

TRIALS

The Spy in the Cold

"Well, I'm sorry but I don't believe you," said Federal Judge John J. Sirica. He was addressing four of the Watergate defendants, and what he did not believe was their claim that they could not remember who had supplied them with money. Even sums as high as \$114,000, they said, simply turned up in brown manila envelopes from none knew where. Despite the judge's sharp questioning, the four insisted last week on pleading ignorance—and guilt. That reduced the number of defendants from seven to two and also reduced the likelihood that the trial would ever disclose who sanctioned the conspiracy to bug Democratic Party headquarters last June.

The four—three of whom are Cubans from Miami—were talked into pleading guilty, TIME has learned, by the same man who recruited them into the conspiracy in the first place: E. Howard Hunt, the former CIA official who had pleaded guilty himself a week earlier. Hunt promised his four confederates that unidentified "friends" would offer each defendant up to \$1,000 for every month he spent in prison, with more money to be paid at the time of his release (TIME, Jan. 22).

The guilty plea by the four defendants staved off a prospective courtroom uproar—testimony that Hunt had told them the Watergate bugging had been approved by the White House, specifically by two presidential advisers—former Attorney General John Mitchell, then head of the Committee for the Re-Election of the President, and Charles W. Colson, who at the time was on the White House staff as special counsel to the President.

Castro. Hunt's influence over the four dates back to 1961, when Hunt was a leading CIA official engaged in planning the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba. At that time, the four men were convinced that Hunt spoke secretly for the U.S. Government; apparently they still are. In 1972, when Hunt recruited them into the Watergate conspiracy, he grandly told them: "It's got to be done. My friend Colson wants it. Mitchell wants it." Colson is in fact an old friend of Hunt's; it was he who got Hunt onto the White House staff in 1971 as a \$100-a-day consultant. Hunt also told the four that their old enemy Fidel Castro was sending money indirectly to the Democratic Party in the hope that a McGovern victory would soften the U.S. attitude toward Cuba.

After the Watergate arrests, Hunt became more cautious, referring to Administration officials merely as "my people." He insisted that his people were prepared to put up plenty of money for the defense of the arrested men. Of the \$35,000 Hunt is known to have received from his people, however, only

about \$8,000—or \$2,000 apiece—has reached the four defendants. Yet the four men do not appear to be displeased with the arrangement. To have worked with Hunt, one of them told the court, had been "the greatest honor."

"Under the spreading chestnut tree, I sold you and you sold me." In an interview with TIME Correspondent David Beckwith, E. Howard Hunt quoted those mocking lines from George Orwell's *1984*, and then he added defensively: "There was none of that in any operation I ever ran. Nobody above or below me was ever sold out. I protect the people I deal with."

Hunt, a remarkable storyteller (who has written some 46 novels as well as an account of the Bay of Pigs fiasco called *Give Us This Day*), decided to talk because "I've been taking a real beating in the press. I've been portrayed

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E. HOWARD HUNT
"My people."

as an irresponsible adventurer, a desperado. And bring a photographer. The pictures of me at the trial have made me look like a buffoon." For legal reasons, he refused to say much about the Watergate trial, but he reminisced freely about other adventures.

"Let me tell you a story," Hunt declared. "The last wartime operation I was involved in was an air resupply operation in central China. We had a five-man guerrilla team that hadn't been resupplied for months, so we went parachuting supplies out of a C-47 to them in a rice paddy. I went along as a cargo kicker, holding onto the chute wire and pushing the stuff out in a hurry from about 600 feet. Two of us were hit in the face by flak on the way back, and one later got caught by the Japs and skinned alive, but the point is this: A team out on an unorthodox mission expects resupply, it expects concern and attention. The team should never get

the feeling they're abandoned. End of story."

Hunt makes no effort to hide his own sense of abandonment. "Nobody has invited me anywhere for six months," he says. "My family has been harassed, my kids are teased and taunted at school. Most of my old CIA friends, people I worked with for years and thought I was close to, have cut me off. I had lunch last week with my daughter at a club in Georgetown and saw a CIA officer who worked for me in Japan. He looked right through me."

Secure. Speaking of the death of his wife in a Chicago plane crash last month, Hunt insists that the mysterious \$10,000 she was carrying in \$100 bills was to have been invested "in a new business enterprise out there, a concern that might have provided me with a job after I got out of jail." Turning a bit maudlin, he remarks: "I've often wished that it had been me on the plane instead of my wife. The Watergate would have been over for me. My family would have been financially secure. And the four children would have a mother instead of a father wasting away in jail." At another point, as he spoke of trying to explain his situation to his nine-year-old son, he wept. Still later he referred to himself as "a fish at the end of a line; I'm struggling hard, but it looks like a pretty strong line."

Hunt joined the CIA in 1950 after having served in the Navy and the OSS during World War II, worked as a LIFE correspondent in the South Pacific, won a Guggenheim fellowship in creative writing and sold a movie script (*Bimini Run*) to Warner Bros. for \$35,000. He is proud of his 20 years in the CIA, though he feels "the agency" has treated him badly of late. "When they identified me as a former CIA officer right after the Watergate arrests," he says, "they abrogated our agreement of confidentiality."

As a member of the agency's "Department of Dirty Tricks," he worked on the operation that overthrew the Communist-supported Guatemala regime of Jacobo Arbenz in 1954. After the coup, he recalls, "Arbenz and his people were stripped naked at the airport and searched before they were allowed to leave. One of his aides was Che Guevara. If we'd let our Guatemalans start to shoot them, as they wanted, there's no telling when the shooting would have stopped. It was a close decision, and I have often wondered how effective Castro would have been without the intelligence of that asthmatic little medical student from Argentina."

On his years in espionage, Hunt reflects: "You see, our Government trains people like myself to do these things and do them successfully. It becomes a way of life for a person like me." Often he traveled under assumed names, says Hunt, "to preserve plausible denial," the phrase rolling from his lips so smoothly that it sounds like an agency cliché. Again and again he returns to

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the theme of an officer's loyalty to his subordinates: "If your people are caught in an operation, you do everything you can for them. Money is the cheapest commodity you've got in an operation like this."

Hunt retired from the agency in 1970. "The Bay of Pigs," he says bitterly, "really ended my chance for substantial advancement within the CIA, because I was associated with it and the thing went sour." In 1971 he was asked to join the White House to plug security leaks. "It wasn't a petty operation. There were major leaks involving the SALT talks, operations in India. One leak resulted in the extermination of one of our agents in Asia. The Administration couldn't stand for that, and I worked closely with the CIA trying to stop it."

Why did he get mixed up in the Watergate case? Hunt admits that he had a political motive, which he dresses up rather elaborately. "There is a built-in bias by the intellectual community, including the news media, against people who want to preserve the best of our country's heritage. As for me, I don't want to exchange the good of this country for the uncertainties of change." Hunt also has a more practical explanation for his involvement: "I was not aware that my activity constituted a federal offense. I never personally went into Democratic offices, and I thought the most they could get me on was second-degree burglary."

Hunt insists that he never thought much of the Watergate scheme in the first place. "I cased the situation thoroughly, and I'm good at it. I appraised the risk [in bugging Democratic headquarters] as very high and the potential return as very low. I recommended against it, but it wasn't my decision. I can tell you this: if it had been a CIA operation and I'd been in charge, it never would have happened."