

Starting on Watergate

After six months of explosive rumors, the Watergate bugging trial got under way at last. But hardly had the jury been chosen last week in a Washington courtroom when one of the seven defendants pleaded guilty to the charges against him. By week's end, as Judge John Sirica moved the trial temporarily to a closed courtroom and barred spectators, there were reports that four of the other defendants planned to do the same. Pleading guilty would not, of course, make the defendants invulnerable to severe punishment; the maximum sentence for their offenses ranges between 24 and 34 years in prison with fines of between \$70,000 and \$80,000. But the guilty pleas could increase the chance that the real truth in the Watergate case—whether or not top officials in the Nixon Administration sanctioned the break-in at the Democratic Party's Washington headquarters last June—would remain obscured.

The first defendant to plead guilty was E. Howard Hunt, 54, a former White House consultant and longtime CIA official who played a prominent part in the planning of an earlier fiasco, the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba in 1961. At first Hunt offered to plead guilty to only three of the six charges against him, but under pressure from Judge Sirica he agreed to include all six.

"Anything I may have done I believed to be in the best interests of my country," Hunt declared. Had there been a conspiracy involving high Government officials? "To my personal knowledge," he replied, "there was none." Hunt insisted that the key factor in his decision to plead guilty—and thus escape the ordeal of a long trial—had been the death of his wife in a Chicago plane crash last month. Still, his action inevitably increased speculation that he was seeking to avoid further disclosures in the case.

Cash. Late in the week, reports circulated in Washington that four of the remaining defendants—three of whom are Cubans from Miami—were being offered large cash settlements by undisclosed "friends" if they would plead guilty and thus avoid a potentially embarrassing trial. The offers, *TIME* learned, ranged as high as \$1,000 to each defendant for every month he spends in prison, with additional amounts to be paid at his release.

Hunt, who said last week that he had recruited the four into the spying operation, told *TIME* Correspondent David Beckwith: "I'm almost certain that the Cuban community in Miami will take care of those four. The great majority of the Cuban community is convinced that what they were doing [at the Watergate] will rebound to the ultimate benefit of Cuba, and I'm convinced of that." Presumably he meant that most anti-Castro Cuban refugees



STEVE NORTHUP

DEFENDANT E. HOWARD HUNT
One fiasco after another.

favored a Nixon victory in November.

One of the two remaining defendants is G. Gordon Liddy, onetime White House aide and counsel to last year's Committee for the Re-Election of the President. Liddy, a lawyer, might be the most reluctant of the defendants to plead guilty, since this would probably lead to his disbarment.

Even if the trial should end prematurely this week, however, it has already produced considerable additional detail. Highlights of the Government's case, as outlined last week by Principal Assistant U.S. Attorney Earl Silbert:

► Liddy received \$235,000 cash from two officials of the committee to set up an intelligence operation for the 1972 campaign. The operation, charged Silbert, had two purposes in the begin-

ning: to watch the movement of extremists and demonstrators, particularly at the Republican National Convention, and to take on a few spying chores against the Democrats—such as investigating the rumor of a contribution by a company that pollutes the environment to the campaign of Senator Edmund Muskie.

► Liddy and Hunt tried to recruit several old friends into this spy ring, said Silbert. They outlined a planned operation "against the Democratic Party and Convention," and described a "communications center" to be operated from a houseboat in Biscayne Bay while the Democratic Convention was taking place in nearby Miami Beach.

► Hunt recruited Thomas James Gregory, 25, a history student from Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah, to spy on the Democrats. He paid Gregory \$175 a week to pose as a volunteer in Washington for Senator Muskie and later for Senator George McGovern. Hunt met Gregory regularly last spring in a Washington drugstore and elsewhere and picked up information about the candidates' campaign schedules, planned speeches and even the layouts of the Democrats' offices.

Whether there will be any defendants left to prosecute will be determined this week. But even if the trial ends immediately, the Watergate controversy will be far from settled. Attorney Silbert has hinted that Hunt will be called before the grand jury for further testimony. The Justice Department has filed an eight-count criminal complaint against the Re-Election Committee for failing to account for some of the money it gave Liddy, and the Democratic National Committee is suing the Watergate Seven for violating the committee members' civil rights. Perhaps the most searching investigation will be the one conducted by the Senate's Government Operations Committee under Senator Sam Ervin, a North Carolina Democrat.



DEFENDANT G. GORDON LIDDY
A question of pleas.