and more than four hours of responses to questions, allegations that the White House had been

involved in a "game plan" selves, heady enough to cause designed to cover up the involvement of officials in the Nixon Administration and the Committee for the Re-election of the President.

The charges were, by themselves, the atmosphere in the high-ceiling Caucus Room to become, for a while, 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 he was saying.

The witness and the Sena-

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Testimony

Blue Fountain 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.

Had he ever been accused, before last summer, of breaking the law?" he was asked.

Straight-faced, he replied: "I have had traffic violations, in the Washington area."

His testimony in the nationally televised proceedings will resume next Tuesday. Nothing that he said today, it was emphasized by the committee chairman, Senator Sam J. Ervin Jr., would be "relevant to prove any connection with the White House or the President."

Whatever its ultimate authenticity, McCord's testimony today produced the drama that had been absent when the Watergate committee began its investigation yesterday.

Senator Baker remarked as the hearing concludes today 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

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tors underscored, over and over, 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., Republican of Tennessee, said more than once of the hearsay accounts. "I wish simply to identify it as we go along."

Credibility Crucial

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 recollection. He kept the professional agent's poker face intact when the hearing erupted in cynical laughter at some of what he said had been told by Government officials.

He declined, "respectfully," to tell Senator Baker in detail what he had done before retiring in 1970 from the C.I.A., saying that he did not wish to violate the National Security Act by spilling spy secrets.

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, Democrat of Georgia, cautioned McCord at one point in a way that emphasized the allegations.

"You have made serious charges," the Senator said, "implicating the President of the United States probably as an accessory after the fact, the former Attorney General of the United States as probably an accessory before the fact and perhaps guilty of a conspiracy involving the Watergate bugging."

By contrast, Senator Edward J. Gurney, Republican of Florida, cross-examined McCord in sarcastic tones, voicing incredulity at McCord's statement that he had joined in the espionage in the belief, at first, that it was legal.

"You have all kinds of inferences here that are inaccurate and are casting aspersions that are going to damage people's reputations," Mr. Gurney said.

But the acceptability of McCord's statement appeared to bear as much on his manner. All around him, spectators were fidgeting and perspiring in the heat of the television floodlights.

McCord sat passively at the center of it all, serious, professional, respectful, above all precise.

Exploring McCord's relationship with former Attorney General John N. Mitchell, Senator Talmadge asked, "You called him Mr. Attorney General. I presume?"

"Yes, sir," replied the witness in conservative blue suit, blue shirt and blue tie.

A Moment of Humor

"What did he call you?" Mr. Talmadge asked.

"Before June 17th?" replied McCord, citing the night of his arrest inside the Watergate.

Laughter welled up from the several hundred spectators. McCord permitted himself a rare public smile.

"I haven't seen him since June 17th," he said of Mr. Mitchell. "He called me 'Jim,' I believe."

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