

Mary McGrory

The Career of E. Howard Hunt

IT WAS LOOKING PRETTY bad for us Watergate junkies. Until we could scrape up the \$88 that would be needed for a complete set of trail tapes, we had nothing to look forward to.

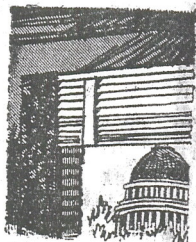
Frankly, we were beginning to get the shakes. It came right up to December 31, and the Watergate jury was listening to the tapes of June 23 and March 21 again, and the end was in sight. Then suddenly, the whole picture changed. From the foggy mists of the CIA story, Watergate's proposed paltry substitute, emerged the familiar figure of E. Howard Hunt.

We were back where we started. Howard Hunt, according to Seymour Hersh of the New York Times, was right in the middle of the whole thing. It was, as ever, delicious.

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THE FEDERAL SOAP OPERA which opened on June 17, 1972, is simply getting a new title. The key character survives. Howard Hunt is the spy who wants to get caught.

He is the walking history of all that has gone wrong in this country since 1961, when he mismanaged the Bay of Pigs. He engaged in the forbidden domestic espionage that apparently began some-



where around that time. He came into his own with Richard Nixon. To rattle off his activities is to plot the profile of that misbegotten administration. He was at the Ellsberg break-in, he was at Dita Beard's bedside; he forged the Kennedy cables, supervised the Watergate break-in.

He left his little notebook with the fatal "W. House" notation in it at the Howard Johnson Motel on June 17, 1972, and set Woodward and Bernstein to sniffing. He had his picture taken with Gordon Liddy at the site of the Ellsberg burglary. He wrote a memorandum for his lawyer in the Watergate affair to lay on his dear friend, Charles W. Colson, and it surfaced dramatically at the trial.

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WE MAY NEVER find out what he had on President Nixon, that something that made Nixon choke on his name, that set him to babbling about clemency and reaching for the cash box.

It is, perhaps, not too much to hope that he took an active role in the collection of the 10,000 dossiers on American citizens which we have learned the CIA was using our tax money for.

If he was there, we can be sure, he went about his work in his usual elaborate way. Perhaps 1973 will bring us a picture of him at a peace rally wearing a beard and blue jeans, carrying a sign with, say, "Nixon, the mad bomber" on it. It would be like him.

Howard Hunt is one of the great inadvertent civics teachers of our generation, just as Fanne Foxe has turned out to be the most effective parliamentary reformer the House of Representatives ever knew. We may yet find out something about the CIA. With Howard Hunt at the blackboard, there's always a chance.

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