

Big Names Linked to Texas Scandal

By Jack Anderson
and Les Whitten

Some prominent names have been linked to a Texas scandal, which involves a bungled wire-tap operation, a cover-up attempt and some accompanying shenanigans.

After weeks of investigation, we have now dug details out of unpublished court records and sealed grand jury evidence.

The roots go back to the late oil curmudgeon, billionaire H. L. Hunt, whose children and aides split up in a struggle over his wealth. One faction was led by the Hunt brothers, Bunker and Herbert, who suspected another faction of siphoning funds from the old man's empire.

To satisfy their suspicions, the government charges, they hired wiretappers, who botched the job. A wiretapper, spotted outside the house of a former Hunt executive, was arrested Jan. 16, 1970. The trail led to the two Hunt brothers, who allegedly began pulling political wires to keep their names out of the scandal.

We have already reported the sworn testimony of two witnesses who told possible of a

\$50,000 to \$60,000 payoff" to the powerful Senate Judiciary chairman, James O. Eastland (D-Miss.), whose committee has jurisdiction over the Justice Department. He allegedly made calls in behalf of the Hunt brothers to Richard G. Kleindienst, who was then deputy attorney general, and to House Appropriations Chairman George Mahon, whose nephew, Eldon Mahon, was one of the prosecutors.

Kleindienst is said to have called both the head of the Criminal Division, Will Wilson, and Wilson's aide, Henry Petersen, about the case. Wilson and Mahon then allegedly spoke to Mahon's prosecutor nephew. All deny that they bought any political pressure to help Hunt. Eastland also swears that he never received a cent from the Hunts, except a fair market price for some Charolais cattle.

The Hunt brothers were indicted on Feb. 28, 1973. Both have pleaded innocent. Bunker subsequently allegedly asked Eastland to inquire about a parole for Patrick McCann, one of the jailed wiretappers, whose testimony could be damaging to the Hunts. An Eastland aide, Courtney Pace, sounded out the

federal Parole Board about McCann.

Here are a few other allegations in the case:

•There is sworn testimony that Bunker Hunt discussed his pending prosecution with President Nixon at a barbecue, which former Treasury Secretary John Connally threw at his Texas ranch. A former Hunt employee was also quoted in testimony as alleging that Connally got fat legal fees and a bonus cattle deal from Bunker Hunt "to disguise a payoff" for his backstage help in the case. A Hunt spokesman said the multimillionaire had business dealings with Connally but denied a payoff of any kind. At the barbecue, Hunt merely exchanged amenities with the President in a reception line, the spokesman said. We were unable to reach Connally for his comment.

•The case almost broke in open court last March when a lawyer started telling federal Judge John Singleton in Houston about his suspicions of a cover-up. The judge silenced him. "I am liable to get the marshal up here and just put you in jail for making that remark," the judge said. Singleton told us, in retrospect, his ire may

have been "unwise."

•A witness swore that lawyers hired by the Hunts offered him \$1,250 a month if he would go to jail and keep his mouth shut. A second witness testified that he was also offered \$1,250 a month for his silence, and a third witness said he was offered \$800 a month. The money was never paid, but the Hunts allegedly picked up the lawyers' fees for potential witnesses in the case, according to testimony.

•Two witnesses in the case swore they were threatened with death if they testified against the Hunts. One said he was told that "the government can't help you if are dead." The other testified he received a warning that he would "get killed if you doublecross the Hunts." A Hunt spokesman called the charge absurd, pointing out that both witnesses testified and remained quite alive.

The Justice Department is officially silent on the case. But their court filings in Dallas state that Bunker Hunt and some of his associates "are the subject of the grand jury's investigation . . . of obstruction of justice."

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