

State Department Let
Hunt Copy 240 Cables

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Clearance Not Questioned

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E. Howard Hunt Jr. obtained copies of 240 classified diplomatic cables from the State Department in 1971 on a "routine" request from a White House aide, virtually with no questions asked, officials acknowledged yesterday.

Hunt was employed at the time as a White House consultant to check on security leaks, and he subsequently was convicted in the Watergate conspiracy. It was revealed on Monday through Hunt's own testimony that after checking the State Department cables, he forged two of his own to embellish the Kennedy administration's complicity in the Nov. 1, 1963 assassination of President Ngo Dinh Diem of South Vietnam.

The new disclosures yesterday showed that on a single telephone call from a White House aide, David Young, Hunt gained access to hundreds of State Department cables, apparently with no check at all on Hunt's own security status. Young's call to State, and Hunt's White House identification card, were treated as adequate authority and security clearance, State Department spokesman Charles W. Bray indicated.

For months before, during and after that time, the Nixon administration charged that press disclosures of the Pentagon Papers on the history of the Vietnam war seriously endangered national security. Hunt's mission was supposedly to check on the leakage of the Pentagon Papers, for the theft of which Daniel Ells-

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berg is still on trial in Los Angeles.

At the time, Bray said, Hunt's visit to the State Department was treated as "routine." In the department's defense, Bray said, "... Business gets done as between any set of institutions, public or private, with a certain assumption of authority and benign intent." "Obviously," said Bray, "and in retrospect, this particular request turns out to have been far from routine—in retrospect."

In grand jury testimony made public Monday in the Ellsberg case, Hunt claimed that Charles W. Colson, President Nixon's former counsel, ordered Hunt to "create" two cables when the documents Hunt obtained from the State Department failed to implicate the Kennedy administration directly enough in the assassination of President Diem, as distinct from the coup to

overthrow Diem. Colson has denied giving such an order.

Bray told reporters yesterday that "on or about Sept. 20, 1971, there was a request from a member of the staff of the White House ... I believe it was David Young ... that Mr. Hunt be given access to cable traffic to and from Saigon for the period ... April 1-Nov. 30, 1963."

The request went to the office of William B. Macomber Jr., deputy under secretary of state, Bray said.

Bray said later yesterday that he talked by telephone with Macomber, now U.S. ambassador to Turkey, and Macomber could not recall a conversation with Young concerning Hunt. Bray said, however, that records indicate a request to someone in Macomber's office and Macomber, in any event, had done business with Young on changes in the classification of documents.

Young at that time was listed as a member of the

National Security Council staff headed by Henry A. Kissinger. Kissinger recently noted, however, that as of July, 1971, Young had been assigned to the Domestic Council, headed by John Ehrlichman.

Bray stressed that "when a staff member in good standing in the White House asks for our assistance in providing facts or documents to the White House for whom we all work, we tend to respond to requests like that on the assumption that the request is made with a certain institutional authority."

State Department records, said Bray, show that Hunt "worked for at least part of one day, and maybe on additional days as well," going through the cables. But Hunt, he said, "would not divulge his purpose in inspecting the cable traffic to those who were assisting him in our records services division."

"We do know that ... when completed his survey of the cable traffic ... he was authorized to and did take with him copies of some 240 cables."

Bray said that the cables extended through many categories, including secret. When asked if anyone at State inquired whether Hunt had security clearance to examine and obtain copies of such documents, Bray said, "I don't know. I am inclined to doubt it, in those circumstances."

"Isn't it a little odd," a newsman asked, "that a pro forma check of Mr. Hunt's security classification was not made?"

"Not, I believe, for any-

one working in the White House, no," replied Bray, "for the same reason that we would not normally check the security clearance of somebody from various other agencies in this government. The fact of employment tends to speak for itself ..."

Bray said that because this "appeared on the face of it to be a routine request from the White House ... It certainly need not have involved the Secretary of State and did not." Bray said he believes that the first time that Secretary William P. Rogers "was aware of this was yesterday, when the wire stories started moving excerpts from Mr. Hunt's deposition out of Los Angeles."

When reports first appeared in the press last month alleging that Hunt had "fabricated" State Department documents concerning Diem's assassination, Bray said there was nothing in those accounts that was "in any way linked to the Department of State." Therefore, Bray said then, there was nothing for State to investigate.

Now, said Bray, "There is an exploration underway."

Bray said Hunt may "have gone directly" to the records division to try to examine the cables on his own authority, before Young's subsequent phone call clearing the path.