

Dear Jim,

12/23/73

I've had volume 8 for several days but did not read any of it because I was doing other things. I started reading today. I have read Helms' testimony only. It is about this that I write, on the chance you (both) read it soon. I plan to read Cushman next.

Baker's and Thompson's attempts to do a job for Nixon are more blatant here. I'm surprised they were as open as they were, but perhaps they felt they had it hidden.

There are, I think, some subtleties here. There is also falsehood and misrepresentation and much was withheld, as you may remember from some hasty writing of that time of which I carboned you.

Helms was deliberately evasive about Hunt. He also failed to give him a good character when he was willing to and did give McCord one. Calling Hunt a romantic does not cover this. Nor did he know as little of Hunt's career as he pretended. No mention Guatemala, for example, and before Helms became director that was his branch. He and Hunt in the same one. His reason for Hunt's retiring seems credible but is not consistent with others'.

There are also subtleties in the questioning, as well as gross incompetence.

It interested me that Helms said Hunt's last years were spent in Washington, as it interested me that he avoided saying what Hunt was doing in Washington. It is not because he did not know. Nor is it or can it be because he hadn't learned all there was to know that he might have forgotten as soon as Hunt's name was first mentioned in WG.

I did get the impression that he was firm in saying what he did, no Mexican connection or any other. So, I take it he believed this, based on what he had been told. But there were things, as he also realized, that he might have had no way of learning. One is what a former Mexico City station chief may have had by way of local ~~contact~~ contacts and another is moonlighting. Oh, while I am satisfied that the WH anti-CIA effort was just that, an effort to get it to take the rap, it is by no means impossible for there to have been a connection.

Some of the things that were to have been incorporated into the record were not, at least not in this volume, where they belong. There was time for it. I take it this means the items will not be published. Like excerpts from Helms' Symington subcommittee testimony. Answers that were to have been provided also were not, so I don't expect them.

I did learn of other things to try to get.

The covering of the CIA in this is open to one who looks. Baker and Thompson were incompetent or didn't want anything else, only the political rhetoric.

Some of the things I obtained earlier and quoted are reproduced in facsimile but not all and not some of the more important. However, the Cushman taping of the Hunt conversation is, as are several handwritten memos. The unused things were not introduced into evidence in Helms' testimony. I don't know if they were elsewhere. They could not have been here, if you recall that writing. They would have blown it all.

It would seem that in all the many pre-testimony staff interviews, they never went into Hunt and domestic intelligence. If they did, they left it out of their memo for the members on the interviews and they avoided it where it was relevant in questioning Helms and in ignoring the indefiniteness of his answers.

Before ~~Hunt~~ Helms was fired I got the idea he was given greater responsibility. I felt that he was fired under unusual circumstances when it happened, so close to automatic retirement policy changes did not explain it. Then, when I learned what GL had been up to, I felt it was because Helms did not lend himself to GL's plans. Now I am satisfied this is the case and I think this interpretation can be seen in Helms' careful words.

The Ehrlichman plotting is visible and Helms is the one who made it visible. Fairly delicately. Perhaps as delicately as possible.

He added nothing to what had appeared in print on both Hunt, confirmed only part and a ~~aided~~ most. He even mis-identified Hunt's Bay Pigs role. Said he was in charge of propaganda only, and they let it go.

They let so much go I can't assign it to total incompetence.

So, if you read, I'd be interested in any conclusions and impressions.

Best,