

WATERGATE PLEA OF
GUILTY ACCEPTED

Campaign Espionage Admitted

Examiner News Services

WASHINGTON — Watergate defendant E. Howard Hunt Jr. pleaded guilty today to all charges against him and said the prosecution's claim of a wide-scale political espionage operation ordered by top officials of President Nixon's re-election campaign was essentially correct.

U.S. District Judge John Sirica, who earlier refused to accept a guilty plea to three charges, accepted the second plea covering six counts of conspiracy, burglary, bugging and wiretapping against Hunt in connection with last summer's break-in at the Democratic Party's national headquarters here.

Strong Case

In refusing to accept the first plea, Sirica said the government had a strong case on all six counts and that the interest of justice demanded that they all be prosecuted.

It leaves six men, including a former White House consultant and another man who held positions at the White House, the Treasury Department, and in the Nixon campaign, on trial in the Watergate case, which was a major issue in the 1972 presidential campaign.

Hunt, a former CIA agent, also was a White House consultant for the Nixon administration.

Espionage

Before the second guilty plea was accepted, Hunt said under questioning from

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the judge that the prosecution's opening statement outlining a broad operation of political espionage by top members of Nixon's campaign was essentially correct.

After accepting the plea, Sirica placed Hunt under \$100,000 bond and he was taken into custody by U.S. marshals while his attorneys tried to raise it.

Sirica said he set the bond high because Hunt fled government investigators shortly after the break-in, had friends and acquaintances in foreign countries and was not employed.

The possibility the case would be expanded beyond the simple criminal counts involved in the break-in last June 17 apparently vanished when Hunt's attorney William Bittman, with the support of the prosecutor, successfully argued against Sirica's suggestion that for Hunt to have his guilty pleas accepted, he ought to explain "how you got into this conspiracy."

Hunt did admit under Sirica's questioning that he was guilty of each count and committed the violations "knowingly, intentionally and unlawfully."

Bittman argued against Hunt answering the question of how he became involved in the conspiracy on grounds the government plans to reopen a grand jury investigation of the political espionage.

Prejudice

Bittman said Hunt's answers might prejudice his position in that investigation and that his answers might prejudice the judge's own view regarding the other six defendants still standing trial.

Lawyers for the other six men charged with political espionage — obviously worried Hunt might later be called to testify against their clients and that his admission of guilt could hurt their case — had hinted they might move for a mistrial if Hunt's request was granted.

Bittman cited the death of Hunt's wife in a plane crash last month, the fact he has four children between the ages of 9 and 22 at home,

and his health among the reasons for his not wishing to proceed with the trial.

Guilty Plea

Silbert told Sirica the government had agreed to accept a guilty plea from Hunt but said he had made it "perfectly plain" to Hunt that one condition was that he would be called before a grand jury to testify about "what knowledge, if any, he has about others involved in the Watergate affair."

After a recess, the trial resumed without Hunt at the defense table, and testimony began.

Sirica gave the jurors no explanation of Hunt's absence except to advise them that they were "no longer to be concerned with the case of the United States against E. Howard Hunt."

Witness

Among the opening witnesses was Robert Fletcher, a former college student who said he was asked by Hunt to recruit young people to infiltrate Democratic organizations and feed out information useful to the Republicans.

Fletcher said he met Hunt in the summer of 1971 at the Robert R. Mullen Co., a Washington public relations firm headed by Fletcher's uncle, Robert Bennett. Hunt was employed by the firm.

In February, 1972, Fletcher said, he visited the firm, said he was dropping out of school and was interested in working in the Republican campaign, hoping to get possible leads to employment.

Fletcher said he talked to Hunt.

"We chatted for a while," Fletcher said. "Then he got

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up and closed the door and said he had something he wanted to talk to me about."

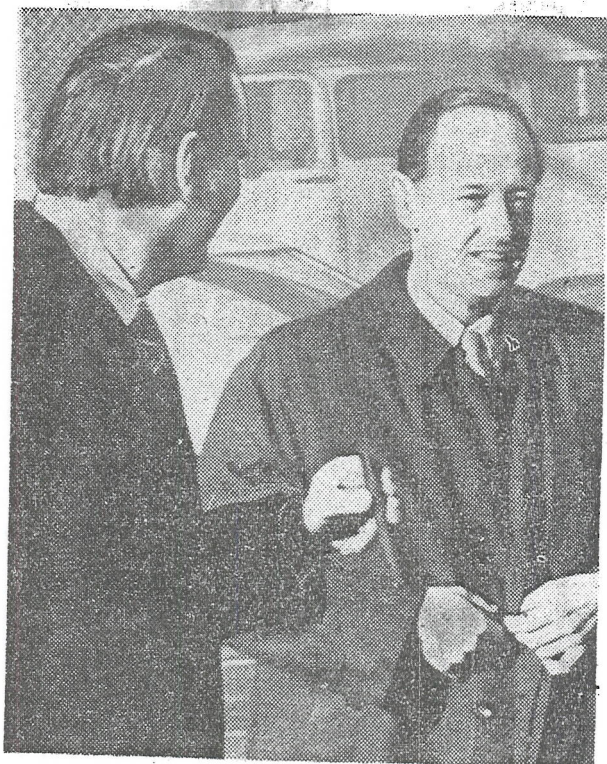
Fletcher said he was asked if he had any friends interested in joining Democratic organizations to provide information for the Republicans. Fletcher said he could think of none at the moment but later got in touch with a long-time friend, Thomas Gregory, a student at Brigham Young University.

Gregory, who is to testify later, was identified yesterday by the government as a spy planted in the campaign offices of Democratic Sens. Edmund Muskie and George McGovern.

Earlier witnesses were police and FBI experts who presented photographs and charts of the Watergate office building which housed the Democratic headquarters, and its environs.

In a two-hour opening statement to the jury yesterday, Silbert alleged that Hunt was the chief recruiter for the political spy squad, which he said was funded by \$235,000 from Nixon's re-election campaign and directed by another defendant, former White House staffer G. Gordon Liddy.

The other defendants are James W. McCord Jr., former security coordinator for the Nixon re-election committee, Barnard L. Barker, Frank A. Sturgis, Eugenio R. Martinez and Virgilio Gonzalez, former CIA operatives.



HOWARD HUNT AFTER ENTERING PLEA
With attorney (left) William Bittman

—AP Photo