

THE STRANGE CAREER OF E. HOWARD HUNT COMPULSIVE SPY

By TAD SZULC

ARTICLE V: Living High

HOWARD HUNT IS NOT a man who believes in retirement or vacations. In the afternoon of April 30, 1970, he walked out for the last time from the headquarters of the CIA. Next morning, May 1, he was at work at his new job with the Robert R. Mullen & Co. public relations firm, on Pennsylvania Av. in downtown Washington.

Hunt was 51 going on 52, and he desperately wanted and needed employment. His constant need for money was something of a mystery to his friends and associates. His CIA pension was \$24,000 and the Mullen company was paying him \$24,000 a year.

Dorothy, his wife, worked part time at the Spanish Embassy, where she wrote letters in English for the Ambassador. The family's income, therefore, had to be at least \$50,000, which was not bad in Washington in 1970. Besides, Hunt received residual royalties from some of the 44 novels

he had published over the previous 28 years.

To be sure, the family had high expenses and they lived well. The

**BOOK
DIGEST**

mortgage and upkeep for Witches' Island was rather high. Kevan, the younger daughter, was attending Smith college. Lisa, the eldest, had a history of illness, and medical bills must have been considerable.

Earlier, both girls had attended Holton Arms, an expensive private girls' school in the Maryland suburbs not far from the Hunts' house. The family had two cars, a Chevrolet and a Pontiac. Kevan had a red Opel station wagon of her own.

The Hunts lived comfortably, then. On Howard's insistence, they dined every evening by candlelight. They were busy on the suburban Potomac cocktail circuit. Their house was full of animals—cats and dogs and birds and even, once, a small boa constrictor.

By all accounts, Dorothy was a warm and loving mother to her children. She was interested in Howard's new activities. Now that he had left the CIA, he could talk freely about his work—at least for a while. Friends who visited the Hunts during weekends found them relaxed and at ease.

Howard, puffing on his pipe, would fondle one of the kittens. Dorothy mixed the drinks. Much of the housework was done



Howard Hughes
Needed Hunt's help?

by a Uruguayan woman who had been with the Hunts since their days in Montevideo more than ten years earlier. All in all, it was a rather pleasing picture of a well-to-do American family, with the father embarked on a new career, the mother working but dedicated to the children and to her pursuit of horsemanship, and the kids doing well at school.

Yet things were not all that simple downtown for Howard Hunt. In the first place, he was frustrated in his job. In the second place, he craved more money. The frustration evidently came from the instant transition from a glamorous association with the CIA (so it was believed to be) to the brain-addling dullness of writing press releases and other publicity material for the Mullen firm. For this is what Hunt was doing at 1700 Pennsylvania Av., although he claimed he was a vice-president of the company.

As Richard Helms was to testify in the summer of 1973 at the Senate Select Committee hearings, Hunt had been given undemanding jobs at the Agency in his last two years because of his daughter's medical problems, which, Helms said, required much of his attention. Still, it was painful for Hunt to be cut off so abruptly from the CIA and from the comforting sense of belonging to an elite, even though Hunt was increasingly critical of the CIA for losing its old aplomb.

Now he was an outsider in the intelligence community and a "has-been." It must have rankled. Humorously or wistfully, Hunt decorated his personal memo pad, the kind that has the owner's name at the top, with an imprinted "00?" in the right-hand corner. This play on James Bond's "007" code number, which indicated "license to kill," revealed Hunt's uncertainty over his own identity in the context of a new life.



Financially Hunt was always "haggling" for more money, as his associates at the public-relations company reported later. When he first discussed joining the Mullen firm before his retirement from the CIA, he talked about buying into the company. Robert Rodolf Mullen, founder and chairman of the board, was in his 60s and thinking about retirement. Hunt expressed an interest in buying a share of his equity, but when the time came he seemed to have difficulties in raising the \$2000 in "earnest money" which the Mullen firm required.

Later, he put up an argument for an \$8000 salary increase—this would have brought up his salary to \$32,000—but the Mullen people turned him down. Hunt made noises about resigning over the money issue but never did anything about it.

Actually, the Mullen company was an interesting place for a man like Hunt to be in Washington in 1970. Robert Mullen, a veteran newspaper man, had served as director of public information for the Economic Corporation Administration between 1946 and 1948 (the latter being the year when Howard Hunt used the ECA as his CIA cover in the Paris station). It is unclear whether Mullen and Hunt met in those days.

