

E. Howard Hunt, Master Storyteller

The agent who had planted the mike in the target office had tested the key, so the first barrier would yield. But the lock on the office door was a later model—pin and tumbler—and they would have to make its key on the spot ... "All right," Peter said curtly, "I don't want heroes, just the contents of the safe."

At first glance, this description of the espionage burglary of a government office building, contained in a yellowing 1965 paperback called *On Hazardous Duty*, might seem to be a rather ordinary experience in the life of Ace CIA Agent Peter Ward. As the star of a series of fictional thrillers by David St. John, Ward has had far more exciting adventures. There was the time, for instance, when he was assigned to verify the identity of the man with the scarred face who was returning from 20 years in Soviet slave labor camps to claim the throne of Spain. Or the time he went to Japan on

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his own and wound up in "a wild round of I Spy, featuring Koto-playing geishas, Chi-Com masters, and a beautiful Nipponese belle who's simply murder in the bath." *Hazardous Duty's* burglary scene is of special interest, however, to readers who know that Author David St. John is really E. Howard Hunt, the convicted Watergate conspirator.

During the past 30 years, 20 of them spent working for the CIA, Hunt has managed to write no fewer than 47 novels under a string of pen names: John



Baxter, Gordon Davis and Robert Dietrich, as well as David St. John. His chief characters are Agent Ward, a younger version of Hunt himself (they both went to Brown University), and a casual, thrill-hunting Washington C.P.A., Steve Bentley, who describes the nation's capital as "a great town if you've got the stamina of a Cape buffalo and the wealth of a Punjab prince." Most of the books are predictable concoctions of es-



pionage and sex in exotic settings. Hunt is said to earn \$20,000 a year from his writing.

While in the CIA, Hunt cranked out at least one, and sometimes three books a year, drawing on his knowledge of agency operations. Each time he was obliged to submit the manuscript to his superiors for approval. "I made a conscientious effort to fudge details, blurring locations and identities so they couldn't be recognized," Hunt told TIME Correspondent David Beckwith. But occasionally his superiors would censor a scene or a theme, he recalled, "and I'd learn that some episode I thought I'd made up from whole cloth had described an actual operation—one that I'd never heard about."

Hunt's newest novel, *The Berlin Ending*, is about a Willy Brandt-like character—Klaus Werber, West German Foreign Minister and notorious "anti-Communist cold warrior," perhaps to be honored with the Nobel Prize and the secretary-generalship of the United Nations. The gimmick: in truth Werber is a Soviet agent.

To be published in September, *Berlin* is a longer and more elaborately plotted version of the Hunt formula and

the Hunt style ("He was back, as the saying went, to square one"), but it is a notch above his usual work. Hunt's hero this time is ex-CIA Agent Neal Thorpe, who returns to the spy game to save Werber's beautiful stepdaughter Annalise (who knows too much). He loves espionage ("He was alive again") but loathes politics. When Thorpe snorts in disgust at a mere mention of the U.N., his mysterious CIA boss, "the man called Smith," replies: "I may agree with your appraisal of the U.N., but so long as our government counts it a worthwhile forum, I feel bound to do so too." Hunt describes the CIA as "grown old and cautious, prim, reliant on technology far more than human beings."

In the end, after a web of plots and counterplots, the mission fails, and Annalise decides to go home again and keep her mouth shut about her wicked stepfather. "God damn you!" cries Thorpe, who is facing a murder charge on her account. Everybody loses, concludes Hunt, "except Klaus Werber, who was, as the saying went, home free."

The book is dedicated to Hunt's wife Dorothy ("23 years, three months and one day"), who was killed in a plane crash last December while taking

\$10,000 in \$100 bills to Chicago. Hunt also credits his wife with suggesting the book's ending. On the way to the airport for the fatal flight, he says, "she told me that the original ending was just too pat, that the good guys won too easily. She said, 'The evildoers of the world are not always punished, sometimes the son of a bitch gets away with it and the good people don't.' I dropped her off, thought about it and decided she was right. I was sitting at the typewriter, making the changes in the ending as she suggested, when my son told me about the crash. It was her final contribution to my writing."

Hunt may be in Danbury prison awaiting final sentencing, but he has suddenly become a fairly hot literary property. Besides the new novel, he has a nonfiction account of the Bay of Pigs—in which he was involved—coming out in the fall, and his publishers are after him to write a book about Watergate as soon as he can. His current literary plans are unknown, but four months ago, not long before he went to prison, he expressed the desire to retire to Tossa, on Spain's Costa Brava, to "do a book about an ex-U.S. jailbird who is looking for peace."

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