

THE STRANGE CAREER OF E. HOWARD HUNT

COMPULSIVE SPY

By TAD
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ARTICLE III: The Writer.

THE YEAR 1943 marked the start of Hunt's career in clandestinity. It was the turning point in his life, although friends were to say later that it was during the war years that Howard had first "flipped."

It is unclear, as so many other things are about Hunt's life, under what circumstances he joined the Office of Strategic Services. At that time, the OSS was already well established all over the world, drawing its personnel from both military and civilian sources.

To the extent that this episode in his life can be reconstructed, Hunt volunteered for the Army Air Corps in 1943, and was assigned, first as a student and then as instructor, to the Air Force Intelligence School at Orlando, Florida. At some point in late 1943, he volunteered for the OSS and

was quickly trained in clandestine intelligence work.

Hunt's time in the OSS is also unclear. Some in-

formation indicates that he was attached to an OSS unit in Southeast Asia which won a Presidential citation. Hunt may have belonged to this OSS Detachment No. 101, but it is by no means certain.

The 101, which fought in Burma with local guerrillas and distinguished itself in defeating superior Japanese forces, is the only OSS Detachment to have received a Presidential citation. (It was at one time commanded by William R. Peer, who later became a Lieutenant General and was in charge of investigating the My Lai massacre in the Vietnam war.)

I know quite a few of the 101 Detachment veterans, but none of them remembers the face or the name of Howard Hunt.

It may be of some interest to note that among the officers of OSS Detachment 101 was Clark MacGregor, later a Congressman, a White House staffer, and, after the Watergate break-in, the replacement for John Mitchell as head of the Committee for the Re-Election of the President. Whether or not Hunt knew MacGregor in some OSS capacity is not known. However, at the end

of the Burmese campaign a number of OSS officers from Detachment 101 were shifted to Detachment 202 in China, and many of them parachuted into Japanese cities to supervise the surrender of Japanese garrisons.

Yet the people from Detachment 101 have no recollection of Hunt in China, either. A leading member of the 101 said that it was essentially composed of 75 or so American officers who knew each other intimately and that it was inconceivable that Hunt would not have been known to the group had he been with them at some stage.

According to the official record, Hunt left the OSS as a First Lieutenant in the Army Air Corps in 1946. He obtained a Guggenheim Fellowship sometime during 1946 and spent close to a year in Mexico learning more Spanish and writing books. He had already written a few wartime spy thrillers, and evidently the Guggenheim committee considered him to be of some promise. This was Hunt's first exposure to Latin America, except for his student visit to Havana in the late 1930s.

Hunt's first and probably best book, "East of Farewell," was published by Knopf in 1942. It was written when he was recovering from injuries suffered aboard the Navy ship, just before he joined the OSS. "East of Farewell" received very favorable reviews, and a New York publisher who then knew the author told me recently that this first book, written when Hunt was only

24 years old, demonstrated well the case of "a writer with great promise which was never fulfilled."

Hunt's second book was "Limit of Darkness," apparently based on his short assignment as a war correspondent. A reviewer assessed it succinctly: it "was not 'The Naked and the Dead,' but it is a creditable war novel of the 'I-seen-it' variety so popular during the war."

Returning from Mexico, Hunt spent all of 1947 and the early part of 1948 back in the United States employed as a screen writer, though we do not know where or by whom. This period produced three more books.

**BOOK
DIGEST**

One, "Maelstrom," in 1948, was based on Hunt's Mexican experience and had a hero fleeing from the U. S. to Mexico to escape a Senate investigation. (This was curious prescience. After the Watergate break-in, Hunt himself was advised by the White House to flee the U. S. to avoid investigations which, in time, were to include Senate hearings.)

"Maelstrom" did quite well and, according to the publisher in New York, sold some 150,000 copies in paperback, which was not bad in those days. Also in 1948 he wrote "Stranger in Town," stories of the French Resistance. In 1949 came "Bimini Run," an **adventure** story built around a former Marine and a drifting gambler named Hank Sturgis.

