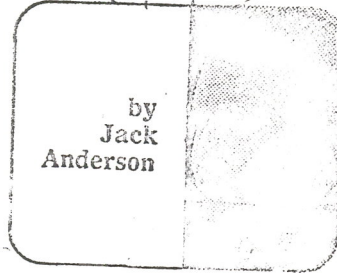


Cubans trust in Hunt no more

WASHINGTON — Last year, the four foolhardy Cubans who pleaded guilty to the Watergate burglary were willing to blindly follow their ringleader, E. Howard Hunt. Now they hold him in silent contempt.

He had been their charismatic CIA superior — a soft-spoken romantic who was able to stir them.

UPON HIS hush-hush orders they broke into the offices of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist, no questions asked, not even knowing the identity of their victim until 10 minutes before the burglary. Then they followed Hunt's directions into the Watergate. After their arrest, he told them to keep silent



about the Ellsberg caper, and their lips were sealed.

They had planned to plead not guilty and appeal to the jury for understanding. But at that time, the White House wanted to avoid a public trial. Hunt advised them to plead guilty, and overnight they changed their plan.

The Cubans sometimes quarreled among themselves, but all four swore by Hunt. They wept with him when his wife was killed in an airliner crash. They would have died for him.

Then the sordid Watergate story was spread on the front pages. They found out that Hunt had collected tens of thousands of dollars in bribes of the Watergate defendants. But only a few paltry payments ever reached them. He used most of the money to pay his own legal expenses.

He is now prepared to testify against the Cubans, whom he recruited to break into Ellsberg's psychiatrist's office, in

return for immunity for himself.

BUT PERHAPS the last straw was the deal he wrangled from the Senate Watergate committee. In return for his co-operation, the committee arranged for him to be removed from jail into spacious, comfortable quarters at Fort Holabird, Md. Our sources say he occupies his time playing checkers and chess.

The four Cubans, meanwhile, are still behind bars. They saw him as he was cashing a \$100 money order just before checking out of jail. As a gesture of contempt, Eugenio Martinez pulled his empty pockets inside out. Then they watched together in cold silence as the sheepish Hunt was led away.

(FOOTNOTE: The latest irony is that Hunt, despite all the hush money that passed through his hands, has set up a defense fund for himself. No less than famed columnist William Buckley, a friend of Hunt, has loaned his good offices to assist with the collection. In contrast, Cuban friends are struggling to raise a few hundred dollars for the forgotten four through a Watergate relief fund at the Bank of Miami.)