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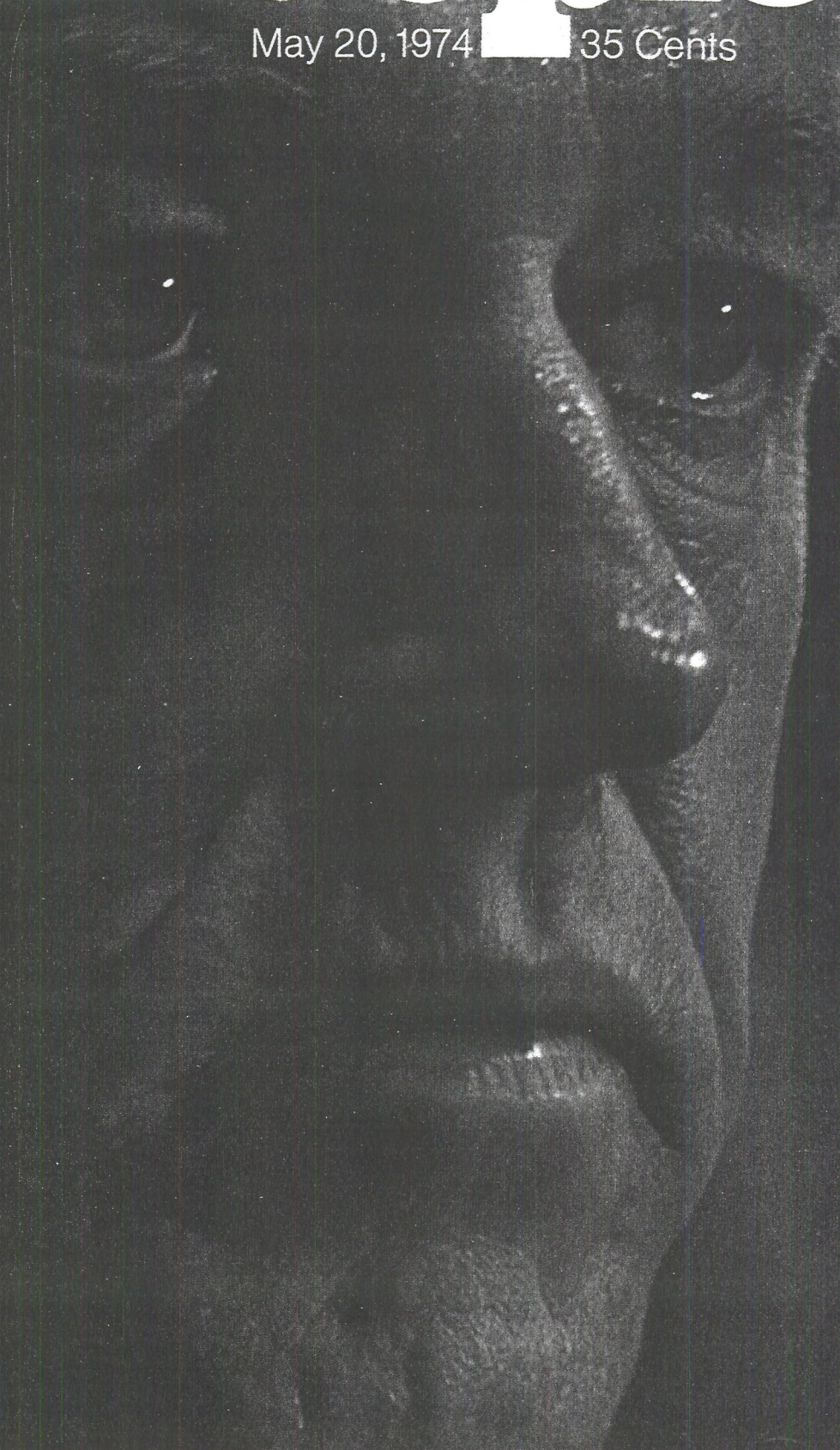
E. Howard Hunt

The spy whom
Nixon feared

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WATERGATE'S HUNT: 'I GOT A BAD SHAKE FROM MY COUNTRY'

As the author of more than 40 spy pot-boilers, mostly pseudonymous, and a CIA agent for 21 years, Watergate conspirator E. Howard Hunt Jr. has always lived close to his fantasies. He must have seemed a terribly logical candidate to White House operatives in search of someone to mastermind its plumbers' operation. It was not, as things turned out, a match made in heaven. For it was Hunt, in 1971, who helped engineer the foolish, futile looting of the office of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist. It was Hunt who recruited the bumbling team of buggers and burglars who made Watergate a code word for scandal. And it was Hunt whose demands for money left the administration entangled in cover-ups. Throughout the transcripts of White House tapes released this month runs the constant, nagging theme: Hunt knows too much; Hunt must be kept quiet; Hunt must be paid off.