Interestingly, Frank Sturgis was 23 years later one of the Watergate raiders under Hunt's command. This real Sturgis is a former Marine who has led a life of extraordinary adventures. I have no idea whether or how Hunt might have known Sturgis before 1949, but it is not a very common name. Perhaps it was a coincidence. "Bimini Run" did well in the paperback trade, likewise selling around 150,000 copies.

Hunt wrote under his own name until he joined the CIA. Afterward he turned to pseudonyms: John Baxter, Gordon Davis, Robert Dietrich, David St. John. The last one was a combination of the first names of his two sons. Then Watergate ironically gave him back the use of his real name on

book covers. Two of them came out in 1973 as he sat in the federal prison at Danbury, Conn. His Watergate notoriety started a Howard Hunt literary mini-cult.

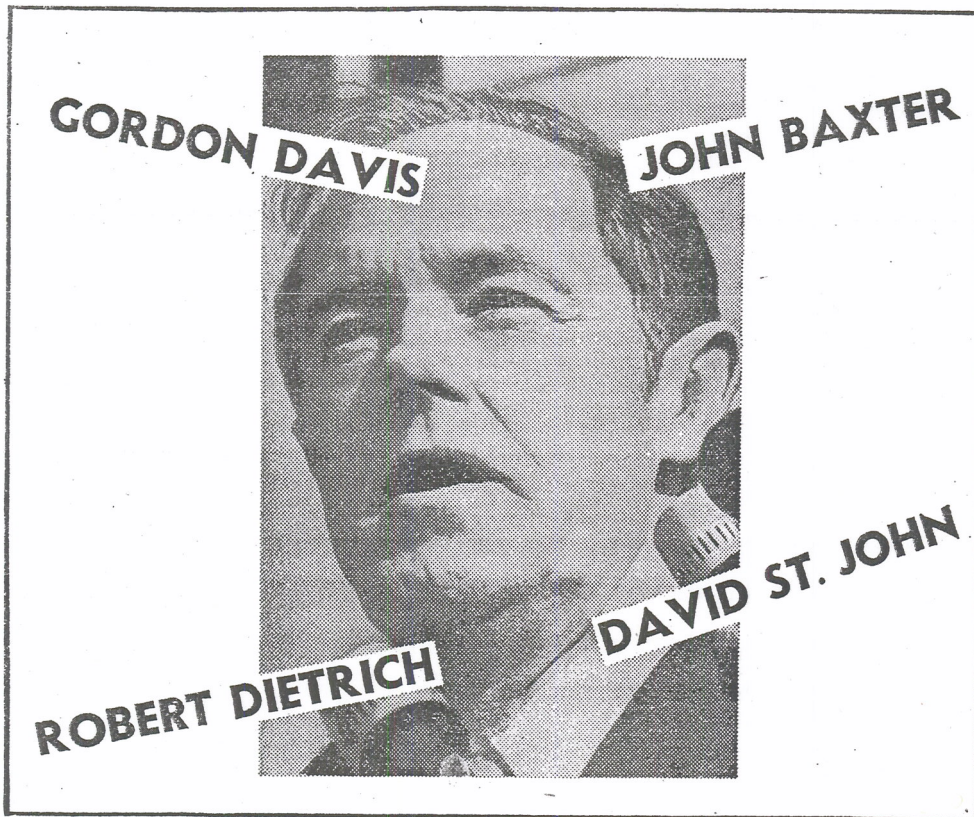
It appears that Hunt joined the CIA very late in 1947 or in the early part of 1948. Again, we do not know what precisely led him to join the infant intelligence organization. We do know, of course, that Hunt was attracted to adventure and excitement, and, as for so many OSS people, for him the CIA was a natural next step.

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Howard Hunt, then a 30-year-old bachelor, arrived in Paris sometime in 1948—we do not know the precise date—under his newly acquired cover as a State Dept. reserve officer. Ostensibly, he was attached to the Economic Corporation Administration (ECA), the Marshall Plan organization, to perform liaison with the American Embassy. Actually, he belonged to the year-old CIA station in the French capital.

ECA's principal political objective was to strengthen the European economies, in this instance the French economy, as part of the wider effort to block Communist expansion and penetration. The CIA was interested in precisely the same objective, and Hunt fitted well into the over-all operation.

In this first of his CIA assignments,



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The pseudonyms Hunt wrote under after he joined the CIA.

