

Conversation with Howard Hunt, late November,

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From Senate Press Gallery**

H: .. Hi,

C: How we doing?

H: Oh, about as well as could be expected. How are you?

C: Just about the same. Trying to hold the pieces together.

H: Congratulations on your victory.

C: Thank you. I'm sorry that we haven't been celebrating it together with some good champagne and some good Scotch, but...

H: There may yet come a time.

C: There may, I assure you. Before you say anything, let me say a couple things. One, I don't know what is going on here, other than, I am told that everybody is going to come out alright. That's all I know. I've deliberately not asked any specific questions, for this reason. That I have my own ideas about how things will turn out and I'm not worried about them and you shouldn't be, but I've always thought that if it came to an open trial, that I would want to be free to come into it and character and testimony and etc. etc. This way the less details I know of what's going on in some ways the better.

H: I appreciate that.

C: If you follow. So, I have tried to stay out of asking specific questions and it's very hard for me to do that for the reason that you're an old and dear friend and I'm sure you regret the day I ever recommended you to the White House.

H: Not in the least, Chuck, I'm just sorry that it turned out the way it did.

C: Well, I am too, obviously and I hope to hell you had nothing to do with it and I've clung to that belief and have told people that and if you did have anything to do with it, I'm goddamn sure it's because you were doing what you were told to do.

H: That's exactly right...

C: Because you're a loyal soldier obviously and always have been...

H: Would you be willing to receive a memorandum from me?

C: Yea... the only...

H: Because I think it might help you.

C: Except there are things you may not want to tell me.

H: No, there's really nothing I don't want to tell you. I would think that you could receive this memorandum, read it and destroy it.

C: Nope.

H: You couldn't do that?

C: Nope. The reason I can't is the same reason your letter to me, when I got that and then I was asked by Federal authorities, did I had any any communication and I said yea I've received this letter and here it is. I can't. you can't get in the position where you're purguring.

H: No, of course not. And I'm afraid John Mitchell has already done one.

C: The problem is, you see, I don't want to get into the position of knowing something that I don't now know for the reason that I want to be perfectly free to help you and the only way I can help you is to remain as completely unknowing as I am. See, my problem... let me tell you the problem. Is that... I could do you a lot more good by not ... by honestly being able to testify that I don't know, I just don't know the answer and I don't. And right now I don't know anything about the goddamn Watergate. Now, supposing Teddy Kennedy holds his hearings and I get called up there. Well, I can't refuse to answer and I wouldn't. I'd answer I just don't know. I have no idea what happened and I don't.

H: Of course I'm never going to be put on the stand, as it stands now.

C: That's right.

H: And so I won't have the opportunity to say one thing or another.

C: You don't want to.

H: You wouldn't be willing to talk to my attorney? Wouldn't that be a different affair?

C: Uh, I don't know, Howard. I don't know whether it is or it isn't. He would know best.

H: That was a suggestion of his.

C: Well, hell, I'll talk to him. That's not a problem. I'll be glad to talk to him. I'm sure that you're being watched.

H: Oh, I am too.

C: And not by federal authorities. I'm sure the Washington Post is watching you.

H: Oh, yea. Well, the reason I called you was to make... to get back to the beginning here is because of commitments that were made to all of us at the onset, have not been kept, and there's a great deal of unease and concern on the part of 7 defendents and, I'm quite sure, me least of all. But there's a great deal of financial expense that has not been covered and what we've been getting has been coming in very minor gibbs and drabs and Parkison, who's been the go between with my attorney, doesn't seem to be very effective and we're now reaching a point of which....

C: Okay, don't tell me any more. Because I understand and....

H: These people have really got to... this is a long haul thing and the stakes are very very high and I thought that you would want to know that this thing must not break apart for foolish reasons. Oh...  
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C: Oh, no, everybody...

H: While we get third, fourth hand reassurances, still the ready is not available. That's the basic problem.

