

Hush Money Pay to Hunt Detailed

By Jack Anderson

The most serious question raised by the White House transcripts is whether President Nixon authorized a bribe payment to Watergate conspirator E. Howard Hunt.

As the reporter who uncovered the hush-money scandal, I have been questioned about the circumstances by both the Watergate prosecutors and Senate investigators. Here are the sordid details:

Scarcely a month after the Watergate burglars were arrested, Hunt wrote a threatening, three-page letter demanding "to contact someone in the White House."

His attorney, William O. Bittman, read the letter to the Nixon campaign committee's attorney, Kenneth W. Parkinson.

"Give us a week," requested Parkinson.

Hunt told Bittman to reply: "No, you get two days."

"Okay," promised Parkinson. "Something will be worked out in a couple of days."

He spoke to John Mitchell, then the campaign chief, who told White House counsel John Dean about Hunt's demand for money. Dean summoned the President's personal attorney, Herbert Kalmbach, to Washington, held a whispered, sidewalk conference with him in front of the Hay-Adams Hotel and asked him to raise money for the Watergate defendants.

Stressing the necessity for secrecy, Dean suggested the hush money should be channeled through Anthony Ulasevicz, an

ex-New York cop straight out of Damon Runyon.

Kalmbach collected between \$210,000 and \$230,000, which he delivered in secret packets to Ulasevicz. They kept in touch with one another through pay phones, using code names to identify the people involved in the payoff.

Hunt was referred to as "the writer," because of his sideline as a novelist. His wife-Dorothy, using pay phones and answering to the code name "Chris," passed out hush money in sealed envelopes to other Watergate defendants.

As their trial date approached, Mrs. Hunt met on Nov. 30, 1972, with Waterbugger James McCord. She warned that the payments would be cut off "unless you fellows agree to plead guilty . . . and keep your mouths shut."

Four weeks later, we broke the story that the White House wanted the Watergate burglars to enter guilty pleas. "By pleading guilty, the defendants could avoid a public spectacle," we wrote, "and save the White House embarrassment."

But we still couldn't find out who was paying their legal bills. "Who is paying for these high-powered, high-priced attorneys?" we asked in our December 26, 1972, column. By this time, we had succeeded in winning the confidence of some of the Cubans on the Watergate burglary crew. But all they would admit to us was: "We were told when we took the job that we would be taken care of."

They refused, however, to plead guilty. They thought they would get a better break by having their day in court, since they had merely carried out what they had thought to be White House orders.

Suddenly, their hush payments were cut off. We reported on January 11, 1973, that "some of the defendants in the Watergate trial are sending quiet signals to the Nixon administration that they may start talking before they'll go to prison." We mentioned G. Gordon Liddy and E. Howard Hunt.

We learned, meanwhile, that the Cuban defendants planned to meet at the Arlington Towers across the Potomac from the Watergate to decide whether to give into the pressure and plead guilty. I arranged with one of them to slip into a nearby room and give me progress reports on their meeting. He told me they had agreed after a heated discussion to plead guilty.

We were able to report on January 15, 1973, that "Hunt agreed to plead guilty, apparently with a tacit understanding that he wouldn't have to spend too long in jail. He urged the other defendants privately to follow his example."

Then came the clincher. We reported an offer "to make regular payments to the defendants' families. A \$1,000-a-month figure was mentioned. Our sources could not, or would not, identify the men behind the scenes. We can report only that most of the money for the defendants was funneled through Hunt."

President Nixon has claimed he didn't learn about the bribe payments until March 21, 1973. Yet we had reported the story in 50 newspapers more than two months earlier.

The White House transcripts show that John Dean told the President on March 21 that Hunt was demanding an additional \$120,000.

"You have no choice but to come up with the \$120,000 or whatever it is. Right?" asked the President after much discussion.

"That's right," agreed Dean.

"Would you agree that that's the prime thing that you damn well better get that done?" pressed the President.

"Obviously," said Dean, "he (Hunt) ought to be given some signal anyway."

"(Expletive deleted), get it," directed the President.

A discussion followed about who should arrange the money. White House staff chief H. R. Haldeman mentioned John Mitchell's name.

Immediately following the meeting, Haldeman telephoned Mitchell who allegedly asked aide Fred LaRue to deliver \$75,000 in campaign cash to Hunt. The FBI has established that the money was delivered about 10 o'clock that night to Hunt's attorney.

Mitchell reported back to the White House next day that Hunt was no longer a problem.