

James Bond in the White House (as played by Peter Sellers) HW 2/10/73

Today's Post story on Hunt's July 1971 foray into New England in quest of dirt on all Kennedys, especially Teddy, via Clifton DeMotte tells more about Hunt, the project, and the Mullen Agency than Woodward and Bernstein make of it.

Unless there was official lying, which is quite possible despite the pay records, this was just about the first thing he did: dash off to New England and disclose himself and his interest. For a man with more than 20 years experience in international spooking? Either Hunt was well into his work, meaning it was well begun long before he appears on the White House payroll, or this is incredible arrogance and stupidity even for him. The first thing anyone does in such a venture is learn what he can quietly and privately. With the open record of the Kennedys going back to old Joe, the first thing is to read, the next to talk to those who can be trusted to pick up rumors, etc. Teddy's madcapping was not secret, nor was his drinking, nor the fact that efforts were made to keep him from driving, it was that wild, especially after drinking.

(It would be interesting to ask Dick Whalen if Hunt consulted him. Dick learned much more about the family than he used in The Founding Father, as he told me.)

So, Hunt was incredible, even for Hunt, or the project did not begin as late as 7/71, when the payroll records, the White House and Hunt say. The simplest explanation is that it was a Mullen project. Aside from this, it could have been a Hunt personal interest. Were it, it could hardly have been as exhaustive as venturing into the open and contacting people means, given rationality.

The picture of DeMotte that appears is clouded. On the one hand he says he was against it and would not join up, but on the other he says he later talked to Volpe about it, trying to interest Volpe (who had to have enough knowledge of his own).

(Aside from Whalen, one of Hunt's politics should have made one of his first stops Manchester, N.H., to see Art Egan, Bill Loeb's investigative reporter, who spent much time on Chappaquiddick if not earlier on all Kennedys.)

Even if as I suppose, the GOPs had extensive files on the personal lives of all Kennedys, esp. John and Bobby, more research was required before any field work on Teddy. Then, when field work begins, the first stop is enemies. DeMotte, although a government employee in a Republican administration, does not from what is published come out as an enemy. Political enemies, not all of whom are GOPs, would ordinarily be first.

When Hunt met DeMotte in Hunt's own rented accommodations, this meant to a pro that the fake name could deceive DeMotte only, that he was leaving a trail by which he could be positively identified. Not professional on a really clandestine operation, as only a nut would conceive this not to be during an election campaign in particular. Exposure could backfire. Thus Hunt was careless at best to trust DeMotte or had reason to believe DeMotte could not be untrustworthy, something more than the loss of his job.

There is more than stupidity involved in this. There is a strange, anti-professional arrogance. Here is Hunt using the name Edward Warren and then using the same name at the Watergate, obviously linking both operations if there were to be an investigation. Yet looking back, as he did on the Buckley show, he says he was against the Watergate part of the project. Opposed to it because of the risks yet using the same name and false identification he has used in Kennedy-stalking? With all the false identifications he had already established, all he could have made up with no trouble? And at the same time asking for trouble from DeMotte by offering to pay expenses only? With all the money available? This, in turn, suggests that as early as 7/71 Hunt was aware of enormous expenses to be incurred in the entire operation, otherwise, with all the initial funds, why be a cheapskate with DeMotte? Yet from DeMotte's account, Hunt hadn't even concocted a good cover. When DeMotte asked for whom Hunt spoke, Hunt was mysterious and spoke of an undescribed "group" only. This is an implausible method, one that in itself is almost certain to make those approached apprehensive. An experienced spook should have been more elaborately prepared. To say nothing about an experienced spy-thriller novelist.

There is more here on Hunt's arrogance, stupidity or whatever it or the combination may be. He calls DeMotte in a way that can be traced? With all the pay phones in the world? The phonestix calls to DeMotte were the means by which the FBI found DeMotte.

Here also a view of Hunt's high political principles: personal-life smears.

A farout Machismo is not a Hunt monopoly. Each new disclose points all over again to the potential importance in the entire mess of the Mullen agency. It has never been checked, not even when I supplied a factual basis, as I did to Bernstein, Woodward and Dick Harwood on the Post alone and to several other papers. When Woodward and Bernstein have Hunt gulping down all of Chappaquiddick as soon as he goes to the White House and the White House disclaiming it, they can easily discount the disclaimer, but Hunt was working for both the White House and the agency and he had been working for the agency, so on this simplistic basis checking into the agency could not be avoided. Now I told Bernstein about the Washington Building part and said that if he got me the pages from the city directory for it going back to 1965 I could steer him around what I have to keep confidential. He said he would but he didn't. I told him of Hunt's long agency connection, of his mail and phone service, and his real position, not that of a hack pen.

If ordinarily a lawyer might be expected to make the objection Bittman did in the deposing, I suggest two things: Williams was not just fishing and Bittman was not just going on general principles. Both had to have had some specific knowledge. If Bittman didn't, at the absolute minimum Hunt was insane to keep his lawyer in the dark about what could surface. Williams had to have known not less than had already been published, under Schleicher above here. With what had been published, aside from anything he knew, what Bittman was doing is not exaggerated in Williams characterization, obstruction, interference and impugning of motive.