C: I follow you. Okay, you told me all I need to know and I can... the less I know really of... what happened, the more help I can be to you.

H: Alright, now we've set a deadline now for close of business on the 25th of November for the resolution on the liquidation of everything that's outstanding. And this... they're now talking about promises from July and August. It just has been an apparent unconcern. Of course we can understand some hesitancy prior to the election, but there doesn't seem to be any of that now. Of course we're well aware of the upcoming problems of the Senate and...

C: That's where it gets hairy as hell. See, for your information, Howard, ... of course this thing has hurt us all because everybody... it's just unfortunate as hell, but the Democrats made such an issue out of the whole..

H: Well, on the other hand, it kept them from the real issues.

C: Well, I always thought when I write my memoirs of this campaign, that I'm going to say that the Watergate was brilliantly conceived as an escapade that would divert the Democrats' attention from the real issues and therefore permit us to win a landslide that we probably wouldn't have had otherwise. Seriously....

H: Whether you believed it or not.

C: No, listen, I think there's a good bit of validity to that.

H: I do too.

C: Dumb bastards were on an issue that the public couldn't care less about.

H: See, I haven't known at any time what sort of an input you were getting from Dean and other people about who was responsible.....

C: Minimum..

H: ...about who was responsible for all this..

C: Minimum for very good reasons because if somebody told me, ~~no let me me~~ tell you the position I'm in. Whether I stay in the White House for ~~a while~~ or whether I leave, doesn't matter, I want to be in a position to help you. Okay, that means I have to openly talk to people and no matter who it is, from a character standpoint or anything else, be able to say things about you that I want to say. Now, I can't do that the moment I know something that makes it impossible for me to talk to people and the moment that I know something that makes it impossible for me to talk to people, then I've got to be kept in the background and can't talk and I want to talk, so as long as I can help you and I'm going to see that you don't get a bad break out of this and I'll tell you sometime about that.

who were

H: I would hope that somewhere along the line the people ~~that~~ paralyzed initially by this within the White House could now start to give some creative thinking to the affair and some affirmative action for Christ sake.

C: That's true.

H: I think now is the time for it and we expect it now and we want it and the election is out of the way, the initial terror of the number of people has subsided. Some people have already left the Administration and that's all to the good. So, now it's pared down to the point where a few people ought to really be able to concentrate on this and get the goddamn thing out of the way once and for all because I don't want to ~~worry~~ bore you with what it's been like, but it hasn't been pleasant for any of us.

C: Jesus Christ, I know it. I hope you're doing some writing to keep yourself busy.

H: Oh, I am. I don't know if anything will ever come of it, but it's a good... it keeps my mind from my plight, let's put it that way. So that I was never clear in my own mind, and I'm still not, and... that one of the initial outputs that I had read about was that while this is done by a bunch of wild assed guys and so forth... well, that's fine for we're protecting the guys who are really responsible, but now that that's... and of course that's a continuing requirement, but at the same time, this is a two way street, and as I said before, we think that now is the time when a move should be made and surely the cheapest commodity available is money. These lawyers have not been paid, there are large sums of money outstanding. That's the principal thing. Living allowances which are due again on the 31st of this month, we want that stuff well in hand for some months in advance. I think these are all reasonable requests. They're all promised in advance and reaffirmed from time to time to my attorney and so forth, so in turn I've been giving commitments to the people who look to me and....

C: I'm reading you. You don't need to be more specific.

H: I don't want to belabor it.

C: No, it isn't a question of that, it's just that the less specific, I know, the better off I am... we are, you are.

H: So, Parkison is out of town until next Monday, at which time a memorandum is going to be laid on him and he's going to be made aware...

C: I'll tell you one thing I've said to people, and I just want you to know this because I think it's important. I've told people the truth that I've known you for a long time, that I've considered you a personal friend, you're a person in whom I've had high regard and high confidence, a patriot, real patriot, and that had you ever been the one masterminding this, it never would have fallen apart, that the reason that I am convinced, and I told this to the federal authorities on the grand jury, the reason that I'm convinced that you Howard Hunt never had a goddamn thing to do with this or if you did, it was on the peripheries, is that if you ever did it, you would do it a lot smarter than this and that I've know....

