

The Disputed 'Hush Money'

Washington

The Watergate grand jury concluded that a disputed "hush money" payment to the attorney for E. Howard Hunt Jr. was made on the evening of March 21, less than 12 hours after a White House meeting involving President Nixon, sources close to the investigation said yesterday.

The sources said that specific testimony fixing the date and time of payment — which has been challenged by the White House — was provided to the grand jury by Frederick C. LaRue, the former Republican re-election committee official who served as go-between in hush money payments.

In an interview with the New York Times Monday, James D. St. Clair, Mr. Nixon's attorney, pointedly drew attention to a chart published during the Senate Watergate committee's hearings last summer in which Hunt, one of the Watergate burglars, placed the final date of payment as March 20.

St. Clair's point obviously was that if the payment did take place on the 20th, it could not have been authorized as a result of the March 21st meeting attended by the President.

During their Senate testimony, Hunt and LaRue expressed vagueness about the precise date of the payment — the last delivery of hush money to Hunt's attorney, William C. Bittman.

The Times' sources conceded LaRue's vagueness before the Senate but said that the delivery date of March 21 cited in the indictments had been, in the words of one official, "very firmly established by the grand jury."

New York Times