Hunt was chiefly involved in covert political activity and propaganda, with special emphasis on the French press and labor organizations. He had already acquired his rigorous anti-Communist attitude and made it perfectly clear to his embassy colleagues, as some of them remember to this day, where he stood politically and what he thought of State Dept. "liberals" who, in his judgment, were too soft on communism.

Even liberal priests bothered him. Himself a devout Roman Catholic, Hunt held the "worker priests" of Western Europe in deep contempt and later was to fear that their influence would spread to Latin America. As he wrote subsequently, "I recalled the 'worker priests' in France and Italy so many of whom were fellow travelers, and of the frankly subversive work in which they engaged."

But there was more than intelligence work in Paris in 1948, especially for an American bachelor with valuable dollars and access to the well-stocked embassy commissary. One of Hunt's close friends was Ionie Robinson, a painter and one of the most popular American women in Paris in those days. He certainly enjoyed the pleasures of Paris, and there seems to be no question that sex and alcohol—both of them in every conceivable dimension—were much on his mind.

But nobody can really tell more about Hunt in Paris than he did himself in a novel entitled "A Foreign Affair," published in 1954 under the pen name of John Baxter. The novel, covering his time in Paris and a brief stay in Vienna, sticks closely to auto-

biographical facts, as most Hunt books do. And it displays a peculiar mixture of politics and sex.

The hero, Michael Prentice, happens to be an American diplomat attached to the ECA. He is a hard-drinking, handsome, and decidedly anti-Communist bachelor, battling his pro-leftist colleagues and carrying on a torrid love affair with a French countess, whose Spanish husband was believed to have died in Russia as an officer with the Blue Division that fought alongside the Nazis in World War II. (Hunt's acquaintances say that his real romantic life was not quite so flamboyant and his interest in sex was highly intellectual or sublimated. Many years later, according to his Cuban friends. Hunt spent a whole night in a Miami motel with a pliant young lady supplied by his hosts. But, she complained later, "All he did was to keep me up all night talking about his novels.")

When it comes to sex, the book borders on the pornographic. The author seems to have a strong interest in homosexual men and lesbians, and the novel is full of incidents in homosexual bars and other situations involving male and female homosexuality. It should also be added that Hunt has a good ear for certain kinds of speech; his heroes sound exactly like Howard Hunt quoting himself in his book on the Bay of Pigs, written many years later.

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On Sept. 7, 1949, a little over a year after his arrival in Paris, Hunt married (over his parents' objections) a dark-haired young lady named Dorothy L. Wetzel, a secretary for the CIA station in Paris, also working under a State Dept. cover. Dorothy was born in Dayton, Ohio, but from the age of three she lived with her uncle and aunt because her parents were divorced and her mother evidently could not afford to take care of a young child.

A quiet girl, with an intellectual bent, Dorothy went to a Cleveland high school and attended Bowling Green State University in Bowling Green, Ohio. Foreign languages were one of her greatest interests. She was an avid reader and she spoke French and Spanish fluently by the time she joined the CIA. Her interest in foreign lands and languages was probably what attracted her to the Agency.

One can readily imagine this reserved young girl becoming captivated by the dashing Howard Hunt. For his part, he probably made the most of his intellectual capacities to impress her. Excellently educated, Hunt had high literary aspirations. Almost incongruously, his espionage-cum-sex novels begin with epigraphs from such greats as Ezra Pound or Pliny the Elder. But we must remember that Hunt was a classicist.

In the winter of 1949-50 Hunt was sent on a temporary assignment to Vienna, leaving Dorothy behind in Paris. "A Foreign Affair" also describes his days in Vienna, still under four-power occupation. Michael Prentice continues as a bachelor but leaves his beloved lady behind in France, just as Howard had Dorothy waiting for him in Paris. For Michael, Vienna is again the scene of complicated sexual liaisons, hard drinking, and political work.

Sometime in 1950, Hunt was ordered back to CIA headquarters, then located in temporary buildings—known as "Quarters Eye"—not far from the Lincoln Memorial in Washington. Dorothy returned with him to the U. S., and their first child, Lisa, was born in 1950.

Tomorrow: A Coup in Guatemala.

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