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Washington Merry-Go-Round by JACK ANDERSON



WASHINGTON — The White House financed a trip to New England by Waterbugger E. Howard Hunt to investigate Sen. Edward Kennedy's role in the Chappaquiddick tragedy, according to Charles Colson, who ordered the mission.

The former White House aide confessed his part in the snooping operation during a secret deposition taken May 28 by lawyers for the Democratic National Committee.

Colson told under oath how Hunt came to him in July 1971, with a tip that a policeman, identified only as "Demott," had confidential information on the case.

Because Kennedy was a potential presidential contender, the White House was eager to learn more about the 1969 drowning of Mary Jo Kopechne during a drive with Kennedy.

Colson instructed Hunt to interview the policeman whose information, said Colson, proved to be a rehash of published material. The White House paid Hunt's air fare either to Massachusetts or Rhode Island for the interview, Colson recalled.

The tough, glib Colson also admitted he had dispatched Hunt to Denver to question Dita Beard about her famous memo linking an ITT financial commitment to the Republicans with an advantageous antitrust settlement. Hunt wore a preposterous, ill-fitting red wig on this secret mission.

Colson conceded that he had worked, too, on an advertisement supporting President Nixon's decision to bomb and mine Haiphong harbor. The ad was signed by private citizens but paid out of campaign funds.

In his deposition, Colson also spoke fully for the first time of his mysterious "Attack Group," which worked out of the White House in 1972. Its job, he said, was to coordinate policy for surrogate candidates who were carrying the political attack to the Democrats.

Colson vigorously denied he

had advance knowledge of the Watergate break-in. The most he did, he said, was phone campaign deputy Jeb Magruder to arrange for the Watergate ringleaders, Howard Hunt and Gordon Liddy, to explain their intelligence plans. But Colson insisted he did this at Hunt's request and never learned the actual plans.

On balance, Colson denied more than he admitted. He flatly contradicted press reports that he had recruited men to pose as homosexuals in the McGovern campaign. He also denied knowing Hunt had once forged documents to show the late President John F. Kennedy had conspired to assassinate the late South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem.

Democrat Deal: The Watergate spotlight has caught in its sweep many a moneybag who contributed generously to President Nixon's campaign and received a government favor in return. But there were Democrats, too, who engaged in this sort of exchange.

A defaced "m" in a typed bill introduced by Sen. John Sparkman, D-Ala., for instance, led us to the typewriter of John Horne, a former Sparkman aide who is now a director of the billion-dollar Continental Investment Corp.

We established that Horne had written the measure and Sparkman had rushed it through his Senate Banking Committee without bothering to have it retyped. The bill would allow

Continental's brokerage company to continue collecting fat brokerage fees until 1975 from a mutual fund company also owned by Continental. This would benefit the company at the expense of the shareholders.

Until a few days ago, we thought Sparkman had granted this legislative favor because of his long friendship for Horne. But now we have learned that Continental executives funneled money into Sparkman's 1972 campaign.

In December 1971, C. Robert Strader, vice president of Continental's brokerage firm, wrote his top aides in confidence: "In regard to the Senator Sparkman Campaign, would you be good enough to forward your check, made payable to the Sparkman Campaign Fund, to Mr. Reasoner immediately. . . ." William Reasoner is president of the brokerage subsidiary.

Again in February 1972, Strader made another pitch to his

harassed executives: "Everyone in the Home Office is being asked to contribute the cost of one or more \$100 fund-raising tickets based on their salary level. . . Forward your check to me made payable to the Senator John Sparkman Campaign."

Even in this day of Watergate, such blunt corporate pressure is uncommon. We have traced the flow of money from Continental executives into account number 12-860-81-411 at Washington's American Security and Trust Bank.

The trail ends there. We were unable to get the bank or Sparkman's office or Continental to discuss the secret fund with us. Insiders have assured us, however, that the contributions were "substantial."

Whatever the total, it was a good investment. Sparkman's bill will benefit Continental many times above the amount its executives raised.