

The 'Why' of Watergate Explored

By Jack Anderson

Senate investigators have come up with a theory that may explain the greatest Watergate mystery of them all.

What did the White House burglars hope to find that would justify breaking into the Watergate? Why would they take such foolish risks to burglarize and bug the offices of a Democratic Party factotum like Larry O'Brien?

The investigators, who have been piecing together the Watergate puzzle, think they know the answers. The key to the puzzle, they now feel sure, was the celebrated \$205,000 that billionaire industrialist Howard Hughes loaned to President Nixon's brother, Don, on Dec. 10, 1956. The loan secured by a \$13,000 family lot that no bank would have accepted as security for a loan of that size, was never repaid.

We learned about his curious transaction in 1960. Our disclosure coincided with Richard Nixon's first campaign for the presidency. He complained afterward that the loan story had helped to defeat him. Two years later, the \$205,000 loan became the biggest issue in his inglorious defeat for governor of California.

After his political comeback and triumphant takeover of the White House, Mr. Nixon re-

mained so sensitive about Howard Hughes that he had his own brother bugged and followed in 1969. Don Nixon, an amiable but bumbling wheeler-dealer, was consorting too openly with Hughes aides John Meier and Tony Hatisis.

Yet at the same time, in the deepest secrecy, the President's bosom friend, Bebe Rebozo, was arranging to receive a \$100,000 cash contribution from Hughes. Subsequently, two \$50,000 consignments for President Nixon were delivered at San Clemente and Key Biscayne by Hughes emissary Richard Danner.

We dug out and published the story of the secret \$100,000 gift on Aug. 6, 1971. Our story, according to Senate investigators, caused panic inside the White House.

We were marked for investigation by undercovermen G. Gordon Liddy and E. Howard Hunt, who had started operating a month earlier out of a command post in Room 16 of the basement of a White House annex known as the Executive Office Building.

Their mission was to plug up news leaks, an assignment that earned them the nickname "the plumbers." My name was posted prominently on a wallboard in their basement sanctum, as a voodoo meant to inspire the occupants on against the foe.

Meanwhile, Las Vegas publisher Hank Greenspun in Sep-

tember, 1971, mentioned to White House aide Herb Klein that the \$100,000 Hughes gift "may have later been used in the purchase of San Clemente."

The memo notes, significantly, that the White House first learned of Don Nixon's new involvement with the Hughes organization "from a sensitive case report" about the tax problems of Johnny Meier and Tony Hatisis. The Internal Revenue Service wanted to interview Donald Nixon about his connection with the Hughes aides.

The same sensitive report also disclosed that a tax audit of Larry O'Brien had uncovered a close relationship with the Hughes organization. "Ehrlichman has admitted discussing these matters with the President," the memo adds tersely.

The Senate investigators now believe the White House was highly alarmed over the possibility that O'Brien, through his relationship with the Hughes crowd, might get for the Democrats confirmation of our story about the delivery of \$100,000 in cash for the President.

It's known that White House staff chief H. R. Haldeman ordered counsel John Dean and security man Jack Caulfield to find out how close O'Brien was to the Hughes organization. About the same time, the plumbers began making plans to break into the Watergate and bug O'Brien's office.

On Feb. 3, 1972, The New York Times reported that Howard Hughes' private memos were stashed in Hank Greenspun's safe in Las Vegas. The following day, chief plumber G. Gordon Liddy presented to his superiors the final plans for breaking into O'Brien's Watergate offices.

According to the sworn testimony, Liddy was also instructed to "review the situation to see if there would be potential . . . for an entry into Mr. Greenspun's office."

Liddy went ahead with plans to break into the Watergate and also to loot Greenspun's safe; thence to make a getaway flight to Mexico in a plane to be provided by Howard Hughes.

In a confidential memo, the Senate investigators report: "In October, 1971, Herb Kalmbach (the President's personal attorney) on instructions of John Ehrlichman, visited Greenspun in Las Vegas and discussed both the \$100,000 contribution and any information that Greenspun may have had on Donald Nixon's relationships to Johnny Meier. Kalmbach denied to Greenspun that any campaign contribution went to San Clemente."

It was to cover up the Hughes-Nixon connection, the investigators strongly believe, that the Watergate crimes were conceived.