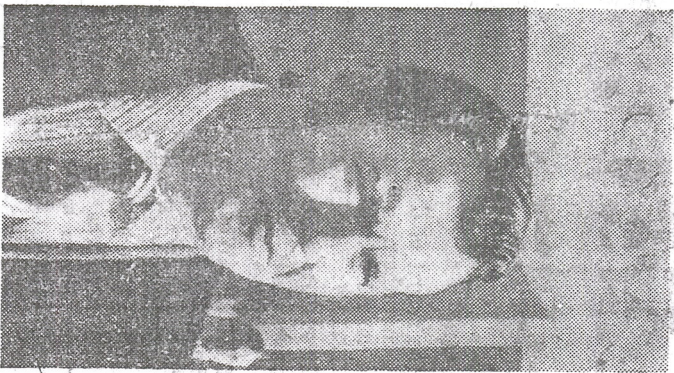


THE STRANGE CAREER OF E. HOWARD HUNT

COMPULSIVE SPY

By TAD SZULC



Bitman: Payday at a pay phone?

ARTICLE VI: Are There Secrets Still?

HOWARD HUNT'S personal behavior after his return to Washington tells a strange story. It is a story of deceit, lies, blackmail, and disloyalty toward virtually everybody with whom he had been associated.

On July 20, 1972, Hunt began to threaten the White House with public disclosure of his other secret activities in the Special Investigative Unit unless he was paid off. Hunt is said to have sent a message, saying "the Writer has a manuscript of a play to sell," via Caddy, the lawyer whom he visited the night of the break-in, to be passed on to the White House. Caddy relayed the word to Paul O'Brien, an attorney for the Com-



Hunt (r) on Buckley's 'Firing Line' in January, 1973. Southern Educational Community Assn. photo. *Watergate: The spirit of CIA.*



McCord: Hunt knew . . .



The ever-silent Liddy.

mittee to Re-Elect, who, in turn, passed it on to John Dean.

Hunt's message apparently was understood quite well at the White House, because large payments began to be made to him almost immediately for his and his family's expenses as well as for Bittman's

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fees. To be sure, Hunt had lost in income from the Mullen company, for he never again went back to work there. His continued employment there was in any case highly unlikely, even if he had reported for duty. Bennett made that clear.

Dorothy Hunt lost her part-time job at the Spanish Embassy, following The New York Times' publication of a story I had written about her work there. Hunt, of course, still had his CIA retirement pay, but he was evidently after bigger stakes. Again it was his insatiable desire for money.

The fact that large payments were made by the White House to Hunt seems to support the idea that the White House Special Investigative Unit had engaged in activities that are still secret. It appeared that the White House may still have an interest in protecting Hunt for what the President has described as "national security" reasons.

One may theorize that some kind of an agreement exists between Hunt and his former White House superiors that he will maintain his silence about certain top-secret projects, despite his public complaints that they let him down. It may be further theorized that these payments continued throughout 1973.

Nixon himself said that he was apprised in March, 1973, that Hunt was demanding \$120,000 in fresh money to keep from revealing information that he, Hunt, believed to be extremely damaging to the administration.

James McCord, who never belonged to the Special Unit, said in a memorandum submitted to the Senate Watergate investigating committee and federal prosecutors in the case on May 8, 1973, that the FBI and the CIA had been prevented from properly investigating Watergate on White House orders. "E. Howard Hunt has additional in-

formation relevant to the above. Hunt stated to me on more than one occasion in the latter part of 1972, that he, Hunt, had information in his possession which 'would be sufficient to impeach the President.'"

(Late in August, 1973, new information was developed that Hunt had maintained contacts with a senior Secret Service agent in Miami sometime in 1971 for reasons that were not immediately clear.)

"In addition," McCord said, "Mrs. E. Howard Hunt, on or about November, 1972, in a personal conversation with me, stated that E. Howard Hunt had just dictated a three-page letter which Hunt's attorney, William O. Bittman, had read to Kenneth Parkinson, the attorney for the Committee to Re-Elect the President, in which letter Hunt purportedly threatened to 'blow the White House out of the water.' Mrs. Hunt at this point in her conversation with me, also repeated the statement which she, too, had made before, which was that E. Howard Hunt had information which could impeach the President."

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In September, 1972, Hunt testified before a federal grand jury in Washington. He freely admitted his part in the Watergate break-in, but volunteered no information concerning the 1971 raid on Dr. Fielding's office in Los Angeles or the forgery of Vietnam cables intended to blacken John F. Kennedy's reputation.

