

Hunt Admits Lying About Hush Money

By George Lardner Jr.
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Watergate burglar E. Howard Hunt, his voice drained and tense, admitted yesterday that he had lied at least a dozen times about his demands for hush money and his protection of higher-ups in the Watergate scandal.

In a dramatic courtroom confession, Hunt, 56, told a hushed audience how he had gradually come to realize that the men he had been protecting were not worthy of his loyalty and finally how he had decided "to tell the truth once and for all."

He said he saw that even his own children had come to doubt him.

Testifying at the Watergate cover-up trial here, the former CIA agent said his "rude awakening" began last spring with the White House's publication of edited versions of many of President Nixon's Watergate tapes.

"I felt a sense of rude awakening," Hunt said. "I realized that these men were not worthy of my continued and future loyalty."

At first, Hunt said, he still did nothing. "It was in my self-interest to leave the situation as it was," he explained.

Then, over the summer, the slender, soft-voiced conspirator said, he was subpoenaed as a trial witness. "I was faced with the hard decision of whether I should continue to lie to protect others or to tell the truth once and for all," he said.

Hunt said he decided to end the deception. He said he knew Watergate prosecutors had "certain reservations" about his past testimony, but even beyond that, he realized that his family did, too.

"I sensed all along even my own children were not persuaded that my testimony in various forms was, in all respects, factual and candid," Hunt said in tones thick with emotion. Urged by his attorneys to make a full disclosure, Hunt said he finally resolved just in the past month, "to testify to the entire truth."

"Have you done so in this courtroom today to the best of your ability, Mr. Hunt?" Assistant Watergate Special Prosecutor Richard Ben-Veniste asked him in the final question of the day.

"I have," Hunt said firmly.

The onetime secret agent prefaced his confession with a stream of details about the involvement of former Attorney General John N. Mitchell in pre-Watergate break-in planning and Hunt's subsequent collection of hush money payments as the price of his keeping quiet.

The testimony came at a subdued courtroom session that began with repeated expressions of chagrin from U.S. District Court Judge John J. Sirica about an article in yesterday's editions of The Washington Post. The article discussed some of the judge's earlier trial rulings involving hearsay testimony as well as the announced plans of Watergate prosecutors to "short cut" procedures for the further introduction of White House tapes.

Sirica, who evidently regarded the article as unfair, observed repeatedly that the Supreme Court has ruled that

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the defendants in a criminal case are entitled "not . . . to a perfect trial, but a fair trial."

"I'm doing the best I can, ruling on the evidence," the judge said. "I'm trying to give them a fair trial."

Hunt took the stand as a "court witness" called by Sirica, a step that the prosecutors had requested so they could ask him leading questions and, in effect, treat him as though he were under cross-examination. The prosecutors had told the judge that even after Hunt was granted immunity from further prosecution in the spring of 1973, he had not been "entirely candid" in subsequent, and repeated, appearances before the Watergate grand jury here.

Before he stepped down from the witness stand yesterday afternoon Hunt admitted, statement by statement, to

false testifying in claiming that he had never been told who had approved the political espionage that led to the Watergate bugging, denying contacts with former White House special counsel Charles W. Colson, and in disavowing threats to expose other "seamy things" that he, Hunt, had done for the White House.

The testimony was less encompassing, but in many ways, far more compelling than former White House counsel John W. Dean III's static, almost computerized, account of the Watergate scandal over the past two weeks.

Hunt, dressed in a light pin-striped, charcoal gray suit, began with a quick recitation of his work at the White House

in 1971, first as a consultant for Colson and then as a member of the secret White House "plumbers" unit that burglarized the offices of Pentagon Papers figure Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist that fall.

In late November of 1971, Hunt said, G. Gordon Liddy, who also had been with the "plumbers" unit, told him he was moving to the Committee for the Re-election of the President not only as general counsel but with other equally important functions as head of a large-scale, political

intelligence-gathering and political action unit."

The mild-mannered witness said he helped Liddy develop the budget for an ambitious \$1 million program that they code-named "project Gemstone." It ranged from plans to abduct troublesome demonstrators expected at the 1972 Republican convention, then set for San Diego, to use of a "chase plan" that could intercept the communications of airborne Democratic presidential candidates in the 1972 campaign.

Hunt said Liddy told him the budget "related to certain projects that were desired by the Attorney General, John Dean and (Nixon campaign deputy director) Jeb Stuart Magruder." Giving his own description of the scheme, Hunt blandly explained that it had two major categories: electronic surveillance and "what we termed the human resources side."

Under questioning by Ben-Veniste, Hunt said the "human resources side" in-

cluded the proposed abduction schemes, prostitutes to compromise Democratic politicians, and a surreptitious entry team such as the one caught on June 17, 1972, in the Watergate bugging and break-in at Democratic national headquarters here.

Hunt said Liddy told him Mitchell had called for a less expensive plan, first at a meeting in the Attorney General's

office in January of 1972 and then again at a follow-up session on Feb. 4.

An entry from Hunt's daily appointment diary for Feb. 4 listed successive notations showing a luncheon meeting he had with Liddy that day and then a 4 p.m. meeting that Liddy was to have with the Attorney General.

Underneath, in capital letters, Hunt had jotted down the final results of the day's work: "DISASTER."

In mid-February, Hunt said, Liddy asked him to arrange a meeting with Colson whom Liddy admired "as a man who could get things done, a mover

and shaker" in the administration. Hunt said he arranged a get-together that same afternoon and left the two talking while he retired to the other side of Colson's office where "I smoked my pipe and read a magazine."

From there, Hunt said, he could see Colson pause "perhaps a dozen times" for phone calls. During one of them, the witness said, "Mr. Liddy leaned forward in a demonstrative fashion, using his hands."

Stepping out in a corridor after the meeting, Hunt said, Liddy turned to him and said, "I think I may have done us some good."

"The only thing he could have done us some good on at that time was Project Gemstone," Hunt said.

Hunt said he and Liddy scaled the budget down to slightly less than \$250,000. Then, in early April, he said, Liddy told him that it had been approved, saying:

"The big man said okay and the word is go."

Over the protest of Mitchell's lawyers, Hunt said Liddy meant the Attorney General, whom Liddy often called "the big man . . . and/or the big boy." Mitchell, Hunt emphasized, was "the biggest man, rank-wise and stature-wise" in the planning and development of "the entire operation."

When Liddy told him in late April that Democratic National Committee headquarters at the Watergate office building here would be "a target," Hunt said he and James McCord, then security chief for the Nixon re-election committee, "began casing" the place. McCord and the four Miamians whom Hunt had recruited first broke into the offices over the 1972 Memorial Day weekend.

The burglars, Hunt said, not only planted some bugs, but began taking photographs of every document they could find that involved campaign contributions, "anything with a figure on it" indicating financial matters.



During luncheon recess in Watergate cover-up trial, defendant John D. Ehrlichman, right, and

family friend Pat Taylor pass three Watergate assistant prosecutors. They are, from left, Jill

Wine Volner, Carl R. Feldbaum and James F. Neal.

Associated Press



Cover-up trial witness E. Howard Hunt arrives at court.

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