

Search Started for Hunt's 7 Boxes

By Jack Anderson

Seven elusive boxes of Watergate documents, once in the custody of Watergate conspirator E. Howard Hunt Jr., were hauled away by a Nixon loyalist named Roy Sheppard after the Watergate break-in of June 17, 1972.

Until a few weeks ago, it appeared certain the boxes had been burned on orders of Nixon campaign aides prior to the November, 1972, presidential election.

According to sworn testimony, the boxes, containing an estimated 7,000 documents, were destroyed. But new reports suggest they may have been cached instead in a locked vault. The reports are now considered firm enough to have brought the Watergate special prosecutor into the probe.

In August, 1972, we came within an ace of getting them through Sheppard's lawyer, who was troubled about their hidden secrets.

But Sheppard adamantly refused to give them up. He later testified that he had burned them in his furnace on orders of Nixon campaign aides. There the matter stood until a month ago.

At that time, we received reports that Sheppard had not burned the papers, and once again we tried to find them. Mr. Ford's "transition team" also heard of the documents and assigned a crack lawyer to track them down.

The lawyer worked through last weekend chasing clues. He satisfied himself there was at least a slim chance the boxes exist, although neither he nor anyone else was sure what they might contain.

Acting on White House orders, the lawyer immediately turned his clues over to assistant special prosecutor Richard Ben-Veniste, who quickly reopened the investigation. Ben-Veniste has now been given the name of the town where the boxes are supposedly located. He also has clues to the identification of the alleged custodian of the boxes, provided by one of Sheppard's friends, Hal O'Brien.

At O'Brien's urging, we have learned, the special prosecutor intends to give Sheppard immunity from prosecution if the boxes are found intact.

Firearms Fracas—The Treasury Department's firearms regulators got caught with their

powder wet by Rep. Mike Harrington (D-Mass.).

Harrington, who wants to ban all private handguns, accused Treasury's Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms of using faulty figures to show that 70 per cent of pistols used by criminals are cheap "Saturday night specials."

This figure plays right into the hands of the big domestic gun manufacturers, who want the public to believe that costlier weapons aren't often used in crimes. Exactly the opposite is true.

Harrington complained to bureau Director Rex Davis that such phony figures make it look like banning Saturday night specials will end the slaughter on America's streets. Davis promised to "re-examine the figures."

Actually, the figures were known to be wrong from the start, as we now know from a secret memo directly from the bureau's own files.

"If you will but recall," wrote Davis' deputy, William Thompson, to the bureau's public affairs chief, Warren McConnell, "I challenged the process by which (the figures) were reached at the time."

The statistics, wrote Thompson, contained "built-in error

(and) items which are inaccurate or incorrect."

"It gives me no pleasure to say, 'I told you so'" wrote Thompson. "Quite the contrary. I hope that we will be able to prove our figures . . . are very nearly perfect."

But, Thompson concluded, "the hastily taken shortcut has . . . cast doubt upon our credibility." Meanwhile, Director Davis, unaware that Harrington already has the secret memo, has written it will be "about two weeks" before he can fully answer Harrington.

Poage Pressure—Autocratic House Agriculture Committee Chairman Bob Poage, (D-Tex.) is privately pressuring members of the Merchant Marine and Fisheries Committee to gut two bills protecting streams and wetlands.

Poage wants to open 150,000 miles of waterways to the bulldozers so his fatcat farmer and land-developer friends can get rich. The taxpayer would foot the bill for the destruction of marsh, streams and rivers where wildlife and fish have been breeding for centuries.

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