Whatever Watergate has meant to the rest of the nation, for Hunt it has meant personal tragedy. At first, secure in the illusion he was serving his country and confident he had his government's backing, he coolly pleaded guilty to planning the Watergate break-in and awaited sentencing without naming his sponsors. Then, suddenly, his world fell apart. First his wife Dorothy, mother of his four children, was killed in a plane crash while carrying a mysterious parcel of \$10,000 in hundred-dollar bills. Then U.S. Judge John J. Sirica sentenced him to a

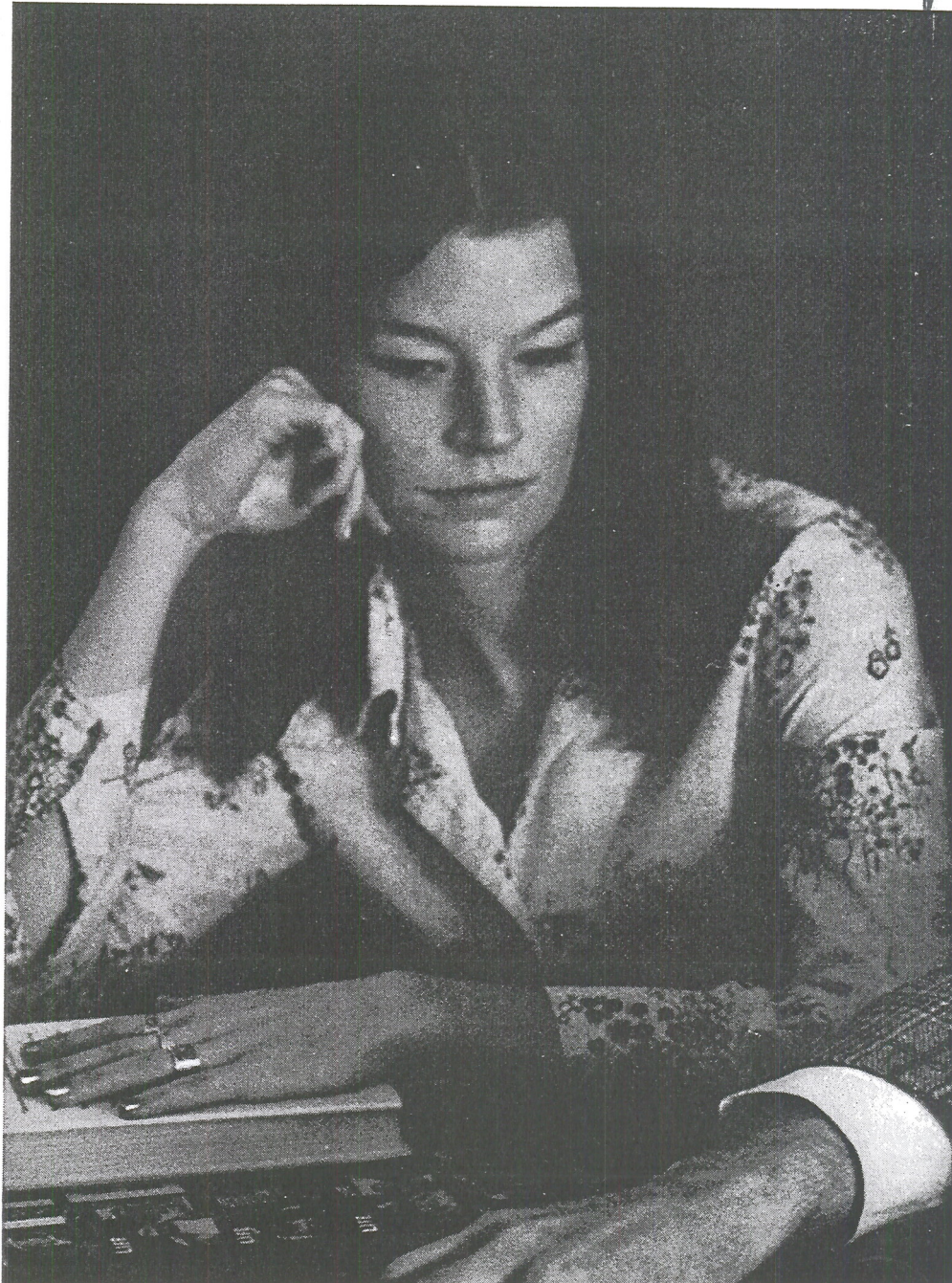
shattering 35-year provisional prison term in an effort to persuade him to talk, and he actually served almost 11 months behind bars. (Later the sentence was reduced to a more reasonable two-and-a-half to eight years, but only after Sirica's strategy had worked and Hunt had testified about the plumbers operation before a Washington grand jury.) For the shaken Hunt, a devoted family man and establishment loyalist, the sense of betrayal was almost too much to bear.