H: Chuck, if I had had my say, it never would have been done at all. Let me put it that way.

C: Say no more.

H: ...the position of another fellow too.

C: Say no more.

H: ...high risk ballgame.

C: Well obviously I never knew about...

H: That's right and I've always maintained to my attorney who of course has my complete confidence in this matter, that you absolutely had nothing to do with it.

C: If I had ever known it was coming I would have said to you as a friend, if some asshole wants to do this, fine, but don't you get involved. I mean, if you and I, if we'd ever had a conversation like that, I would have said, my God, ....but the point I've made is that you're a smart... among many other qualities, you are a brilliant operator and brilliant operators just don't get into this kind of a thing, so I've held and I was asked... and this is why I don't want to know any different, this is why I was asked by the Bureau, well, what about Hunt? And I could honestly say, look, I've known this guy a long time, he's a very smart fellow and I can't for the life of me conceive that he would ever get himself into this kind of situation, so I want to be able to stay in that position. That's why I don't want you to tell me anything beyond that. Give my love to Dorothy, will you?

H: Alright I will.

C: I know it's hard on you and the kids and...

H: It's awful tough. My daughter up at Smith is really getting a rough time.

C: Is she really?

H: Very, very hard time.

C: Well, you know, I'll tell you, I find it's only the rough experiences in life and you've had your share of them, god knows, that really harden you and make something out of you, and you learn by them and become a better man for it and we'll talk about that. You'll come out of this fine, I'm positive of that.

H: Well, I want all of us to come out of it, including you.

C: My position, I suppose has been hurt in one sense, that I've been publicly

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but obviously people around here know I didn't have anything to do with it, but so be it. We'll all come out of it, don't worry about that. That's the last thing to worry about and I understand this message...

H: If you can do anything about it... I would think the sooner they can get moving on it the better. Good to talk to you. I'll discuss with Bittman whether he still feels he needs to talk with you.

C: Alright and as soon as I feel that the situation, the future of the thing is clear enough that you and I can get together, we'll damn well do it, but I don't want to do it pre-maturely because it will limit my ability to help you.

H: Chuck, I understand that completely. That's why I never tried to get in touch with you.

C: I'm in a better position to help you if I can honestly swear under oath, which I can do, because I don't know a goddamn thing about it and I don't. And as long as I'm in that position then I can say what kind of a guy I think Howard Huhnt is and why I think this is a bum wrap.

H: Okay. Is your family alright?

C: Doing fine.

H: Your boy's doing well in school I understand.

C: Doing great and he's at Princeton. He's taking a lot of heat, just like your talking about.

H: Oh, he must have.

C: When...

H: The only counsel I can give my daughter is that people/will do that sort of thing are the kind who would pull the wings off flies and they're not really the sort of people she would really want to have as friends or even associates in any case.

C: I said the same thing to my son, when the indictments were announced, he said everybody at Princeton said, "oh, you're old man beat the wrap".. Isn't that great? Doesn't ~~xx~~ that make you feel wonderful? I said the same thing to him and he's gotten so he doesn't... he figures that the price you pay for serving your country and you take the good with the bad, so if you believe in what you're doing, that has to be the ultimate consolation for all of us.

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H: It does indeed. Are you going to be able to take some time off?

C: God, I hope so, howard. I'm planning to in December some time. If I can possibly get out of here. Well, you take care of yourself and don't let it get you. Don't let it wear down that great spirit and we got the President in for four years and thank God for the country we do.

H: Exactly.

C: You know, when you go to sleep at night, you can put up with a lot of personal grief if you think that ... there are always things bigger than yourself. That's really true. The moment in life when things are not bigger than yourself, then you're all washed up. Even I know that.

