

THE STRANGE CAREER OF E. HOWARD HUNT

COMPULSIVE SPY

By TAD
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Hunt
with
his children,
St. John and Lisa
at the
Watergate
hearings
last fall.

ARTICLE II: The Political Activist.

THE DEEP-COVER CIA chief in a foreign country has his Soviet counterpart in the KGB's *resident*. Colonel Rudolf Abel, discovered by American counterespionage in the late 1950s, was one of the most famous Soviet *residents*. One does not talk about who the American *residents* abroad might have been in the past or are today.

In any event, Howard Hunt never held such posts. With one exception—when he was CIA station chief in Uruguay—he was never engaged full time in the handling of actual intelligence work and certainly not in agency. His specialty was so-called covert political action, and he worked out of various embassies under a State Dept. cover, unless he was at headquarters in Virginia.

Hunt's mission was to specialize in covert political activities—as *distinct* from actual espionage or sabotage—and in black propaganda. This meant infiltrating political parties and organizations such as labor

unions and youth groups, and helping, often with money, the pro-American and anti-Communist elements in them. It entailed the secret financing of different foreign publications.

All in all, this was the kind of political groundwork the CIA laid in many instances

for a *coup d'etat* in a foreign country. Regimes are not overthrown by cloak-and-dagger American agents furtively working

BOOK DIGEST

the streets, but by the Agency's political apparatus.

This was vital work from the CIA's viewpoint, but it did not make Howard Hunt a spy or even a real deep-cover operator. The few occasions when Hunt was forced to use a cover name came when he was engaged in political preparations for the overthrow of the Guatemalan government in 1954 and, again, when he served as political adviser to

the CIA-financed Cuban Revolutionary Council in whose name ostensibly the Bay of Pigs invasion was carried out in 1961.

Hunt, therefore, was not an experienced action officer, or agent, and the "horrors" of Watergate were something of a novelty to him when it came to the execution of the plans. But Hunt did have a certain amount of covert military experience because of his service with an OSS unit in the Burma-China theater during the war. But that was guer-

rilla warfare—in which one either succeeded, and lived to see the success, or failed and usually died.

It is not easy to reconstruct in detail the lives of covert CIA officers, and this is certainly true of Howard Hunt, who was given to elusiveness sometimes even beyond the call of professional duty. One knows a great deal about the famous leaders of the CIA—Allen Dulles, Dick Bissell, Tracy S. Barnes, Richard Helms, and so on—but the life stories of the Agency's anonymous operators are hard to piece together.

The State Dept. Biographic Register had until 1960 a brief entry summarizing Hunt's life from his birth in Hamburg, New York, on Oct. 9, 1918, just a month before the end of World War I, to his ostensible retirement from the Foreign Service shortly before the Bay of Pigs. Hunt used this Foreign Service cover for most of his CIA career.

There also is an entry on Hunt in "Who's Who in America," which essentially repeats the information contained in the State Dept. directory and adds a few bits—such as the fact that he wrote 44 novels (the 45th came out in 1973) and once upon a time held a Guggenheim Fellowship in Mexico. But these dry official entries are contrived to cover rather than to illuminate the real story of Hunt's life.

It is not, by the way, altogether unusual for CIA personnel to be listed in "Who's Who." This is because the fat red books do list a large number of Foreign Service officers, even those below ambassadorial rank, when they appear to be interesting or important—or when a name is suggested by someone else who is already listed.

Nonetheless, it is a curious touch of vanity that Hunt desired to be listed in "Who's Who"—one's cooperation is necessary—and this, too, tells us a bit more about the kind of man he is.

As a matter of policy, the CIA does not make available employment records of its employes, even the retired ones, because one might uncover in them a pattern of clandestine identities. Although I have many acquaintances, chiefly CIA and State Dept. officials, who at different times worked with or alongside Hunt, I found it rather astonishing how little they remembered about him—and, therefore, how little of an impression he must have made.

It may be unkind to say so at a time when Hunt has been punished for criminal acts he had committed, but the record of my

interviews with his former associates conveys the feeling that he was generally disliked and, in some instances, even held in something like contempt. Seeking recognition and approval, as we all do, he evidently sought in a variety of ways to compensate for the fact that he never really rose very high in the CIA and that he was far from being a favorite among his peers.

This may well be the reason why Howard Hunt developed an intense and aggressive personality, although, when convenient, he could be ingratiating; why over the years he presented strange behavior patterns; and, in the end, why he slaved over his typewriter for years to produce so many books. Even though most of his novels were written under pen names, he must have hoped for some form of wealth and recognition from this toil in the subliterary vineyard.