"I had always assumed, working for the CIA for so many years, that any-



WIDE WORLD

Freed on appeal early this year after over 10 months in prison, E. Howard Hunt Jr. appeared gaunt and unshaven.



Photographs by Stanley Tretick

UP FRONT

thing the White House wanted done was the law of the land," Hunt explained recently at his rambling home outside Washington. "I viewed this like any other mission. It just happened to take place inside this country."

Curiously, for a veteran of innumerable foreign intrigues, Hunt was stunned by his first taste of the squalor of prison. Initially he was held in solitary confinement at the District of Columbia jail. "Food was shoved at me between the bars of my cell," he recalls. "You kept time that way. You knew it was 6 in the morning, because that was when

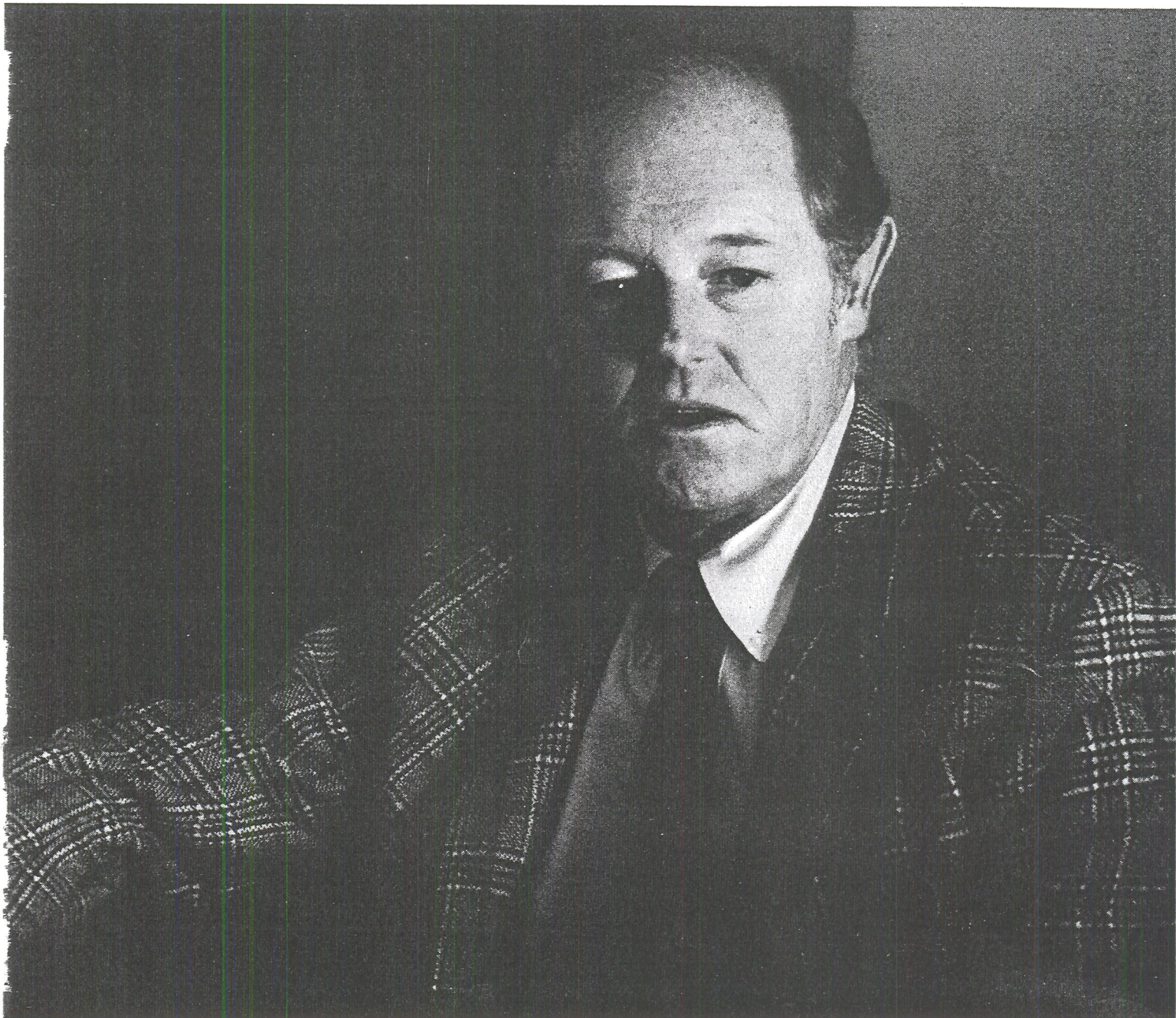
the man came by and shoved a paper plate through the bars. The filth was indescribable. There were roaches, rats, mice. The bedding was soaked with urine. Blankets and mattresses were never cleaned." Perhaps the most degrading experience was being carted to the grand jury hearing room to testify. "Your ankles are manacled, you've got leg irons on, and you're handcuffed," he says. "You've got a chain around your waist, and your wrists are cuffed to the chain. If you're fed, the marshal puts a hamburger in your mouth. I was treated like some sort of sick an-