H: I know. I spent a lifetime serving my country and in a sense I'm still doing it.

C: Damn right. Alright, pal, we'll be talking to you.

H: Okay.



Conversation with Lucien Conein, July 9, 1971

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H: Hello, there.

C: Hi, who's this?

H: The reason I'm not identifying myself is because although the phone at this end is secure, I don't know about yours. We had a little drinking yesterday.

C: Oh, fine.

H: I hope you got more dinner than I did.

C: Oh, I got a beautiful dinner. Why, didn't you get any?

H: Well, 'no, I got out of here kind of late and by then...

C: Well, you didn't get out any later than 8:30?

H: It was between the cocktail hour and the general evening activities down in Georgetown, and I ended up with a ham sandwich and a scowl from my wife.

C: Oh, and she blamed it all on me, I suppose.

H: Well, hardly, she blamed it all on good times and the fact that we used to go jumping together. No, I was seriously concerned about the hour because I felt I kept you overtime and I know that you had guests waiting and all that. Well, listen, I've been going over some of my notes. Can I take about 5 minutes of your time?

C: Sure, go ahead.

H: And I have a colleague of mine here whose name is Fred Charles. He's on the other line, he's in security, and we're interested in a couple of things. And let me just.. say hello, Fred.

FC: Hi, how are you? Sorry I wasn't with you yesterday.

C: Well, I'll tell you what, I didn't know that our dear President served Cutty Sark.

H: Well, these things happen, you know and it's all for the best. Well, look, during the period we were discussing yesterday, did you come back to Washington at all in that period.

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C: I didn't take home leave. I came back for a conference around the 9th or 10th of January of 1964 at which time I met with different officials of the United States Government including Governor Harriman, Forrestal, Hilsman, Kattenberg, Krulak, some people over in the Department of Defense and...

H: Mac Bundy?

C: McGeorge Bundy, yes, and I had quite a session with McGeorge Bundy which lasted about 2 or 3 hours.

H: Oh, really, that must have been pretty interesting.

C: Yes, it was. I found him a very interesting guy to talk to. You know, we were talking about the thing and ....

H: Oh, sure, he's a helluva bright guy. A lot brighter than Bill, I think we agreed.

C: Oh, there's no comparison between the two. And then I left around the 25th and arrived in Saigon the day after Nguyen Can had pulled his coup.

H: Uh, huh.

C: And I did not return to the U. S. until I was relieved by Ambassador Taylor on September the 12th of 1964.

H: You've got a helluva memory, man, you know that?

C: Yeah, because every time that I can remember things there was a coup on, an attempt, on the 13th of that month.

H: It has nothing to do with astrological signs and concatenations. Well, when you were back for that long session, you posed an interesting thought yesterday on something that sounded entirely logical to me. I'd never heard it espoused before, and it had to do with your thoughts that the Catholicism of the then President was a factor.

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C: Yes, well this was a thing that I just myself thought that was the factor which was why they were so pressured, should I say. There was so much interest voiced in keeping track of what was going on among the different coup groups. And it was obvious that if there wasn't a change made, nobody ever told me this, this is my....

H: You never heard any echoes of this from anybody like Bundy or anybody... ?

C: No, I never heard any echoes of that from Governor Harriman or from... and I also saw Sullivan and I saw Leonard Unger. I talked to a lot of people.

H: Well, you also mentioned this curious figure Vann, and I noticed from my notes I've got this involvement with this girl Germaine. There are two restaurant owners, two Corsican restaurant owners involved. Right? One is named Nicolai and the other....

C: The owner. His manager is the lover of the Germaine girl who was tied up with Ellsberg, and this is how John Paul Vann got into all this because Dan Ellsberg and John Paul Vann were great buddies, you know, in the beginning, and they were all during the time we were out there....

H: Well, how the hell could a man like Vann who'd quit the Army as a matter of principle, how could he be hired back on by USAID for a sensitive position.

C: Oh, this I don't know. This, my friend....

