



United Press International

W. Herbert Hunt, left, and Nelson Bunker Hunt, right, outside the Federal building in Lubbock, Tex., yesterday, as their trial went to jury. With them were Lamar Hunt, their brother, and Mrs. H. L. Hunt, their step-mother.

Hunt Brothers Are Acquitted of Wiretapping Charges

By MARTIN WALDRON
Special to The New York Times

LUBBOCK, Tex., Sept. 26— A Federal court jury tonight acquitted Nelson Bunker Hunt and W. Herbert Hunt, two of the nation's wealthiest men, of wiretapping charges.

The two men, whose fortunes are estimated to be \$400-million each, had been accused of hiring private detectives six years ago to tap the telephone of six employees of their late father, H. L. Hunt, the eccentric Dallas billionaire, to check on thefts from the company.

The jury, ten of whose members have direct ties to agriculture, reached a verdict of acquittal in less than three hours.

There were gasps of relief from the relatives of the two accused oil men when Federal District Judge H. O. Woodward read the verdict.

Forty members of the Hunt family crowded the courtroom

today as the two-week-old trial ended.

Among them were Lamar Hunt, owner of the professional football team, the Kansas City Chiefs, who is a brother of the defendants, and his wife, Norma.

A large number of rich Texans flew to Lubbock last night to have dinner with the Hunt brothers in what was described as "a show of faith."

Although the trial lasted two weeks, there were only four days of testimony, and none of the six people whose telephones had been tapped were called as witnesses by the Government, a circumstance that was stressed in a closing argument by a defense attorney, Travis Shelton of Lubbock.

Mr. Shelton, a former prosecutor, said that in 27 years of practice he had never seen another trial where none of the complaining witnesses were called by the Government.

"There is something odd about this case," he said.

Another defense attorney, Philip Hirschkop of Alexandria, Va., has accused the Government of persecuting the Hunts. The Hunts have said that the Justice Department has been pursuing a "vendetta" against them because they refused to let the Central Intelligence Agency infiltrate their foreign oil interests.

The Hunts admitted hiring the detectives who installed the telephone taps, but said that they had not known that wiretapping their employes was against the law, and that the three private investigators had not told them that it was.

The detectives, all from Houston, were convicted in the case, which dates back to 1969. Two served short prison terms, and one was granted probation.

The wiretapping took place in Dallas in late 1969 and early 1970. The trial was transferred from Dallas to Lubbock be-

cause of publicity in the Dallas newspapers.

There was testimony at the trial that the H.L.H. Food products Division of Hunt Oil Company lost \$50-million in less than 10 years because of mismanagement and theft within the company.

Two H.L.H. managers were convicted earlier this year of mail fraud, and H. L. Hunt's former security chief was granted limited immunity and not tried.

In urging the jury to convict, United States Attorney Frank McCown of Fort Worth said that he felt "awed" by the concentration of wealth and influence in the courtroom.

It was estimated that the assembled Hunts represented \$2-to \$3-billion in assets.

Extreme wealth, Mr. McCown said in his closing argument, does not carry with it any special exemption from the nation's laws, even though the Hunts may have thought so.