

Hunt Denies Demand Constituted Blackmail

By George Lardner Jr. *1/30/74*
Washington Post Staff Writer

Watergate burglar E. Howard Hunt Jr. insisted yesterday that he was just trying to collect some "long overdue bills" from the White House last year when he demanded more than \$100,000 before going off to prison.

Testifying under cross-examination at the Watergate cover-up trial, Hunt primly denied that this could be called "blackmail" even if he had threatened to start talking about his "seamy" work as a White House spy.

"What did you consider it? Investment planning?" demanded William G. Hundley, the chief defense lawyer for former Attorney General John N. Mitchell.

"I was being as forceful as I could, attempting to collect long overdue bills," Hunt replied. "I was acting in the tradition of a bill collector, trying to get others who had made a prior contract to live up to it."

His voice dripping with sarcasm, Hundley tried again. "How about extortion?" he asked.

"No sir," Hunt maintained. "I've consulted counsel on this

and my understanding is that it constitutes neither extortion nor blackmail."

The 56-year-old former CIA agent said he couldn't recall "any more perjuries" about the Watergate scandal than those he admitted under questioning by Watergate prosecutors earlier this week. He readily conceded that he couldn't say as much for his new book, which was not written under oath.

It is scheduled for publication next month by G. P. Putnam & Sons under the title of "Undercover: Memoirs of an American Secret Agent." Even Hunt gave it a bad review, saying it was laced with false statements.

Hunt said he wrote the book earlier this year before the "rude awakening" that he got when President Nixon published edited versions of many of his Watergate tapes, replete with references to the original defendants as "idiots" and "jackasses."

The book's errors, as explained by the author before he stepped down from the witness stand, included several

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crucial points that cover-up defendants John D. Ehrlichman and Kenneth Wells Parkinson had been counting on as part of their defense.

Hunt had written, for example, that Watergate spy leader G. Gordon Liddy had told him to "get out of town" around 11:30 a.m. on June 19, 1972, two days after the Watergate bugging and break-in at Democratic National Committee headquarters here.

Yesterday, however, Hunt said he subsequently realized that Liddy actually gave him the perplexing instruction,

with the suggestion that he not stop until he got to Europe, at a sidewalk rendezvous outside the U.S. Information Agency building around 4 p.m. that day.

The new timing dovetailed with the charges of former White House counsel John W. Dean III that it was Ehrlichman who commanded Hunt's disappearance at a White House meeting around the same time. Deand has said that he promptly called Liddy from a phone in Ehrlichman's office and told him to get the message to Hunt as quickly as possible.

Ehrlichman's lawyers have

contended that the order to Hunt was all Dean's idea and that it had been conveyed, and then countermanded, earlier in the day before the meetings with Ehrlichman.

Hunt was firm about the new timing. He said he originally thought he had met with Liddy around noon because of the heavy pedestrian traffic which made him think it was the lunch hour.

He said he subsequently became convinced "it was the early outbound rush" of government workers headed for home.

The soft-spoken Hunt also

insisted that he and his late wife, Dorothy, had composed a detailed, typewritten memo in November of 1972, outlining his involvement in the Watergate break-in as well as that of Mitchell, Dean and former White House special counsel Charles W. Colson.

Hunt said both he and his wife had been upset about the sluggish payments the original Watergate defendants had been getting and wanted to emphasize the need for more money.

The confessed burglar had said in his book that the memo had never been written although he had planned to "lay it on Parkinson," a Nixon re-election committee lawyer who allegedly served as a middleman in the hush money payments.

Yesterday, however, Hunt said the memo had been composed and then delivered to his lawyer, William O. Bittman, who, in turn, later told him that he had "read it" to Parkinson. Hunt said Bittman told him "Parkinson said he would see what he could do about it."

In his testimony, Dean had said that Parkinson had submitted a "laundry list" rundown of the payments the Watergate defendants were expecting.

Hunt added yesterday that \$40,000 in cash was anonymously delivered to him in Bittman's office about two weeks after his lawyer had told him of the conversation with Parkinson.

Parkinson's lawyer, Jacob Stein, repeatedly questioned

Hunt about his failure to make a copy of the memo and the inability of Watergate prosecutors to track down the original.

Stein contended that Hunt surely would have wanted to keep a single copy so he would know "what was in the document if it ever came up again," but Hunt shrugged off the question.

"I hoped it would never come up again," Hunt said. "I knew what the situation was. My wife knew what the situation was."

All they wanted, he said, was for "others" to have a similar appreciation.

The most intense cross-examination came from Mitchell's lawyers in an effort to undermine Hunt's charges that the former attorney general was "the big man" who approved "Project Gemstone," the political espionage plan that led to the Watergate break-in.

Under questioning by Hundley, Hunt acknowledged that he never met or even talked with Mitchell. He said G. Gordon Liddy was the "sole source" of his knowledge about the high-level dickering over Project Gemstone's budget and of "the big boy's involvement."

"Did you ever get any misinformation from Mr Liddy?" Hundley demanded in tones suggesting that Liddy was not the most reliable informant.

"I may have," Hunt said. "I can't think of anything specifically."

One of the side issues left unresolved as a result was the question of who put the prosti-

tutes in Project Gemstone's budget. Hunt said Liddy told him that the use of call girls to compromise compromisable Democrats in the 1972 presidential campaign was the idea of Jeb Stuart Magruder, deputy director for the Nixon reelection effort.

Hunt said he objected to the idea, largely on logistical grounds. The callgirls, he explained, were supposed to work out of a one-room houseboat during the Democratic convention at Miami Beach, but the houseboat was also expected to serve as a listening post for wiretapped conversations.

"You don't use the same site for two widely varying purposes," Hunt said with the air of a covert agent who knew better. "There wouldn't have been room for two people to get in there."

Magruder, who followed Hunt to the witness stand, suggested that the call girls were Liddy's idea, designed to "compromise those in the Democratic Party whom he thought it appropriate to compromise."

Now serving a 10-month-to-four-year prison term for his part in the Watergate break-in and the subsequent cover-up, Magruder said the prostitutes were dropped in January of 1972 when Mitchell told Liddy to cut back his grandiose \$1 million scheme.

Magruder, 39, said he kept the White House informed of Project Gemstone's progress with regular reports to Gordon Strachan, then deputy to White House chief of staff H. R. (Bob) Haldeman.