

CIA Official Felt Aide Spoke for Nixon

9/12/73
By Laurence Stern

Washington Post Staff Writer

Gen. Robert H. Cushman Jr. said yesterday he assumed it was on President Nixon's behalf that former White House aide John D. Ehrlichman asked him to give Central Intelligence Agency undercover assistance to Watergate conspirator E. Howard Hunt.

The CIA paraphernalia—cameras, hidden tape recorders and wigs—was later used by Hunt in the burglary of Pentagon Papers defendant Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist, Dr. Lewis Fielding of Beverly Hills, in September, 1971.

Cushman, who was the CIA's deputy director at the time, said that when Ehrlichman called him and requested the aid for Hunt, "I knew that he . . . spoke with the authority of the President's name."

"I had known Mr. Ehrlichman for a good 10 to 12 years and respected him highly as a man of complete honesty and devotion to

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CIA chief James R. Schlesinger, with Marine Corps head Robert H. Cushman Jr.

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duty," the four-star Marine general said of the former Presidential aide.

Cushman, who now serves as Marine Corps commandant, interrupted a European tour to present his testimony to a Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on intelligence.

Afterward, subcommittee chairman John L. McClellan (D-Ark.) commented to newsmen: "I don't think he (Cushman) would do it again."

Cushman gave this explanation of how a White House call in July, 1971, triggered immediate and extraordinary cooperation from the CIA.

"Ehrlichman had been named within the White House as the man in charge of stopping security leaks and overhauling the security regulations. The Central Intelligence Agency is charged with safeguarding intelligence sources and methods.

"From these facts, I then drew the conclusion which I believe any reasonable man would have reached, namely that Howard Hunt had been hired by the White House to act in the security field and that the Central Intelligence Agency was being ordered to assist him," Cushman asserted.

Outgoing CIA director James R. Schelesinger has condemned the assistance to

Hunt, provided before he assumed control of the agency from Richard M. Helms, as "ill-advised."

Immediate senatorial reaction was that although the CIA assistance to Hunt was improper, the fault lay with Ehrlichman, who resigned under fire two weeks ago from his job as President Nixon's domestic counselor.

"When a man is in the position of Ehrlichman, the first deputy to the commander-in-chief," said Sen. Stuart Symington (D-Mo.), acting Armed Services Committee chairman, "there are not many military officers who would not jump."

Under the CIA's charter, the National Security Act of 1947, the CIA is proscribed from dealing with any internal security matters. That is the province of the FBI.

Cushman said that when Hunt called upon him on July 22, 1974, he "stated that he had a very sensitive one-time interview that the White House wanted him to hold with a person whose ideology he was not sure of and that he dare not reveal his, Hunt's, true identity."

He noted that "it must be recalled that Mr. Howard Hunt was a highly respected and honorably retired CIA employee of 20 years' service."

Nonetheless, said Cushman, White House wanted him to "I was not able to elicit any details of the interview which he stated that he had

to conduct and he said that on White House orders he was not to reveal the nature and scope of this interview nor of the fact that he worked for the White House.

"He did assure me, however, that he was working to a good purpose in the interests of the country."

After the spy gear was issued to Hunt by the CIA's Technical Services Division, Cushman reported the matter to then-director Helms, according to his affidavit.

The decision to cut off the aid came, he said, because "Mr. Hunt was becoming more and more unreasonable and demanding and was attempting to go far beyond the scope of the original instructions which I had given and which related to his statement that he had a one-time interview operation to conduct."

He ordered all relationships with Hunt discontinued, Cushman related, and informed Ehrlichman on August 27, 1971, that the assistance could be construed as improper for the CIA.

"I also advised him (Ehrlichman) that in my opinion Mr. Hunt was of questionable judgment. He should know better than to ask for such support," Cushman asserted. "Therefore, I made this recommendation to Mr. Ehrlichman for him to do with as he deemed proper."