Federal prosecutors, ignorant of these matters, did not question him about anything except the Watergate burglary. The existence of the Special Unit was not known to them at the time.

Along with Liddy and the "Watergate Five," Hunt was indicted on Sept. 15. His indictment on six counts was based principally on his role in the Watergate burglary. When Hunt and his associates came to court in January, 1973, the judge was unaware that there was much more to the case than just a conspiracy to commit political espionage through the Watergate break-ins, although newspapers insisted that this was part of a wider operation directed from "high up."

Since Ehrlichman, Krogh, and Young as former Presidential aides are protected in all their testimony by executive privilege invoked by Nixon and accepted by the Senate Select Committee on matters pertaining to national security, only Hunt and Liddy

could conceivably tell the full story of the Special Unit's activities. Testifying under special immunity from further prosecution before grand jurors in Washington and Los Angeles in 1973, after his sentencing, Hunt only then disclosed the other aspects of his activities. He admitted that he was involved in the Ellsberg raid and the Vietnamese papers forgery, after word about these projects leaked out through other channels.

But even in April, he volunteered nothing else of importance. Evidently, he was keeping his end of what apparently was a blackmail bargain. He was the "Writer" ready to sell the manuscript of his "play" to the highest bidder. Liddy, on the other hand, has maintained absolute silence . . .

A rough estimate in mid-1973 was that Hunt collected more than \$200,000 in payments from the White House and the Re-Election Committee, beginning in July, 1971. Until December, 1972, the money was usually given to Dorothy Hunt by Tony Ulasewicz, the White House investigator. After her death, payments were handled through Bittman and other channels. But in mid-August, 1973, Bittman withdrew as Hunt's attorney without any explanation, to be replaced by another Washington lawyer, Sidney Sachs.

Some investigators believe that Bittman had collected over \$90,000 in legal fees by the time he withdrew from the case. Ulasewicz testified earlier that he alone paid Bittman \$25,000 in fees, leaving the money in a brown envelope in a telephone booth in the lobby of the attorney's office building. (In those days, by the way, Hunt and Mrs. Hunt were called in the White House the "Writer" and the "Writer's Wife.")

Between his indictment and the trial, Hunt, as were the others, was free on bail. He used his time to protect his flanks in a variety of ways—the money demands conveyed to the "higher-ups" by Dorothy and Bittman was one—and to complete his latest novel. On Jan. 18, 1973, a few days after pleading guilty, he went to San Francisco to appear on the television program "Firing Line," moderated by his old friend Bill Buckley. This was Hunt's only public appearance since Watergate.

Hunt was cool and composed as he sat before the cameras, dapper in a dark suit and conservative necktie. His first words on the program showed his anger at the government and the CIA, as he told Buckley that he considered that the official disclosure of his Agency past was a "unilateral abrogation by the government of a commit-

ment that we entered upon my retirement from the Central Intelligence Agency." Defiantly, but less accurately, he also said, "I was never a fugitive."



Under Buckley's tough questioning, Hunt acknowledged that the Watergate operation was conducted "in the spirit of a CIA action." Buckley, himself a one-time CIA agent, was seeking to establish the rather fundamental point that "lifelong experience . . . with the CIA teaches a person to forget about the legal impediments that lie between him and the accomplishment of a mission that he seeks to achieve."

Rereading the transcript of the "Firing Line" program in the light of knowledge developed in subsequent months, one is inevitably intrigued by Hunt's discussion of hypothetical operations "in Canada or Mexico." There have been other suggestions that the Special Unit mounted operations in Mexico. There is the fact that Hunt did obtain a Mexican tourism card as "Edward J. Hamilton," the identity given him by the CIA in 1971. And there is the long and contradictory record of testimony, as well as internal CIA and White House documents, as to whether FBI investigations in Mexico of some aspects of Watergate might endanger the Agency's covert operations there.

This record suggests strongly that the White House exercised maximum pressure to prevail on the CIA to declare that FBI investigations in Mexico *would* be detrimental. McCord has written that "the FBI was apparently proscribed at every turn . . . Even routine investigative efforts were suppressed . . . The question then is: who kept the wraps on the FBI in its investigation of the Watergate case?"

So among the many unanswered questions about the White House Special Unit, there is the one as to whether, indeed, it was involved in covert foreign operations that were kept hidden even from the CIA. Is this among the secrets still kept by Hunt and Liddy?

Last of Six Articles

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