

Bittman Tells Of Actions on Hunt's Memo

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Washington lawyer William O. Bittman yesterday admitted stuffing an incriminating memo from Watergate spy E. Howard Hunt Jr. into a file that was eventually destroyed.

At an extraordinary hearing before U.S. District Court Judge John J. Sirica, Bittman acknowledged that he withheld knowledge of the document from Watergate prosecutors in repeated interviews, but sought to defend himself on the grounds that the memo was laced with what he believed to be falsehoods.

The memo, composed by Hunt and his late wife, Dorothy, was written almost two months before the original Watergate trial and warned that "half measures will be unacceptable" if the Watergate defendants were expected to remain silent.

Bittman, who was Hunt's lawyer at the time, finally produced a secret copy he had made and gave it to Watergate prosecutors early this month after Hunt had testified about it for the first time.

The lawyer said he had read the memo long before that, but said he "rejected it . . . because there were things in there that I believed to be untrue."

The tense hearing before Judge Sirica carried a double edge.

It was called to determine whether the second hand copy of the explosive memo could be admitted into evidence at the Watergate cover-up trial here. But it also amounted to an open investigation, under oath, of Bittman's actions.

Reminded of his right not to testify, Bittman, 43, was called to the witness stand after the jurors—who have yet to learn of the memo—had been sent back to their downtown motel for the day. The hearing high-

lighted a busy session that also produced former President Nixon's consent to a court-appointed medical examination to determine his status as a trial witness.

Assistant Watergate Prosecutor Richard Ben-Veniste charged at one point that Bittman knew the file in which he had placed the memo had been earmarked for destruction. The beleaguered lawyer denied it, although he acknowledged making the copy for his own self-protection in case the original ever disappeared.

Dated Nov. 14, 1972, the memo showed that the original Watergate defendants were expecting pardons as well as hush money long before the trial ever began.

In it, the Hunts warned flatly that "loyalty has always been a two-way street" and declared that "the defendants have followed all instructions meticulously, keeping their part of the bargain by maintaining silence."

The memo complained at the same time that the Nixon administration was still "deficient in living up to its commitment" which, the Hunts said, "were and are: 1. financial support. 2. legal defense fees. 3. pardons. 4. rehabilitation."

Bittman said that Hunt, or perhaps Mrs. Hunt, handed him the memo in a closed envelope "sometime in mid-November of 1972" and told him "to put it in my office safe for possible delivery to Charles Colson," then White House special counsel and an old friend of Hunt.

A former CIA agent, Hunt first alluded to the memo in a phone conversation with Colson on Nov. 13, 1972, when Hunt expressed his growing chagrin over the slow pace of payments to the Watergate defendants.