

Baker Traces CIA's Watergate Links

By Jack Anderson

For months, Sen. Howard Baker (R-Tenn.) has been piecing together evidence that the Central Intelligence Agency somehow was involved in the Watergate break-in.

Now he is preparing a detailed report, backed up with secret documents. The report will depend for explosive effect, however, more on the questions it asks than on the answers it gives.

The report will focus largely on former CIA agent E. Howard Hunt, who retired from the CIA in 1970, joined a CIA cover organization and then went on the White House payroll in July, 1971. A year later, he helped plan the Watergate break-in.

In Baker's study of the CIA role in the case, he has made these tentative findings:

- Deputy CIA Director Vernon Walters' repeated claim that the CIA grew wary of Hunt and broke contact with him by August 31, 1971, is false. The CIA now admits its top psychiatrist, Dr. Bernard Malloy, met secretly with Hunt on the Daniel Ellsberg case as late as October 27, 1971.

- Baker has documents showing the CIA role in the Watergate cover-up was far more extensive than has been revealed in public testimony.

- Baker's documents also indicate that former CIA Director Richard Helms helped place Hunt with Mullen and Co., a CIA

front. Baker believes the CIA kept close tabs on Hunt even after he supposedly "retired" from the CIA.

- While Hunt was working for the CIA front company, he sought out an old Bay of Pigs sidekick, Bernard Barker. The senator suspects Hunt may have been planning exploits with Barker on behalf of the CIA. The senator would like to prove, but cannot, that two of the exploits were the Watergate and Ellsberg psychiatrist break-ins. What Baker can show, however, is that Hunt contacted Barker in April, 1971, months before going on the White House payroll.

- After Hunt went to work for the White House, he got a tip from Robert Bennett, head of the Mullen CIA cover company, that one of Bennett's ex-employees in New England had some fresh information on the Chappaquiddick episode. Hunt could have obtained the information by making a simple call to the ex-employee. Instead, Hunt obtained from the CIA's deputy director a wig, false ID cards, a voice modulator, a camera, a recorder and a "safe house." The trip to New England proved totally fruitless, leading Baker to suspect it may have been a cover for some other CIA purpose.

- Baker has received indications that Hunt was reporting indirectly to the CIA even after he had moved into the White House. The senator suspects, for example, that the CIA may have been involved with Hunt's cele-

brated excursion to Denver in a ludicrous CIA wig to talk to Dita Beard. The CIA reportedly was worried whether we got the famous ITT-Dita Beard memo from the same source who gave us the ITT Chile memos implicating the CIA in a plot to block the inaugural of the late Salvador Allende.

- Baker suspects, but cannot prove, that Hunt's plan to break into the safe of Las Vegas publisher Hank Greenspun may also have had some CIA undertones. The safe contained billionaire Howard Hughes' private papers. Hughes not only was associated with the Mullen CIA front but had also employed Robert Maheu, another CIA front man.

- After the Watergate break-in was discovered, Hunt fled to California to a man identified as "Mort Jackson," who has close CIA connections, Baker has learned.

These bits of evidence have led Baker to suspect that Hunt may never have broken off his ties with the CIA, despite statements to the contrary from CIA officials.

We dug into this story a year ago. We were able to report on April 7, 1973, that the CIA strangely had ordered its agents not to talk to the FBI about the Watergate case. We published the proof on May 8, quoting from a confidential FBI memo which said:

"It is recalled we specifically were requested by the CIA not to interview . . . two CIA employ-

ees, and instructions were issued to WFO (Washington Field Office) to this effect."

However, we later learned that the White House had asked the CIA to intervene with the FBI to limit the Watergate investigation. This request was made by H. R. Haldeman, then the powerful White House staff chief, who told the CIA "it was the President's wish." We obtained and, on May 30, quoted the secret CIA memos about Haldeman's intervention.

This led us to the conclusion not that the CIA was implicated in the Watergate break-in but that the White House was trying to use the CIA to thwart the FBI investigation.

Baker now believes the CIA involvement was much greater than we had been able to learn. Our own CIA sources, while reserving judgment on Baker's report until they see it, agree there's more CIA involvement in the cover-up than has been printed. They concede that numerous contradictions at least need to be clarified.

Official CIA spokesmen, however, gave a "no comment" to our detailed questions, saying only that they were cooperating with congressional investigators. Bennett told my associate Les Whitten the Mullen company severed all its CIA ties in June 1973. He firmly denied that he had acted as a conduit for information from Hunt to the CIA during the 1971-72 Watergate times.