

Dear Jim,

1/11/74

Somehow "Operation Phoenix" stayed in my mind, which may have manufactured it, and thus late yesterday afternoon, just before leaving for Lil, I typed a note on it. On the slight chance there was a basis for it, I have not destroyed it.

Project Odessa is probably what I had in mind, and some of the comment I'd make on it I have made on "Phoenix."

Before going to bed I cleaned up the accumulated clippings I'd not had a chance to read. (The LATimes one on Ray is very helpful, having quotes I'd not seen elsewhere that we'll have to confront if we continue with him. There will be more on this.)

The first Hersh piece is very helpful and makes a confusing uncertainty more confusing and uncertain. I was correct in recalling that the alleged leak to the USSR was after publication of the Pentagon Papers began. Now why should anyone want to leak them after they are being published?

Of course it is possible that there were individual papers not included in what was given to the papers. But that would eliminate Ellsberg as the source and with it eliminate the whole White House rationale.

One of two other alternatives seems more likely: the whole thing was made up and there was no leak to the USSR or it was a deliberate leak, like by the Plumbers, for just this misuse. There is a broad hint of this in the writing I did about June, in advance and to be incorporated when I reached that point in the writing.

Hersh's conjecture that Odessa and Special Project M-1 may have related to the Ellsberg job seem reasonable. He attributes to "federal investigators."

However, he describes the missing graf of the 8/11/71 memo other than it had been, the earlier explanation being of the interception of the personal conversations between the top USSR leaders.

The peek into Kissinger's mind I'm inclined to believe political paranoid. One of the qualities that would attract it and him to Nixon.

I do find it hard to believe that the USSR would have a single man assigned for all the alleged years to Washington, have him be a US agent and not detected him.

The Szulc leak, the third page as you pasted this up, is another fascinating suggestion that he had a CIA hookup. Possible sources seemingly limited to CIA and WH and it was a payoff type of leak. Plus a policy-influencing one.

4th col, 3rd full graf, refers to use satellites in bugging. This was in the Chicago stories I sent you. Prior to seeing them I was unaware that there is this kind of use. It tends to make more credible what that source said about McCord's equipment.

Forgetting for the moment that any kind of contradiction serves GL's personal interest and that there are within it and with others some contradictions, this and the companion piece would seem to indicate all over again that there are many people in important positions who are willing to talk and that they include a fair percentage who are more than willing to say what GL and his remaining closer, like Kissinger, Haig, etc. do not want said. And if these kinds of people are willing to go farther and debunk the essence of the Nixonian defense, I think it is a very good sign. Not that too much be made of it. Rather that too little not be. Among the things to can betoken is the willingness of some of these people to be witnesses in trials. This, of course, assumes a real investigation prior to any trials, the only way the willing can be located other than by their volunteering. Here I believe that what was already in the works before Cox was axed is irreversible, so there are possibilities. The radio and TV news reports today of a deal offered to Ehrlichman, not in the Post, may bear on this theorizing.

I have seen no identification of this alleged Plumbers' project. I have also wondered what it could be based on what we know of their projects, which is far from all.

Two have occurred to me, both predicated on the code-name originating with Hunt. Both are no more than conjectures based on almost nothing.

Hunt seems to have an affection for Georgetown, which is not new and never was all "liberal." Even Korean Dictator Park owns property there.

There is and for years has been a Mexican shop on the west side of Wisconsin Avenue, I think opposite the east jog of P St, called "The Phenix." It is owned by those who started it, or at least was as of my last knowledge, several years ago. It was quite a success so a New York branch was started. The founders are Mr. and Mrs. Bill Hays. Bill was, as I remember, a legislative liaison man for a wartime agency, I think OEM or OPM when I first met him. He was later a red-hunt victim.

His shop was stocked with what he purchased on trips to Mexico. It was authentic stuff.

Hunt would not like him. He could be a symbol to Hunt, who would also know the store. It is near the place operated by a pal of his, part of the anti-Douglas project, pal also once No. 4 man on the other Hunt's Life Line operation. If the store no longer exists, the symbolism, even that of Hays getting the McCarthyite ax, could be symbolic for Hunt. It could be a code-name substitute for something Mexican, having the same origin as the use in the store's name.

The second and perhaps more likely is as a code name for the fake that the Pentagon Papers were leaked first to the USSR and hence the plumbers' interest. I have forgotten the details but I have written this material in the form in which I will use it but so long ago I can't be certain of details without checking. There is a description of someone taking the stuff into the embassy and he is allegedly unidentified. Shades of Odum!

The fact seems to be that this was done when it really served no purpose, after the papers used could be bought in the Times. In short, I am suggesting that the leak to the USSR or even the allegation of a leak that didn't exist was contrived to cover something that was being done, like the Ellsberg job. Something rising from the ashes of the actual leak of the papers.

I think Hunt could go for something like this kind of naming.

By the same token, it could also apply in his mind to many capers.

It could also relate to something in a common past he had with others, like the Cubans.

Even to bag jobs with Chilean victims - on the ashes of the kind of Chile he and his preferred. I am sure his gang pulled them. I believe he and Liddy masterminded the break-in at the NAACP fund in NYC and it seems that this happened just when he and Liddy returned from the Fielding job to Washington by way of New York! (The reluctance on any officials to look into any of these jobs is in itself suspect because there were records that could establish whether the likely candidates were in a position to pull them, like airline records, expense accounts, phone records, etc.) Or has there been any denial of which I am aware of the hints that these bag jobs were part of WG. I do know that the FBI did get all Hunt's WH expense records. They appear to have checked all the phone records of all the likely suspects, including the Cubans and at least Barker's bank records, which they were onto in a couple of days.)

1/11/74 I do not recall if there was a Project Phoenix. I probably remembered incorrectly and meant Project Odessa and I do recall not remembering enough about the plot of The Odessa File. However, I do not destroy this on the chance there was a real Project Phoenix.