

Nixon Not Told About Hush Money

WASHINGTON — According to the edited transcripts made public by the White House this week, President Nixon wasn't told about key hush money conversations that were cited in the Watergate cover-up indictment.

What his aides never seemed to mention directly to the President were a series of events that led to an alleged payment on March 21, 1973, of \$75,000 to Watergate conspirator E. Howard Hunt Jr.

One of the conversations cited in the indictment was a telephone call between H. R. Haldeman and former Atty. Gen. John N. Mitchell on March 21. It took place 35 minutes after Haldeman had discussed Hunt's demand for money with the President and John W. Dean III.

According to the indictment, within hours of the call from Haldeman, Mitchell authorized the \$75,000 payment for Hunt.

But during a second meeting on March 21, with the President, Haldeman never mentioned his conversation with Mitchell when the discussion turned to Hunt's demand.

Other participants in that second March 21 meeting were Dean and John D. Ehrlichman.

During the first meeting that day, the transcripts quote Dean as telling Nixon that Hunt was demanding \$120,000 for lawyers' fees and family support. Dean said that if Hunt didn't get the money he was threatening to disclose his activities as a member of the White House plumbers unit, including the Ellsberg break-in.

There was considerable discussion during that first meeting of the hush money demand as well as of the possibility of offering executive clemency to the Watergate defendants.

At times the President seemed to reject any such offers; at other times he seemed ready to meet Hunt's demands.

Near the end of that meeting, which broke up at 11:55 a.m., the President told his aides to get together with Mitchell.

"Actually, I am perfectly willing to meet with the group," Nixon said. "I don't know whether I should."

A moment later, he added, "I think I need to stay away from the Mitchell subject at this point. do you agree?"

According to the indictment, Haldeman talked to Mitchell at 12:30 p.m.

At 5:20 p.m., there was a second meeting in the President's office and the discussion turned to hush money.

Nixon: "And then so the point we have to cross there, that you have to cross, I understand quite soon, is what you do about Hunt and his present finance? What do we do about that?"

Dean: "Well, apparently Mitchell and (Frederick C.) LaRue are now aware of it, so they know how he is feeling."

Nixon: "True. Are they going to do something?"

Dean: "Well, I have not talked to either of them. Their positions are sympathetic."

But, Haldeman, the man who had talked to Mitchell, said nothing.

Of the four men in the room, only the President and Haldeman knew there was a hidden taping system that recorded all presidential conversations.

The indictment, returned by a federal grand jury on March 1, 1974, also alleged that on March 19, 1973, Ehrlichman

had told Dean to inform Mitchell about the Hunt demand.

During the first March 21 meeting, Dean mentioned that he had called Mitchell and had a n inconclusive discussion about raising money. One problem, said Dean, was that Mitchell's wife, Martha, also was on the line.

But it isn't clear from the transcript whether when Dean says "John asked me to call him," he is referring to John Mitchell or John Ehrlichman.

The indictment charged Mitchell, Haldeman and Ehrlichman and four other White House and campaign aides with conspiracy to obstruct justice in connection with the Watergate break-in investigation.

All seven defendants have pleaded innocent. Trial is scheduled for Sept. 9.

Along with the indictment, the grand jury gave U.S. District Court Judge John J. Sirica a secret report and satchel of evidence about President Nixon's Watergate role. At the recommendation of the jury, Sirica gave that material to the House Judiciary Committee for its impeachment inquiry.