In any event, the two references Hunt gave when he applied for the job with the Mullen company were Richard Helms and William F. Buckley Jr. Helms was then still Director of the CIA and Buckley, an old friend, was now a famous commentator.

At the time of the Watergate raid and in subsequent testimony before the Senate Investigating Committee, Helms insisted that he barely knew Hunt. But there are reasons to believe that Helms was at least quite aware of Hunt's existence. For one thing, according to senior Agency officials, Helms tried hard to get Hunt the Madrid station job which Allen Dulles had promised him. For another thing, Helms kept copies of Hunt's spy novels around his office and



Richard Helms at the Watergate hearings
He said he barely knew Hunt, but . . .

often gave or lent them to friends and visitors.

As for the Mullen firm, it was extremely close to Republican power in Washington. The firm's president—and the man who really ran it—was Robert F. Bennett, the son of the Republican Senator from Utah. Bob Bennett, an affable but strict Mormon, came to the firm from the Transportation Dept. where, in 1969, he was the White House's unofficial representative in the office of John A. Volpe, then Transportation Secretary. (This was the pattern of the Nixon Administration from the very outset. In every department of government there was a trusted White House person who made sure that the Presidential staff were fully informed about what went on at all times.)

Bennett was very well acquainted around Washington, and the firm held some valuable accounts. One of them was to represent in Washington the interests of Howard Hughes, the elusive billionaire. This was rather more a political than a public-relations job; it meant that Hughes received reports from the Mullen firm on the political situation in Washington.



Bob Bennett also looked after such things as Hughes's contributions to the Republican campaign. Another important account was General Foods. Then there was the Dept. of Health, Education and Welfare—an account that Bennett assigned to Hunt when he joined the firm.

Earlier, Bennett had helped to set up Republican finance committees around the country and, in 1971, he was engaged in the successful effort by the milk producers' lobby to win a higher price support from the Agriculture Dept. The milk men gave the Nixon campaign more than \$300,000.

In terms of Washington's political geography, the Mullen firm was most conveniently located. It was a block away from the White House on Pennsylvania Av., and across the street from the building which in March, 1971, would house the headquarters of the Committee to Re-Elect the President. (The Committee's building was called simply "1701"—this was its street number—when Presidential politics went into full swing. Nixon's former law firm had offices there, too.)

But Howard Hunt was being kept down, and he resented it. Bob Bennett is said to have thought highly of Hunt as a writer of publicity material, but he had doubts about Howard's capacity to handle "outside" contacts with important clients. At one point, Hunt tried to assume responsibility for the Hughes account but in this, too, he was disappointed.

The day the word came that Hughes had flown from his hideaway in Nassau to Ma-

Hughes had bought equity in Nicaraguan Airlines, which was one way of doing business with Somoza, and he had plans for other considerable investments in the little Central American Republic.

Hunt also turned out to be something of a social climber. He was a member of the Army and Navy Club, a respectable conservative institution, and of the less known Tavern Inn Club. But he was anxious to be a member of the *very* prestigious Metropolitan Club in Washington, and he kept pressing Bennett and other friends, who belonged to it, to put him up for membership.

He was a bit of a snob, too, and there is a story that on one social occasion he cut a woman he met dead, until he discovered that she was a graduate of one of the ex-



John Volpe.

An eye on his department.

pensive New England girls' colleges. Status is what counts in Washington—whether one is a politician, public figure, or businessman.

And he was always acting the debonair Washingtonian. He liked to date pretty women (which he did with varying degrees of success), and those who were exposed to his company in such circumstances suggested that listening to Hunt was a bit like reading his Paris novels.

He often patronized the Blues Alley, a fairly fashionable Georgetown establishment, where one could get lunch or dinner. Or he went to the Potomack, a Georgetown restaurant specializing in early American food and decor (unfortunately, it has since gone out of business).

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nagua, Nicaragua, Hunt burst into Bennett's office to say that he knew the Nicaraguan President, Tachito Somoza, quite well from his CIA days. Surely he could help Hughes in Managua? The Mullen people thought this was rather amusing; about the last thing in the world Howard Hughes needed was help from Howard Hunt.

State Dept. friends recall an incident at Christmastime in 1960, when Hunt was involved in the Cuban invasion project but came to Washington for the holidays. Having drunk too much, they said, he displayed all his fake CIA identity papers—in those days he used the cover name of "Eduardo"—and this, of course, was a major breach of security. Ten years later, in 1970, Hunt's tastes and inclinations had not much changed.

**In the Weekend Magazine:
Are There Secrets Still?**

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