

THE STRANGE CAREER OF E. HOWARD HUNT

COMPULSIVE SPY

By TAD
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ARTICLE I: Fish Out of Water.

MEN LIKE HOWARD HUNT are curiously frozen in the past. Twenty-five years before Watergate, Hunt and many others made a commitment to certain ideas, they also committed themselves to certain techniques, which once upon a time seemed ideologies, and a modus vivendi. In a sense, they also committed themselves to certain techniques, which once upon a time seemed to function perfectly in an imperfect world.

The world went on changing, as it must, every day, week, month, and year, but the Hunts of our time did not follow the evolution. They were bypassed by history, and this lies at the root of their tragedies. This is perhaps why Hunt was sent to a federal prison. [He is now free, his sentence having been reduced.]

By 1973, most of the world has come to terms with the notion that communism is not a monolithic force and that it has many faces. President Nixon has gone to Peking and to Moscow. Leonid I. Brezhnev has come to Washington. The whole East-West relationship has undergone an astounding transformation.

BOOK DIGEST

But there are men—men with the commitments that Howard Hunt made for the better part of his adult life—who resist change. To them, the CIA—and, to their way of thinking, the world—is tragically no longer what it used to be. Hunt himself has said this to friends and has made this point in his latest novel published when he was already languishing in prison, the victim of a society he no longer could understand.



Entering a House Armed Services subcommittee hearing last summer.

But the changes in the CIA started long before Watergate. Already by 1961, when President Kennedy came into office, new winds were blowing in the intelligence community. Even in the narrow context of its anti-communism, the vocational religion of the CIA, the notion was developing that in this increasingly sophisticated world communism must be opposed subtly and intelligently.

Simple spying and "dirty tricks" were no longer good enough. Agents like Hunt might still have been involved in "black" operations, but in Washington new ideas were taking shape.

For example, in the closing years of the Eisenhower administration the Agency decided to move effectively in the field of culture. Covertly, as it does all things, the CIA undertook to finance the Congress for Cultural Freedom and a group of first-rate intellectual magazines such as *Encounter* in London, *Der Monat* in West Germany, *Preuves* in France, and others.

The idea was to encourage non-Communist liberals and "progressive" groups, on the theory that it was disastrous for the United States to be wedded exclusively to right-wing groups or publications. This was, to be sure, an act of political manipulation, but as one of the senior Agency people engaged in this covert intellectual enterprise explained to me, the U. S. simply could not go on being identified with clearly reactionary forces such as the *patronat* organization of wealthy employers in France, at a time

when the Communist Party was building up strength in the labor unions.

By the same token, it was felt that American viewers no longer should be exclusively reflected in newspapers around the world receiving secret CIA subsidies and identified with rightist causes. New generations have come to the fore, he said, and we had to adopt our approach to their intellectual and social requirements and caliber. So a new flexibility, annoying to the old-timers, came into being.



At home, the CIA, slightly overstepping its statutory role, managed to subsidize a highly active publishing house in New York without insisting that it stay away from liberal manuscripts or even criticisms of the Agency. This cultural effort was primarily engineered by two men—Robert Amory, then the CIA's Deputy Director, and Cord Meyer, a brilliant but unpredictable operator who in his earlier years was an active advocate of world federalism.

In the ironic manner in which people respond to things, the CIA came under heavy criticism from American liberals in the mid-1960s for its underwriting of the Congress for Cultural Freedom, the intellectual magazines and the New York publishing house. Yet it seems to me that this was in many ways a positive contribution from the Agency's treasury.

Had the money come from the State Dept., there would have been little outcry,

even though the same taxpayer money goes into the coffers of both the CIA and the State Dept. But at the other end of the spectrum, the Hunt generation in the CIA found it objectionable that the Agency was embarking on such peculiar schemes when, they felt, it could be concentrating on better and better "black" operations, taking advantage of the new technology that could be applied to clandestine crafts.

Another former senior CIA official complained to me that the Agency was being destroyed because its new management was getting away from classical clandestine work in favor of the new technology, as manifested by orbiting satellites and a whole new arsenal of electronic intelligence. This particular man, who devoted most of his career to clandestine operations from Asia to the Soviet borders, was nevertheless prepared to accept the changing nature of intelligence without going to irrational extremes as some others had done.