H: Doesn't that astonish you?

C: Oh, yeah, especially in a high position that he went into. I can understand a guy like Bill Colby who's a professional man in his own right to be put into a high position. You see, at the time David Halberstam wrote a terrific article on John Paul Vann when he quit the Army, you know, he was telling everybody they didn't know how to fight the war, that sort of thing. But, I mean it's public knowledge of what he did, and then all of a sudden he appears as a very important civilian.

H: That wouldn't have happened under this Administration, though.

C: No, sir.

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H: That would have been in the Johnson era?

C: That's right, sir.

H: I'll be darned. Well, I'm getting very curious about that guy and what his connections with Ellsberg would have been. I mean other than that they, I gather, kind of did the town together and...

C: ...and so forth. But they have known each other, or had known each other before. Vann was becoming a controversial figure because Vann was an adviser to one of the military units over there and made a great big splash, you know, on criticizing the Vietnamese Army, and became quite a controversial figure in the military circles. And he quit the military.

H: He was a military career man, more or less?

C: Yeah, then he quit the military and then he was hired, sent out and he became, when CORDS, now this was under Rober Komer, he came out as the original CORDS. At first they called it OKLE, that was in 1966, I believe, late 65 or early 66. That's when it was, late 66, October or November of 1966, that John Paul Vann was assigned to the Third Corps or the Third Region which is based in Bienhoa, and and it was during, prior to this moment, before he was assigned, that that he and Ellsberg became, you know, they knew each other and became very close friends. Then after this they still kept up their friendship, and of course it continued until the days of 1968 that Ellsberg left, and now, John Paul Vann transferred about a year ago, year and a half, he transferred from the Third Corps to the Fourth Corps and he has just recently transferred from head civilian coordinator from the Fourth Corps and he is now with the infamous General Nho Dzu, the one that was in the newspapers for participating in drug traffic...

H: You gave me his name yesterday, but I didn't realize he was the one involved in drug traffic.

C: Yeah, he was denounced in Congress and in something that went on with Attorney General Mitchell yesterday.

FC: Do you think that Ellsberg or Vann had any connections with the drug trafficking?

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C: No, I wouldn't swear to it, but I would be positive that, one of the things I will say about John Paul Vann, is that he is, you might call him like the rest of us on morals -- we slip there once in awhile, we might have a few too many to drink or pinch some babe's fanny -- but no sir, I wouldn't every say that he was that. He's not that kind of guy.

H: It's interesting to me because Ellsberg and Vann were involved with the Corsican, Nicolai, he used opium or smuggled it from Cambodia, so there are two connections ....

C: He (Nicolai) was an opium addict, too, in addition to that.

H: How about Germaine, was she by any chance an opium addict?

C. This I don't know. I never knew Germaine that way.

H: I'm surprised you didn't.

C: Now, my friend, World War II is over with, I was 25 or 26 years old then!

H: I don't know about that. We're just mere boys as far as I'm concerned.

C: Oh, yeah, sometimes I think I'm a mere boy and then I wake up the next morning I realize that the ages are catching up on me.

H: Well, you don't want to be discouraged because I think there are big times ahead for everybody. I have another question, now. When you were back here -- and also in your very intimate dealings with Lodge -- did you have any occasion to see any of the cables that passed between them?

C: No, the only cables that I would ever see would be the ones that would be passing between Mr. Bundy, you know, and which pertained to my instructions. Sometimes -- at one time, I remember one very important cable that came out, gave me an operation course by numbers, by cable, you know, how I should conduct myself, counter-surveillance, and you know, one of those things. But what the Ambassador wrote, or what was written back to him, except as it pertained to me, as it pertained to my instructions from the Ambassador, he would sometimes

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read it off to me and sometimes he would say, hey read this. But, he never handed me a cable to take anyplace, so despite what it says in the newspapers, just never happened.

FC: These were coming from Harriman?

C: Well, some of it was coming from McGeorge Bundy, at one time.

