

Hunt denies blackmail charge

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WASHINGTON (AP) — E. Howard Hunt Jr. testified Tuesday that the money demand former President Richard M. Nixon viewed as blackmail last year was just an attempt to collect an overdue bill.

"You don't consider your comments to disclose seamy things you did unless you got \$50,000, \$60,000, \$72,000 as blackmail?" the Watergate break-in conspirator was asked at the Watergate cover-up trial.

"No, sir," said Hunt.

"What do you consider it, an investment plan?"

"I consider that I was in the position of a bill collector trying to get those who had made prior commitments," Hunt said.

Hunt underwent cross-examination on this second day as a witness at trial of John N. Mitchell, H. R. Haldeman, John D. Ehrlichman, Robert C. Mardian and Kenneth W. Parkinson, all charged with conspiracy to obstruct justice.

Hunt had testified that in March 1973 when he was about to be sentenced for his role as foreman of the Watergate break-in team he had word relayed to the White House that he wanted \$122,000 to pay his lawyers. He said he threatened to disclose other covert jobs that he had done for the White House.

The White House tape transcript of a conversation former White House counsel John W. Dean III had with Nixon on March 21 showed that both Dean and the President viewed the demand as blackmail.

"You don't feel you were selling your silence?" William Hundley, attorney for Mitchell, asked.

"No, sir," said Hunt, "that was a different matter."

On Monday Hunt testified he had lied at least a dozen times to grand juries and had decided to tell the truth finally after reading the White House transcripts last summer. He said he decided then that

the people he was protecting were not worth it.

Asked by Hundley whether he would have felt differently had his demands been met, Hunt replied: "I felt a rude awakening."

"I read the President's contemptuous reference to those of us who had gone to prison as idiots and jackasses. I realized there had been a wild scramble going on for months in the White House to protect themselves and very little thought had been given to our plight, much less to the money which was the easier thing for them to give to ease our burden."

On the evening of March 21, 1973, after the President said the blackmail money could be raised, \$75,000 was delivered to Hunt's attorney, William O. Bittman, and Hunt said he got the money the following day.

That money delivery figures largely in the charges against three of the five defendants because the government said it was paid to keep Hunt quiet.