

What Nixon Was Told Of Greenspun Break-In

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President Nixon was told more than a year ago by his two top aides of a burglary at the office of a Las Vegas newspaper publisher, but neither he nor the aides, H. R. Haldeman and John Ehrlichman, brought the matter to the attention of the Justice Department, according to well-placed sources there.

Federal investigators have known for some time of plans laid by E. Howard Hunt Jr. and G. Gordon Liddy, two of the original convicted Watergate conspirators, to break into the office of Henry M. Greenspun, the publisher of the Las Vegas Sun, but it had been believed until now that the plot was abandoned because of tight security there.

Investigators for the Senate Watergate committee, who were the first to learn of the burglary plans from James W. McCord Jr., who has also been convicted for his role in the June, 1972, Watergate break-in, were reported to be studying the transcript of an April 14, 1973, meeting between Mr. Nixon, Haldeman and Ehrlichman.

The transcript of that meeting, released by the White House on Tuesday, contains a discussion by the three men of what Hunt might tell the Watergate grand jury about his activities as a part-time White House consultant.

Hunt began working about a year before the Watergate break-in as a member of the White House "plumbers," which organized a number of undercover investigations and operations, including a similar burglary of the office of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist.

Mr. Nixon, the transcript shows, asked the two aides whether Hunt was "prepared to talk (to the grand jury) on other activities that he engaged in." Ehrlichman replied that he was unsure,

but then mentioned that McCord had "volunteered this H a n k Greenspun thing . . ."

"Is that a serious thing?" the President asked, "Did they really try to get into Hank Greenspun?"

"I guess they actually got in," Ehrlichman answered.

Mr. Nixon at first concluded that Greenspun's office had been "bugged," but was corrected by the other two.

"They busted his safe to get something out of it, wasn't that it?" volunteered Haldeman.

"They flew out, broke his safe, got something out," added Ehrlichman.

The Senate Watergate committee was told in an executive session last January that the intention of Liddy and Hunt had been to obtain material in Greenspun's safe that they believed concerned F. Donald Nixon, the President's brother, and Howard Hughes, the billionaire.

But according to reports of those present at the closed-door meeting, Terry F. Lenzner, the counsel in charge of that aspect of the committee's investigation, expressed his belief that the break-in had not occurred because the location was a "newspaper office and too many people" were present.

One Justice Department lawyer, asked if there was a "legal obligation" on the President or his aides to tell the department of their belief that the Greenspun burglary had occurred, replied, "I suspect there is."

A Senate source, also a lawyer, said he believed that even if the Burglary had not occurred, it would have been legally incumbent on the President and Haldeman after April 14 of last year, and upon Ehrlichman before that, to report any suspicion or knowledge of an illegal conspiracy between Hunt and Liddy to break into the Greenspun office.

The source characterized the burglary as "an Ellsberg break-in without the national security angle."

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