It is likewise difficult to reconstruct Hunt's early life. He has no known living relatives except his children, and the kin on his wife's side, her first cousins, know virtually nothing of Hunt's youth. Since Hunt has very few close friends, there are limited sources for research into his youth. In prison, he refused to be interviewed in depth.

A man I know who worked with Hunt in the CIA in Latin America, vaguely remembers him from a summer camp around Buffalo, New York, where they both had gone in the 1920s, but he has no specific recollections. So the pattern repeats itself: the man whom nobody seems to remember.



What is known is that Howard Hunt was born in Hamburg, in upstate New York in 1918, the only child of Everette Howard Hunt and Ethel Jean Todderdale Hunt. Hunt was named after his father, who was a lawyer and might have held a judgeship somewhere at some point in his life. Hunt's infancy was spent in the Buffalo area, but by 1926, when the Florida land boom was at its peak, Hunt Senior went to practice law in Miami Beach. Hunt briefly recollects this period in his book on the Bay of Pigs, to make the point that his associations with Cuba dates back to his childhood.

But through this reference Howard Hunt also provides interesting insights into his attitude toward his father—obviously admiration—and into his general approach to life. His father had been practicing law in Florida, he writes, "with a partner who was given to drink, womanizing, and gambling. One Saturday morning, quite by chance, my father had occasion to visit his office and opened the firm's safe where he found \$5,000 in cash missing.

"A few inquiries told him that his partner had taken the night boat to Havana, so my father pocketed his Army Colt .45, chartered a seaplane and flew to Havana where he encountered the absconder in Sloppy Joe's bar. Father's intervention was direct, illegal and effective, for he flew back to Miami with

most of the missing funds, and on Monday morning dissolved the partnership.

"Although they went their separate ways, the two men remained friends throughout their lives. In the Cuban context the moral is, I suppose, that an operation conducted with surgical efficiency and maximum speed leaves minimal scars on those involved."



Colson waiting to testify before a House committee last summer. Their meeting years earlier drastically changed Hunt's life.

Post Daily Magazine

Howard Hunt was only eight years old at the time. But as he looked back on his work for the Bay of Pigs, he found it necessary to insert this vignette about his father, clearly to make the point that he believed in efficient operations, even if "illegal," and in "surgical" speed in solving problems.

One perhaps understands better why Hunt rushed with such dedication into operations for the overthrow of foreign governments and even recommended to the CIA a plan to assassinate Cuba's Fidel Castro. It all was "surgical."

At the age of 18, in 1936, Hunt entered Brown University after graduating from the Hamburg HS. Brown is an Ivy League college, but Hunt evidently had aspired to go

to one of the more famous ones. In his book about the Bay of Pigs, he has a number of references to men he knew and admired who went to, say, Harvard; and in his novels, the hero (usually quite autobiographical) will have attended Yale, Princeton, or Harvard, the latter being the favorite.

In one Hunt novel, the hero attends a famous prep school in Switzerland—and one wonders whether Hunt got this idea from the fact that Richard Helms was an alumnus of Le Rosey, the most famous of Swiss private schools.

Sometime in 1938, Hunt spent a short vacation in Havana. He wrote that this was "an escapade I remembered with affectionate nostalgia (despite the hepatitis it had brought)." He also spent a prewar summer in France. Hunt graduated from Brown with a B.A. degree in 1940.



It is noteworthy that although he was an English major, he went in heavily for classics. He took Latin and Ancient Greek languages and literature, as well as several years of Spanish and courses in economics, psychology, and geology. His senior year was devoted entirely to English courses, as befitted a bidding writer.

Perhaps the most important thing about being a Brown alumnus was that almost 30 years later it was to bring Hunt into association with another Brown man—a meeting that drastically changed Hunt's life. The fellow alumnus was Charles W. Colson, a Washington lawyer who was to become President Nixon's Special Counsel. Hunt and Colson were not at Brown at the same time. Colson is 13 years younger than Hunt and graduated from the university 13 years after Hunt completed his studies.

Late in 1940, Hunt seemed to be wondering what to do with his life. He was 22 years old and, aside from certain talents for writing and a love of excitement and adventure, had no set goals. Probably because of this sense of adventure—and because he evidently was not ready to embark on a career—Hunt joined the Navy, spending some eighteen months aboard ships. He was a sailor and, according to incomplete records, was injured aboard a ship doing Atlantic convoy duty and discharged from the Navy in 1942.

It is unclear what precisely Hunt did during the following year. His official biography indicates that he was a movie script writer for unidentified producers, and editor of March of Time newsreel films, and, finally, a South Pacific war correspondent for Life magazine. If, indeed, he served as a war correspondent, it was for a very short period during 1943. Among my friends at Time Inc., I could find no recollection of any man named Howard Hunt who was a war correspondent.

Tomorrow: An American in Paris.

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