

A Watergate Defendant Offers to Plead Guilty

Ex-White House Aide Makes Surprise Move At Demo Bugging Trial

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Washington

A key defendant in the Watergate bugging trial offered to plead guilty yesterday as the government charged that President Nixon's re-election staff gave a former White House aide \$235,000 to recruit a network of undercover agents for political espionage against the Democrats last year.

Shortly after the prosecution's two-hour opening statement to the U. S. District Court jury of eight women and four men, E. Howard Hunt Jr., a former White House consultant and 21-year veteran of the Central Intelligence Agency, offered to plead guilty to three of the six counts against him—conspiracy, breaking into Democratic headquarters and monitoring private telephone conversations.

The government accepted the guilty plea partly on the condition that if he is convicted, the government would seek to call Hunt before a grand jury to "testify what knowledge if any he has of any others who are involved in the Watergate affair."

Judge John J. Sirica took the request for change of plea under advisement and abruptly adjourned the trial until this morning.

Gerald Alch, attorney for another defendant, said he was prepared to move for a mistrial if Sirica allowed Hunt to plead guilty.

INFILTRATE

At the start of the celebrated and long-delayed Watergate trial, chief prosecutor Earl J. Silbert said one of the agents was a university student from Utah

who infiltrated the staffs of Edmund S. Muskie and then George S. McGovern on the pretext of "off-campus studies."

The student, who will be a prosecution witness, became disillusioned as the extent of his intelligence-gathering duties unfolded, Silbert said. After four months of work he quit and left Washington, and two days later, police arrested five of the seven trial defendants before dawn June 17 inside Democratic national headquarters at the Watergate apartment complex.

Silbert said the leader of the intelligence campaign was defendant G. Gordon Liddy, 42, a former FBI agent and White House aide who joined the Committee for the Re-Election of the President in September, 1971, as financial counsel.

Liddy sat smiling thinly in

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the courtroom, rocking in his chair with arms folded across his chest, as Silbert described Liddy's assignments from Jeb Magruder, then deputy chairman of the committee, and Herbert R. Porter, in charge of scheduling GOP campaign appearances.

"There obviously was a

political motive here," said Silbert, an assistant U.S. attorney. "There was a political presidential campaign. The operation was directed at the Democratic party, particularly against Senator George McGovern because of his left-wing views."

FURTHER

But the prosecution, in recurring references to Liddy as a take-charge, authoritarian type with a flair for the dramatic, left an impression that he often acted on his own and presumably went beyond the scope of the assignments made by Magruder and Porter.

Shortly after the Watergate arrests, Silbert said, re-election committee treasurer Hugh Sloan met Liddy carrying documents toward a paper shredder. "My boys got caught last night," Liddy was quoted as saying. "I'll lose my job."

Liddy subsequently was fired after he refused to answer FBI agents' questions about the Watergate break-in.

Silbert said Liddy was hired — and given \$235,000

by Magruder — primarily to establish an intelligence network to discover in advance any plans for demonstrations by "extremist groups either of the left or the right" at GOP campaign rallies.

AGENTS

Liddy immediately turned to Hunt to help him recruit agents, said Silbert, and Hunt began by canvassing his former CIA friends and associates.

Silbert said one of the 60 witnesses he will call was Thomas Gregory, a Brigham Young University student at Provo, Utah, who was hired by Hunt in February, 1971, to take a job as student intern on Muskie's campaign staff.

Gregory, he said, used secret telephone numbers to

funnel information to Hunt about Muskie's primary schedules, campaign contributors and staff problems.

'DIFFERENT'

Later, when Muskie's fortunes waned, Gregory became a summer intern at McGovern headquarters near the Capitol and was instructed to get further intelligence, "something different."

Hunt, said Silbert, "wanted the physical layout, the floor plan of the arrangement of headquarters of Senator McGovern, particularly that of (campaign directors) Frank Mankiewicz and Gary Hart.

"He wanted to know where the pictures were on the wall, where the heating outlets were, where the vents were," Silbert said, as well as office keys or impressions of them.

BUGGING

He said Gregory helped one of the seven defendants enter McGovern headquarters during working hours, and in mid-May tried but failed to help them break in during the night to plant bugging devices.

Besides Liddy and Hunt,

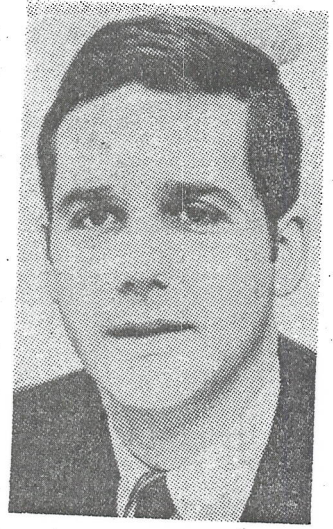
the other defendants charged with conspiracy, burglarly and illegal electronic eavesdropping against Democratic officials were the five actually arrested inside the Watergate offices — Bernard L. Barker, James W. McCord Jr., Frank A. Sturgis, Eugenio R. Martinez and Vergilio R. Gonzalez.

Judge Sirica impatiently demanded that defense attorney Henry R. Rothblatt "proceed, proceed" when the lawyer gave an emotional defense of his five clients as patriotic men who only followed orders. Barker, said Rothblatt, had devoted his life to the cause of "preserving the democratic system of government, particularly in this hemisphere."



AP Wirephoto

DEFENDANT E. HOWARD HUNT JR.
He offered to change his plea on three counts



AP Wirephoto

JEB MAGRUDER
Implicated in case