

HUNT SAYS C. I. A. HAD ASSASSIN UNIT

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Watergate Figure Tells of
Small Group Set Up to
Slay Double Agents

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WASHINGTON, Dec. 25—E. Howard Hunt Jr., the former Central Intelligence Agency officer who was convicted of helping carry out the 1972 Watergate break-in, says he was told in the mid-1950's that the C.I.A. had a small unit set up to arrange for the assassination of suspected double agents and similar low-ranking officials.

In a recent interview at the Federal correctional institution at Eglin Air Force Base in Florida, where he is serving an eight-year sentence imposed for his role in the Watergate conspiracy, Mr. Hunt said he recalled having been told by C.I.A. superiors in 1954 or 1955 that Boris T. Pash, an agency official, was in charge of the assassination unit.

The Senate select committee that is investigating American intelligence activities released a report last month on C.I.A.-inspired assassination plots against two foreign heads of state, and the panel's investigators are known to have gathered information not yet made public about the agency's connection with at least one murder of a lower-ranking official.

But a committee spokesman said that no reference to Mr. Pash, an Army colonel who is understood to have died, had been included by the C.I.A. in the information on the agency's role in assassination plots supplied to the panel.

Mr. Hunt said he had not been interviewed by committee staff members about C.I.A. assassinations or any other topic, but the Senate spokesman said that the assertions regarding Colonel Pash would be investigated.

A C.I.A. spokesman declined comment when asked whether Colonel Pash had ever been employed by the agency or what his capacity there might have been.

The Army's register of retired officers shows, however, that Colonel Pash left the service with an undescribed "permanent disability" in November 1957, about two years after Mr. Hunt said he first met the colonel.

In the interview, Mr. Hunt said that, during the period in question, he was a staff officer assigned to the C.I.A.'s Balkans division, and that on one occasion he and his colleagues had encountered "very substantial problems" with an organization that the agency was "maintaining in West Germany."

'Penetration' Suspected

The difficulty, Mr. Hunt said, concerned a person in the organization, an Albanian, "who probably was a penetration," the C.I.A. term for an agent discovered to be working for a hostile intelligence service.

Mr. Hunt said that it was to "neutralize" the man "in such a way that the other side would not know that we were aware of his activities, and of course assassination was the obvious answer."

Mr. Hunt said that he inquired about arranging for such an assassination and "I was told that we had that capability," and "that the guy to see about his sort of thing was Colonel Pash."

The colonel, according to Mr. Hunt, was a mysterious figure around the agency who shared a small office with his deputy and who "was kind of a joke" among other C.I.A. officials. "It was a wary joke, though," Mr. Hunt added. "Nobody really knew what he was doing."

After having been directed by his superiors to Colonel Pash's office, Mr. Hunt recalled, "I talked to Boris and I said, 'Look, we have this problem here, is this something you guys can handle?'"

Colonel Pash replied that he was not sure, Mr. Hunt said, and seemed to react with a "sort of shock that the subject had ever been brought up."

Mr. Hunt said that he consequently left the matter there, and never inquired afterward about what fate, if any, had befallen the suspected agent.

The Senate committee's assassination report concluded that the C.I.A. had inspired ultimately unsuccessful plots to kill Fidel Castro, the Cuban Prime Minister, and Patrice Lumumba, the late Congolese leader, and had been involved indirectly in a successful plot against Rafael Trujillo, the Dominican dictator.

While all of the information on C.I.A. assassination plots made public by the committee thus far has concerned attempts on the lives of foreign political leaders, the panel is understood to be withholding for later release information it has gathered on agency involvement in lower-level assassinations.

Some sources familiar with the committee's investigation say it has gathered some information about the murder of a C.I.A. operative in a Latin American country who attempted to "blackmail" the agency. The panel is also reported to be looking into a report that an agency official once told confidants of his involvement in a New Orleans murder disguised as a hit-and-run accident.