But now, against this background, one must look at a man like Howard Hunt. He retired from the CIA in 1970, his final period of service consisting of irrelevant tasks given him so that he could serve out his time and qualify for a pension. Once out of the CIA, Hunt—and there are others—was like a fish out of water.

He felt useless and frustrated, both as an individual and as an intelligence operative. This made him the natural candidate for the kind of domestic intelligence plan that the White House was beginning to put into effect.

And when—a year after his retirement from the CIA, a year of unhappiness and emptiness—Hunt was recruited by the White House for its undercover operations, it was only natural that he should bring to this new assignment all the techniques of black propaganda and covert political action that he had employed for so many years against the foreign "enemies" of his country. The tragic difference, or the tragic misunderstanding, was that in his new capacity Hunt was turning these weapons and techniques against fellow Americans at home.

The way Hunt went about his new job could be called pathetic, had it not been part of a scheme of extraordinary danger to the welfare of the U. S. He arranged secret interviews with the CIA's top men, this time arriving at the CIA Executive Office with a White House mandate.

He behaved like the caricature of a secret agent. He procured from the CIA a silly wig, a tiny camera to be hidden in a tobacco pouch, false identification papers, and, of all implausible things, a speech-altering device. He wrote letters to fellow ex-CIA agents to lure them to join his fantasmagoric operations with offers of cash payments. He turned to his former Cuban-American associates from the day of the Bay of Pigs invasion and, counting on their special brand of loyalty, fitted them into a madcap operation that led to prison terms for two of these old comrades and for two others who were added to his improbable task force.



It is perhaps understandable, if one cares to understand such things, why Hunt acted in his fashion, never doing openly what could be done secretly, basking in the glory of the new intrigue, and reliving the good old days of conspiracy. But what cannot be so readily understood is that in Richard Nixon's Washington there was a demand for a man like Howard Hunt and for the kind of services that he would readily and gleefully perform. This, naturally, is the crux of the whole Watergate matter.

There was a President's staff, willing and prepared to procure for themselves a private intelligence service in order to satisfy their immediate political needs, as well as to help them cope with a society in ferment, whose acts of dissent seemed to petrify the American Presidency even more than the whole nuclear arsenal controlled by President Nixon's new partner in the world chess game, Secretary General Brezhnev.

With the whole intelligence community in a state of general disarray because of the way in which Nixon was running the government, a situation had arisen in which the formation of a private investigating unit in the White House made sense to its occu-

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pant. Key men in the Nixon Administration embarked on a policy of undermining both the CIA and the FBI.

A lot of it was just plain politics at its worst. But some of it was because the White House was being frustrated in its efforts to control the aging J. Edgar Hoover and to subordinate the CIA to the foreign-policy formulations emanating from the all-powerful National Security Council.

Under Nixon and his Special Assistant for National Security, Henry Kissinger, the White House set out to do away with the basic principle laid down in the creation of

the CIA in 1947—its independence in presenting its judgments to the ultimate policymaker of the nation. I like to believe that even such old war horses as the late Allen Dulles would not have taken kindly to the controls that Nixon and Kissinger tried to impose on the CIA.

The casual observer in the 1970s could not possibly have been aware of the political struggle which was undercutting both the foreign and the domestic intelligence agencies. Even with the limited perspective that one already has on these events, it seems almost beyond comprehension how the Nixon White House could have played political games with the intelligence community and the FBI, undermining both for reasons that could not possibly benefit national interests and national security, the very objectives that the President continuously invoked in almost every context of American political life.

But it became tragically logical that the men whom the President's staff got to con-



The CIA gave him a wig.

duct their private intelligence operations—behind the back and over the heads of the FBI and the CIA—should be frustrated intelligence adventurers such as Howard Hunt and his literal partner in crime, G. Gordon Liddy, the one-time FBI agent with delusions of grandeur.

At the age of 53, Howard Hunt, hungry for prestige, power, and money, became in this manner the chief operative in an insane game of underhanded and undercover politics which the Presidency was then mounting. This thin, sandy-haired man, with the most easily forgettable of faces, became one of the co-architects of what might have been an American police state if he had not blown the whole operation out of the water through extraordinary carelessness, arrogance, and overconfidence.

Continued Tomorrow

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