

McCord's Angry Blast at Nixon

Washington

James W. McCord, a convicted Watergate conspirator, has accused President Nixon of having "fatally infected" McCord's trial proceedings early last year by criminally suppressing and concealing evidence of the Watergate coverup.

In a three-page letter written Thursday and mailed to the New York Times and other news organizations, McCord based his complaint on what he termed Mr. Nixon's "fantastic admission" during his news conference Wednesday night that John W. Dean III told him on March 21, 1973, that "hush money" payments had been made to the original Watergate defendants.

McCord alleged that President Nixon had "deliberately concealed and suppressed for one year from me and the courts the facts made known last (Wednesday) night."

That act, McCord said, was in violation of federal laws requiring knowledge of the commission of a felony to be reported to the appropriate authorities.

In his letter, McCord noted that a criminal case against Daniel Ellsberg had been dismissed last May in Los Angeles after government wrongdoing and added that if the President had told the district court of the "hush" payments, the original Watergate convictions "would have had to be thrown out on the same grounds as in the Ellsberg case."

His letter added:

"President Nixon neither immediately made known to Judge Sirica (Chief Judge John J. Sirica of the U.S. district Court), nor to his attorney general, nor to the director of the FBI, nor to the (Watergate) prosecu-

tors, the obstruction of justice information given him by Dean on March 21."

In a subsequent telephone interview, McCord angrily declared that "if the justice system was working the way it should, Mr. Nixon and Dean should have walked over to Judge Sirica's office and told him there had been obstruction of justice because there had been money payments to keep the defendants quiet."

McCord, who has appealed his conviction, claimed that the President's alleged failure to report the payments was relevant to his case because of his controversial letter — which told for the first time of the broad scope of the coverup and which was opened and read by Sirica on March 20, the day before the Nixon - Dean meeting and three days before McCord was to be sentenced.

Sirica made the McCord letter public on March 23, a development that stunned the White House and, as subsequent Senate Watergate committee testimony revealed, served as a catalyst in revealing much of the coverup attempt. As a result of the letter, Sirica delayed sentencing McCord and ordered him to begin testifying before the Watergate grand jury.

At his news conference Wednesday, Mr. Nixon recalled the Dean meeting on March 21 and said that "for the first time . . . he told me that payments had been made to defendants for the purpose of keeping them quiet, not simply for their defense."

That characterization of the session sharply contrasted with what Mr. Nixon had previously said about the Dean meeting, during a news conference last August 15:

"I was told then that funds had been raised for pay-

ments to the defendants with the knowledge and approval of persons both on the White House staff and at the reelection committee. But I was only told that the money had been used for attorneys' fees and family support, not that it had been paid to procure silence from the recipients."

The discrepancy was brought to the attention of the White House Thursday during the routine morning news briefing, but officials there refused to comment.

New York Times