H: Through a State channel or through yours (CIA)?

C: Well, most of the traffic that was coming through State, came through State, was from...

H: McBundy traffic came through State.

C: But there was some traffic that would come to Lodge that would come through our channels. Now when it came through our channels it was actually on account of the sensitive thing of it. It was very limited distribution, I mean it was the ambassador, and the deputy...

H: Using the special (CIA) channels?

C: Yeah, using that special channel. That was very limited and I'm I'm sure, well I know I've seen some of the cables, but I was never in a position, you know, where I had complete access to all... ..

H: Well, you wouldn't have needed it actually for your function.

C: No, the only thing I was told was what pertained to me.

FC: Well, that would relate to the time the coup took place, the Diem coup?

C: Right. Prior to it, this is what happened. There was a lot of traffic, most of the traffic that was going on since the 8th of May 1963, July of 1963, and also early August of 1963, now a lot of that traffic was put together through the CAS channels. And this was sent through CAS and I don't know how it was distributed, that never entered... The only function I ever had to do with traffic, would be that part that I would add, you know, because there would be weekly Sitrep and I would have a part to add into that. The other thing that I would participate in would be when we had to get an overall view of political, economic, and military situations in a wrap-up, and I would have parts of it to contribute into that. The other cable traffic...

H: Well, you know how its handled.

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C: And they were contrary to those. And that day I was supposed to meet Big Minh.

H: And this was having to do with the coup itself?

C: Yes, sir. And this created quite a flap.

H: So that Max Taylor was saying one thing, and State was saying something else? And you characterized Max Taylor as being Bobby's spokesman...?

C: This is what I assumed, because of their relationship and also that it sort of had more caution in it, you know.

H: Max was in an uncomfortable position then anyway. He was going against his own military classmates, his Korea pals, like Harkins.  
(SKIPPED OR MISSED PART OF THE CONVERSATION)

FC: Are the media still harassing you?

C: Oh, yes.

FC: Are they bothering you a little still?

C: Well, yes, yes.

H: Since you and I talked yesterday?

C: Oh, yeah. Well, I've had two calls, I've had a call from the New York Times and also a call from Newsweek.

FC: I'll be damned.

C: They're going to publish a story on Lansdale and me in Newsweek, and the New York Times wants to do a magazine section on who is this guy Conein anyhow... this kind of thing.

H: Well, where are they going to dredge up the material?

C: I don't know.

H: You're pretty famous, you know. Guys like to learn all about you. But David Halberstam is still around the Eastern Se aboard, he could have an input couldn't he? Well, you can bet it's not going to be a very flattering piece, Lou.

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C: I'm betting on a lot of things. Well, I don't know about what Newsweek is printing. I think they're printing up the '54-'56 period.

H: You planted a thought with me yesterday that I've been turning over in my mind. Let me ask you this: You and I are both retired, but you have a double retirement, right? Supposing you were to go on, let's say a consultant status, how would that effect your retirement benefits?

C: I don't know, I don't know, I really don't know. The thing is, the problem that I stated yesterday is not a question of things, it's a question of having the proper objectives.

H: Oh, sure, sure, sure, I understand that. But you know, you said you were looking around for something to do in the next 6 months or so until things cleared up. Well...

C: That's for the... like I said I'm seeing Larry Houston the first of next week, and that's one of the things I'm going to bring up to him.

H: Well, that's a good idea. Larry is a very, very square and decent guy, you know. I don't know how much you've dealt with him. I've dealt with...

C: I have never dealt with him.

H: Well, even before I met you, he and I had offices across the corridor from each other in General Donovan's old office. So that goes back quite a long time.

C: It sure does.

H: Lou, I'm very much obliged to you, I don't have anything else to put in, and I thank you so much for the clarification.

C: O.K.

H: And if anything comes up, if you have any harassment, trouble, things trouble you, please give me a call.

C: O.K. Will do.

H: All right, fine. Thank you so much.

C: 'Bye.

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