

Four More Watergate Tapes Are Played At Trial, Expanding on Familiar Details

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WASHINGTON — Some new dimensions and considerable depth were added to the familiar details of the Watergate cover-up by the tapes of four previously unpublished White House conversations.

The tape recordings, played yesterday at the cover-up trial of five of former President Nixon's one-time aides, disclosed among other things that:

—Mr. Nixon decided in January 1973 that he could build a clemency case for Watergate conspirator E. Howard Hunt, whose wife had been killed in a plane crash, and agreed that the other defendants in the original Watergate trial either wouldn't talk or didn't know enough to damage higher-ups.

—The President and his chief of staff, H. R. Haldeman, acknowledged in a March 22, 1973, conversation that the White House was guilty in connection with the cover-up of the June 1972 break-in at Democratic headquarters in the Watergate office building.

—In that same conversation, Mr. Haldeman stated that he and his fellow defendant in the current trial, Nixon domestic adviser John Ehrlichman, worked on providing funds for the convicted Watergate burglars.

The wide-ranging conversations also contain many discussions reminiscent of those disclosed in the bombshell tapes released last spring. For example, Mr. Nixon and his aides agonize over whether their policy of "containment" will work, debate ways of dealing with the Senate Watergate Committee, and review lists of which Nixon aides might be vulnerable to what criminal charges.

The new tapes probably add more to the store of knowledge about Mr. Nixon's attitude on clemency for Hunt than about any other subject.

They show that in a late afternoon conversation on Jan. 8, 1973, President Nixon told his former special counsel, Charles Colson, that on the "question of clemency. . . . Hunt's is a simple case." Noting that Hunt's wife was dead and he had a child with brain damage, Mr. Nixon said, "we'll build, we'll build that son-of-a-bitch up like nobody's business. We'll have (columnist William) Buckley write a column and say, you know, that he, that he should have clemency, if you've given 18 years of service."

Commenting "that's it" on Hunt, "it's on the merits," Mr. Nixon added: "I would have difficulty with some of the others." However, Colson reassured him that "the vulnerabilities are different." He explained that "Hunt and (convicted conspirator G. Gordon) Liddy did the work. The others

didn't know any, direct information (unintelligible)."

"Uh, well, I think I agree," said Mr. Nixon.

Colson went on, saying that he "didn't give a damn" if the others "spend five years in jail" because "they can't hurt us." With regard to Hunt and Liddy, however, Colson said, "direct (unintelligible), meetings, discussions are very incriminating to us. More important than those."

The two men decided they didn't have to worry about Liddy because he was "tough" and probably wouldn't talk. They concluded with a reference to Liddy and apparently

Hunt as "both good healthy right-wing exuberants."

Some two and one-half months later, however, Mr. Nixon apparently had second thoughts about what Colson may have relayed to Hunt about executive clemency. He told Mr. Haldeman on March 22, 1973: "Let's face it, in terms, uh, in terms, uh, of pardon, uh, or so forth, if, if Colson is talking, uh, of a pardon, uh, Christmas, you know, right after the fact that the court, that they're convicted, or either before they're sentenced—he's out of his mind. He knows we can't do that."

"But if Hunt thinks that's what he's been promised . . ." commented Mr. Haldeman. "He'll shut up now," continued Mr. Nixon. "He'll, he may shut up now," said Mr. Haldeman, with an emphasis on "may." Mr. Nixon concluded that "you'd better find out from Colson what he did promise."

Later in the conversation the talk turned to the status of the cover-up and Mr. Nixon asked Mr. Haldeman whether campaign aide Jeb S. Magruder should be allowed to go "down the tube" if the "wagons" were drawn "up around the White House."

Haldeman: You don't intentionally, you leave Magruder—what you do is, is you, see, we're, we're doing stuff now. We're keeping quiet and, and, uh, all that. . . .

President: Right.

Haldeman: . . . Just try and cov—and, and putting up this money and, and everything else We're trying to keep—when you get right down to it, as Dean says—the only White House guilt, culpability, is in the cover-up . . .

President: Yeah.

Haldeman: . . . And what, what's the purpose of the cover-up, to protect the White House? No, it protects some individuals of the committee

President: (Former Attorney General and Nixon campaign director John) Mitchell, Magruder.