

Ex-Nixon aide pleads guilty

By William J. Eaton
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WASHINGTON — Former White House consultant E. Howard Hunt pleaded guilty Wednesday to conspiracy, burglary and wiretapping charges in the Watergate political spying trial.

Hunt, a veteran of the Central Intelligence Agency, who was pictured by the prosecutor as a prime mover in the burglary-bugging of the Democratic National Headquarters, faces a maximum prison sentence of 25 years.

U.S. prosecutor Earl J. Silbert told Judge John J. Sirica that if the surprise plea is accepted he would call Hunt before a grand jury to ask him what he knows about the Watergate case.

Hunt sat expressionless at the defense table while attorney William O. Bittman changed Hunt's plea from not guilty on three counts of the six-count indictment.

Sirica called a recess without announcing whether he will accept Hunt's plea.

SILBERT said the government felt the three counts covered the basis of its case against Hunt and "we could not refuse to change in the plea."

The remaining three counts against Hunt will be dropped, Silbert said, but the government refused to make an agreement on its recommendation for sentencing and insisted on providing the judge with a detailed statement of evidence relating to Hunt.

Hunt changed his plea after Silbert's opening statement, in which the prosecutor said Hunt hired a spy to work in the

Democratic primary campaign headquarters of both Edmund S. Muskie and George S. McGovern.

Silbert also said a burglary-bugging campaign to steal documents and overhear conversations at Democratic headquarters was "directed against Sen. McGovern."

Silbert, in his statement opening the case, said that E. Howard Hunt, a White House consultant until last April, recruited a college student to spy on Muskie and McGovern.

The prosecutor identified the spy as Thomas J. Gregory, a student at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah, who is scheduled to testify.

SILBERT SAID G. Gordon Liddy, another former White House consultant who was gen-

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eral counsel of the Finance Committee for the Re-election of the President, received \$235,000 in a five-month period for intelligence gathering.

Silbert said the evidence would show that Liddy used some of this fund for the bugging of Democratic National Committee offices in the Watergate building. Five of the defendants were arrested at the Watergate with eavesdropping gear on June 17.

The prosecutor's opening statement described the allocation of \$250,000 to Liddy by Jeb Stuart Magruder, deputy chairman of the Committee for the Re-election of the President (CRP).

Silbert said Magruder and another CRP official, Herbert Porter, assigned Liddy to find out if demonstrations were planned against stand-in speakers for President Nixon during the primary campaign.

Liddy was allowed \$100,000 to check on possible protests in 10 states, Silbert told the jury of eight women and four men.

Liddy also was allocated \$150,000 to discover whether a financial contributor to a major Democratic candidate was a "big polluter," because the candidate had taken a strong antipollution stand.

LIDDY, ARMS folded, had a tight smile on his mustached face during the prosecutor's outline of the case. At one point he laughed openly when Silbert referred to his practice of wearing conservative suits.

The prosecutor said the government can account for \$50,000 of the \$235,000 that Liddy received from December, 1971, through May, 1972.

The intelligence gathered, according to Silbert, provided information on two planned

demonstrations — one in New Hampshire and one in Florida — and a forecast that 250,000 protesters would appear in San Diego, where the Republican convention then was scheduled.

Liddy's report, the prosecutor said, caused the GOP to shift the site of the convention to Miami Beach.

SILBERT PICTURED the seven defendants as leaving a trail of \$100 bills in Miami, Washington and Los Angeles.

He said Gregory, whom he described as "young Tom," dropped out of college and was paid \$175 a week to become a volunteer at Muskie headquarters in mid-February and report on campaign plans of the Democratic front-runner.

Gregory telephoned Hunt and passed information to him, the prosecutor said, until Muskie's campaign faltered in mid-April.

Hunt then assigned Gregory to McGovern headquarters to get names of contributors, mailing lists and floor plans of the offices, he said.

Silbert said James W. McCord, security chief for CRP, once visited McGovern headquarters to try to install a "bug" in the office of Frank Mankiewicz, a top aide, but was not successful.

SILBERT SAID the jurors would have to figure out the motive for the alleged conduct of the defendants, but he said there was "obviously the political motive" — to get information about Democratic plans.

At least five of the defendants, he said, had a financial motive since they were not making big money from their regular jobs.

The prosecutor described Liddy, 42-year-old ex-FBI agent, as "the boss of the operation."