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# Ehrlichman: Nixon Backed 'Plumber' Trip

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LOS ANGELES, Oct. 1—President Nixon "specifically approved" a venture to the West Coast by E. Howard Hunt and G. Gordon Liddy to develop information on Daniel Ellsberg and the Pentagon Papers leak, according to former White House domestic chief John D. Ehrlichman.

He did not, however, say that Mr. Nixon approved the burglary of the office of Ellsberg's analyst. Ehrlichman testified last June before the Los Angeles County grand jury, which last month returned an indictment charging him with perjury and conspiracy in connection with the break-in at the psychiatrists' Beverly Hills office. His testimony, along with that of more than two dozen other witnesses, was made public today.

While the 727-page transcript revealed nothing dramatically now, it did shed some light on the role of the so-called "plumbers" unit, the secret White House investigative team created by Mr. Nixon in the summer of 1971, and its relationship with the President.

Four members of that team were indicted with Ehrlichman on charges of burglary and conspiracy to commit burglary. They included Egil (Bud) Krogh and David Young, White House staffers who co-chaired the plumbers, and Hunt and Liddy.

Ehrlichman testified that the President had established the plumbers' responsibilities in a conversation with Krogh, including an order to investigate the Pentagon Papers leak. In the course of that probe, Ehrlichman said, Krogh recommended that Hunt and Liddy be dispatched to Los Angeles to "see if they could develop some facts which Krogh felt he badly needed, in defining the scope of the apparent conspiracy, and some of the missing details, as to how the Pentagon Papers had actually been obtained, duplicated and disseminated."

Ehrlichman was asked: "And did you approve that recommendation?"

"I believe the recommendation was discussed specifically with the President, before it was approved."

"By you?"

"No, I—as I say, I believe he- —he specifically approved it. And it's my recollection that he either discussed it with —well, I know he discussed it with Mr. Hoover."

"What was your understanding," the questioning continued, "of the investigative methods to be used by Mr. Hunt and Liddy during the course of their investigations?"

"Only that they were to conduct themselves in such a fashion that it did not appear that the White House was directly involved in the act of investigation."

Both Ehrlichman and the President have denied any advance knowledge of the burglary of the office of Ellsberg's psychiatrist, Dr. Lewis Feilding. In a nationwide speech Aug. 15, the President said he "at no time" authorized

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use of illegal methods by the plumbers.

Former White House counsel John W. Dean III told the Senate Watergate committee that he had been informed by Krogh that the orders for the burglary came "right out of the Oval Office."

The grand jury transcript indicated that the plumbers' mission—to identify and plug government leaks—had high priority in the White House and that both Krogh and Young had direct access to the President.

Ehrlichman testified that while he had overall supervision of the plumbers, the President "did not want me to shorten my attention to ongoing duties, which were basically in the area of domestic policy . . .

"And so he said, in substance, 'Look, Bud, if you ever need to see me, I'm available to you,' meaning Krogh; 'but at the same time you can talk to John about these problems.' . . . And that's functionally about the way it worked. He [Krogh] did have recourse to the President directly on occasion, as did Mr. Young."

The transcript indicates that when Hunt and Liddy first went to California on assignmen from Krogh, it was to case Fielding's office and decide whether it was feasible to break in later and photograph psychiatric records on Ellsberg.

Hunt, who testified before the grand jury under immunity from prosecution, said that "the concept laid before me was not to get Ellsberg but simply to determine whether this was a man of rational mind, whether he was ideologically motivated, whether this was a unitary personal act on his part."

Hunt said information gathered by other government agencies depicted Ellsberg as "a brilliant, unstable man," who had had "a great many sexual problems" and who had "consorted with females of foreign birth and extraction—which was a danger signal to anybody in the counter-espionage field." Hunt added that "we knew the details of his drug experimentation," but did not elaborate.

Ellsberg could not be reached for comment.

Hunt's testimony revealed, apparently for the first time, that during the "casing" trip to Los Angeles in late August, he, with Liddy, gained access to Fielding's office by posing as a doctor and convincing the cleaning lady to admit him. While he distracted the woman, Hunt said, Liddy took photographs of the interior.

The actual break-in, however, was performed about a week later by three Cubans recruited by Hunt.

Why, Hunt was asked, couldn't he and Liddy have performed the job themselves?

"Because we were both associated with the White House," Hunt replied.

The burglars returned empty-handed, having found nothing after rifling Fielding's file over the 1971 Labor Day weekend.

Ehrlichman testified to a meeting with Attorney General John N. Mitchell and Robert Mardian, a deputy attorney general, regarding the political consequences of prosecuting Ellsberg.

"There was every evidence that Mr. Ellsberg was gong to use the occasion of a trial as a political platform; and I can recall a conversation in which it was opened to judgment as to whether from a political standpoint it would have been a good idea to conduct a prosecution which would be a political platform, would put the conduct of the war and Vietnamization in issue prior to the November election in '72.