

Hunt Is Key To Watergate

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An influential political source says the U.S. attorney's office here is today "far ahead of everybody" in the Watergate case — meaning it has compiled a mountain of evidence sufficient to engage three or four grand juries instead of the single one presently involved.

The key figure in all this is a man already convicted of participation in the June, 1972, Watergate break-in, E. Howard Hunt, former CIA agent. He has been called in on at least eight separate occasions.

Hunt is talking under a grant of immunity. Having stood at the very center of the Nixon administration's espionage-sabotage plan against the Democrats, he is uniquely placed to implicate all the other principals in that undertaking — including some who so far are skillfully escaping serious public attention.

It's taken for granted, of course, that the sitting grand jury ultimately will hand down other indictments. But most of these will likely be for obstruction of justice and perjury in connection with the elaborate White House cover-up of Watergate linkage of the administration.

So engulfed in testimony and documents that it cannot begin to sift all its materials thoroughly, the U.S. attorney's office probably is not the place to look for a fuller unfolding of the espionage-sabotage story.

Furthermore, some of the documented behavior under that plan may be merely unethical rather than illegal.

Thus, my source suggests that the Ervin investigating committee may be the forum for the complete telling of the story, if it is ever to be told at all.

For the moment, interested Americans (far from all of them) wait impatiently for the testimony before the Ervin committee of ex-Nixon aides John Dean and Jeb Stuart Magruder. It is understandable enough, since they, if talking under grants of immunity that really open them up, can start a chain of contacts which may establish once and for all what degree of involvement the President had in the Watergate cover-up and perhaps other aspects.

Let's agree, again, that determining the President's position is crucial information for the nation. Nevertheless, the whole thing will have an aspect of big currents spinning around a hollow center if the American people do not find out the full potential

dimensions and the kind of seamy raw material which seem to be the essence of this unbelievably ugly endeavor.

That must bring the Ervin committee inescapably to Hunt. It will surely get to him, though probably not for many weeks. When it does, his testimony given under immunity will (assuming it matches what he is thought to have told the grand jury) blow the lid.

For, however unseemly is our still-fragmentary portrait of Nixon higher-ups playing cover-up, the heart of this terribly sordid tale is WHAT, in the most complete sense, there was to cover up. The celebrated burglaries, dramatic as they are, don't tell us more than a fraction of what we need to know. Hunt has to be the big hope.