imal, and I was overcome by it."

During the preliminary talks with the Senate Watergate committee in closed session, he was awakened at 4 a.m., fed breakfast and taken from the jail. He was returned to the jail after testifying, too late for the evening meal. Hungry, he tried to sleep, but the cell-block television kept him awake until lights out at 2 a.m. At 4 a.m. the cycle began again.

Hunt, now 55, was released from pris-

His appeal still pending, Hunt has returned to his Potomac, Md. home, where he is shown with his older daughter Lisa, 23.





Hunt's children, St. John and Lisa, heard him testify before the Watergate committee.

on last January pending a decision on his appeal for a new trial but was forbidden by Judge Sirica to discuss any aspect of Watergate. Today, feeling used and bewildered, he is trying to adjust to the return of his freedom. His legal fees, which once amounted to a stunning \$1,500 a day, are continuing at a lesser rate, and Hunt is hurrying to dictate his memoirs, for which G. P. Putnam's Sons has paid a reported \$100,000. And paperback rights have also been sold for a six-figure sum.

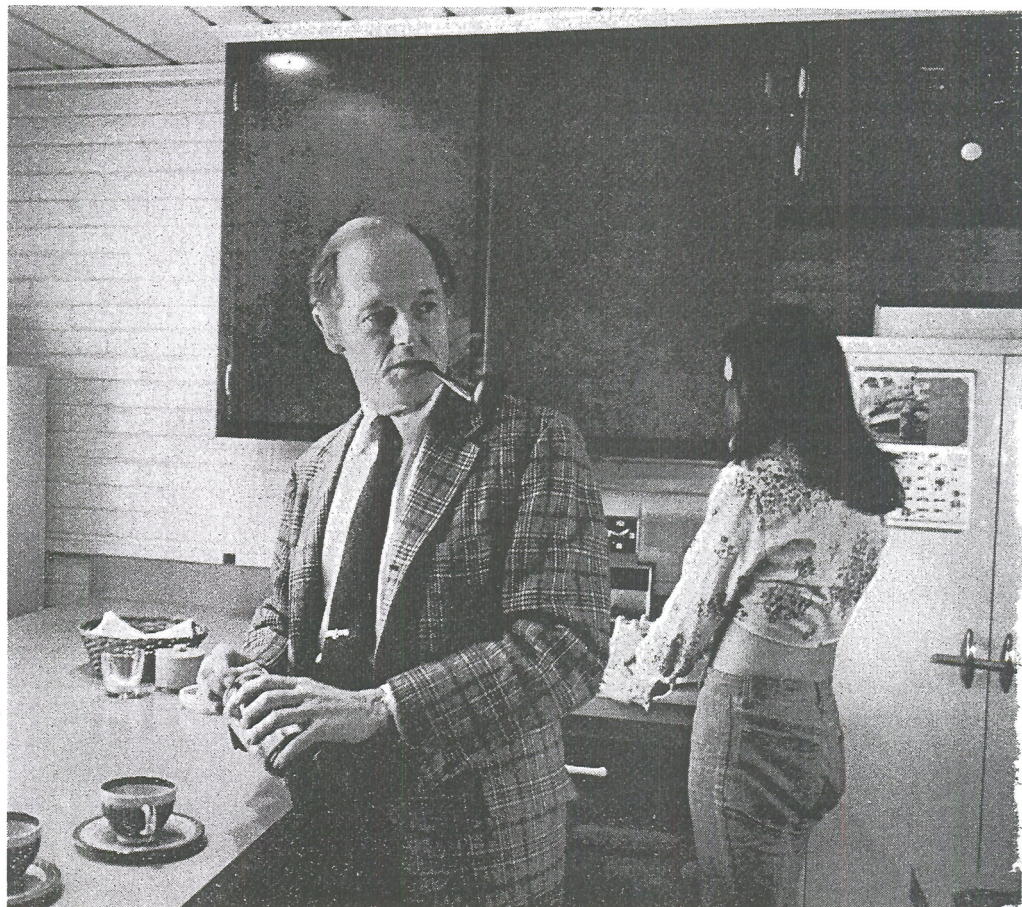
Although Hunt's color has improved remarkably since his ashen appearance before the Watergate committee last fall, and he has shaken off the visible effects of the stroke that he suffered in prison, he has clearly lost much of his vigor. Once a trim, wiry tennis player who felt ten years younger than his actual age, Hunt is still paying the price of imprisonment—and, in fact, his next book will be a plea for prison reform. "It's only 13 months since I went to prison," he says, "but I feel like a very old man now." He sleeps poorly, and has difficulty making routine decisions. At first, just after his release, he was confronted with a stack of 300 to 400 unopened letters and had to struggle just to think what to do with them. "It was a terrible physical effort," he says, "merely to pick up the letter opener and insert it into the first letter. I suppose I was like one of those Japanese soldiers just out of hiding. I was not accustomed to making decisions." Although he moves more slowly now, he is proud that his confinement didn't give him the aimless "convict's shuf-

