

# Few Conclusions Given by

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Sen. Howard H. Baker Jr. (R-Tenn.) once likened the role of the Central Intelligence Agency in the Watergate scandal to "animals crashing around in the forest—you can hear them but you can't see them."

This Aesopian image still fits notwithstanding Baker's release yesterday of a 43-page report which is rich in insinuation, long on footnotes but short on substantive findings.

Baker drew the bottom line on his case involving the agency in a letter Monday to CIA Director William E. Colby. Neither the report, nor the decision to release it, said Baker, "should be

viewed as an indication that either the committee or I have reached conclusions in this area of investigation."

If anything, the Baker report strongly suggests that some CIA officials engaged in cover-up maneuvers designed to minimize the agency's exposure in the Watergate investigation.

Baker did unearth the case of Lee R. Pennington Jr., a \$250-a-month CIA contract employee who acknowledged that he witnessed the destruction of Watergate burglar James W. McCord Jr.'s records by his wife at their home after McCord's arrest in Watergate.

CIA's then-Director of Security Howard Osborn, no

longer with the agency, fed files on a different Pennington to the FBI when agents made inquiries about the incident — presumably to throw the bureau off the track. Columnist Jack Anderson reported the incident several months ago.

A central figure in the report is Washington public relations executive Robert F. Bennett of Robert Mullen & Co., which has provided "cover" for CIA operatives in two of its overseas offices.

The report claims that on July 10, 1972, Bennett reported "detailed knowledge of the Watergate incident to his CIA case officer." This conforms with Baker's gen-

eral suspicion that the agency knew far more about the circumstances of the break-in than it has ever admitted.

Bennett took issue with the report yesterday. "What I reported to the CIA at the time," he said, "was what

## News Analysis

I had already told the U.S. attorney. I didn't know anything about the break-in. I reported my speculation that Howard Hunt had been involved. I find it astonishing to see this characterized as 'detailed knowledge'."

Sprinkled through one portion of the report are references to Howard Hughes, Clifford Irving, Dita Beard and the Chappaquiddick in-

# Baker on CIA, Watergate Tie

vestigation, all in connection with Bennett's various activities.

The CIA, in commenting on these allusions, said: "The testimony of agency witnesses indicates that the agency had not interest or involvement in any of the aforementioned activities of Mr. Bennett and no evidence to the contrary has been made available to the agency."

The theory of CIA involvement in the Watergate case stems from President Nixon who said on May 22, 1973, that within a few days of the Watergate arrests "I was advised that there was a possibility of CIA involvement in some way."

Acting on this suspicion he

issued instructions, shortly after the arrest of the burglary team, which delayed for more than two weeks the FBI's investigation of the laundering of Nixon re-election funds through a Mexican bank account. The President publicly acknowledged that his fears of exposure of covert CIA operations were, after all, unfounded.

Baker, however, has been pressing for months after evidence that the CIA was implicated in, or had advance knowledge of, the Watergate break-in and bugging. Critical colleagues on the Senate Watergate committee, of which Baker was co-chairman, have charged his objective was to divert attention from the role of top White House officials in approving the

break-in and the elaborate and costly cover-up campaign which ensued.

One of the byproducts of the Baker report, however, was to impugn the national security rationale by which White House officials have repeatedly justified the burglary of the office of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist, Dr. Lewis Fielding.

Quoting from closed session testimony by CIA psychiatric advisers, the report says E. Howard Hunt Jr. and G. Gordon Liddy Jr. of the White House Plumbers unit said they wanted to "try Ellsberg in public" and render him "the object of pity as a broken man."

This testimony tends to support the view that Ellsberg was a political rather

than a national security target of the White House.

The strongest indication that the CIA has emerged from the Baker inquiry without serious bruises was given yesterday by CIA Director Colby.

In a June 28 letter to Baker, Colby warned that if the report were made public in the form it was then presented to him, "I may feel it necessary to take an appropriate public position to assure that the conclusions and the results of other investigations are also known."

But after the report was released yesterday Colby said so dire a step as open confrontation with a member of the Senate would be unnecessary.