

Ellsberg Smear Planned By Hunt

WASHINGTON (AP) — E. Howard Hunt's desire to smear Daniel Ellsberg, "to nail the guy cold" out of court, was a major factor in his being hired as a White House consultant two months before the Ellsberg burglary, documents held by the Senate Watergate committee show.

The committee has obtained a transcript of a July 1, 1971, telephone conversation between Hunt and special presidential counsel Charles W. Colson which Colson taped and sent to White House chief of staff H. R. Haldeman.

Colson, who had known Hunt several years, was anxious to hire the retired CIA agent at the White House.

In a cover memo sent to Haldeman with the transcript, Colson said: "If you want to get a feel of his attitude, I transcribed a conversation with him yesterday on it. Needless to say, I did not even approach what we had been talking about but merely sounded out his own ideas."

The memo did not elaborate on what they "had been talking about," and Colson wasn't immediately available for comment.

In the phone conversation the day after the Supreme Court refused to stop publication of the Pentagon Papers, Colson suggested that Ellsberg was likely to be turned into a martyr by the "New Left," "or it could become another Alger Hiss case, where the guy is exposed, other people were operating with him, and this may be the way to really carry it out.

"We might be able to put this bastard into a helluva situation and discredit the New Left."

As a young congressman on the House Un-American Activities Committee, Richard M. Nixon gained national attention with his vigorous pursuit of Hiss, whom he accused of helping the Communists.

Hunt said Colson's proposal would be marvelous, "and at this point I would be willing to set aside my personal yen for vengeance to make sure that the administration profits from this."

Hunt agreed with Colson that "we should go down the line to nail the guy cold."

Four days after the memo went to Haldeman, Colson took Hunt to domestic-affairs chief John D. Ehrlichman for an interview, and Hunt was brought onto the White House staff a few days later to work under Colson. All four have since left the White House.

In a sworn deposition last May, Colson said Hunt was assigned to "an analytical and research job" to determine how the published versions of the Pentagon Papers compared with government files. Two or three weeks after he was hired, Hunt was assigned to the White House "plumbers squad" that carried out the burglary of Ellsberg's psychiatrist's office during the Labor Day weekend slightly more than a month later.

Despite memos from the "plumbers" discussing efforts to change Ellsberg's press image and to discredit him publicly, Ehrlichman insisted during his Senate testimony that the object was not to smear Ellsberg.

In other Watergate developments Friday:

—Sen. Joseph M. Montoya, D-N.M., a member of the Watergate committee, announced his opposition to dividing the panel into subcommittees to conduct separate, simultaneous investigations of political sabotage and campaign financing during last year's presidential campaign. It would appear that the subcommittee proposal, to be discussed by the committee in executive session next week, is now dead.