fle." "And I've learned to make eye contact again," he says. "That's something you don't do in prison."

Perhaps Hunt's most anguishing task is to bind his scattered children into a family again. His older daughter, 23-year-old Lisa, lives with friends in nearby Kensington, Md. Her sister Kevan, 21, is at college in Massachusetts. Hunt's son St. John, 20, is on the road playing guitar with his own rock band, and the youngest, 10-year-old Bobby, is living in Florida with his godfather's family. Hunt went to see Bobby

as soon as he got out of prison, and Bobby insisted that he meet several of his young friends without delay. When the children had gone, Bobby explained why. "He said 'I'm so glad you could meet them, because some of them didn't believe I had a poppa and it meant a lot to me.'" Hunt recalls the incident with his voice cracking.

Although he realizes many of his old friends have turned against him, Hunt is astonished to find that some former CIA colleagues consider him to have become a "nonperson." He refuses to think of himself as a criminal. He does, however, regret having worked for the White House. "Anybody who had been in government as long as I had would be thrilled to come into the White House as a consultant to the President," he admits. "And I was. But I became increasingly surprised by the things I was asked to do. In retrospect, I would much rather have been left alone." To this day, however, he staunchly professes to see no difference between the Ellsberg and Watergate break-ins and any CIA operation against a foreign enemy. A proud man, the son of a staunch Republican judge in tiny Hamburg, N.Y., Hunt has been humiliated by what has befallen him and feels his dedication has been poorly repaid. But he refuses to blame any official by name. As close as he will come to discussing



At ease in his kitchen, Hunt prepares coffee as daughter Lisa talks on the phone.

the actual operation is to observe with oddly detached understatement: "I think that the people at the White House to whom I had given my loyalty had not sufficiently estimated the consequences of discovery. When they were faced with the hard decision of what you do at 4 in the morning when five men are in jail, *nothing was done.*" What Hunt thinks should have been done, obviously, would have included the release of the burglars, the destruction of records and the disappearance of all persons involved. That, one is given to understand, is how the CIA would have done it.

Abandoned now by his sponsors in espionage, Hunt is resigned to a lifetime in Watergate's shadow. Soon, however, he hopes to sell his \$140,000

hunt-country home and move to Miami to be with his son. And whenever he is legally able, he says, he would like to leave the U.S. forever. "I think I'd be very happy in Spain or France," he says. "I feel I've gotten a pretty bad shake in this country and I'll be a marked man for the rest of my life."

But before Hunt can become an expatriate, he faces the prospect of more time in prison. If his appeal is denied he must serve at least 20 more months, and he accepts it with glum resignation. "I used to think prison would be no worse than navy boot camp," he says wistfully, "but I was a lot younger then. I hadn't realized how much I'd aged. In prison I came closer to the breaking point than I had ever come before in my life."

CLARE CRAWFORD

Hunt checks the time in the study where he spends hours daily dictating his memoirs into the tape recorder behind him.

