

Nixon and 2 Aides Said to Have Known of White House Transcript Tells of Office Break-in

By JOHN M. CREWDSON

WASHINGTON, May 2—President Nixon was told more than a year ago by his two top assistants of a burglary at the office of a Las Vegas newspaper publisher, but neither he nor the aides, H. R. Haldeman and John D. Ehrlichman, informed the Justice Department, according to well placed sources there.

Federal investigators have known for some time of plans by E. Howard Hunt Jr. and G. Gordon Liddy, two of the original convicted Watergate conspirators, to break into the office of Henry Greenspun, the publisher, 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., were reported today to be studying carefully the transcript of an April 14, 1973, meeting of Mr. Nixon, Mr. Haldeman and Mr. Ehrlichman. Mr. McCord has also been convicted for his role in the Watergate break-in in June 1972.

Hunt Discuseed

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

Mr. 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 burglary of the office of Dr. Daniel Ellsberg's former psychiatrist.

Mr. Nixon, according to the transcript, asked the two aides whether Mr. Hunt was "prepared to talk [to the grand jury] on other activities that he engaged in."

Mr. Ehrlichman replied that he was unsure, but then mentioned that Mr. McCord had

"volunteered this Hank Greenspun thing . . ."

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

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

Mr. Nixon at first concluded that Mr. 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 Mr. Haldeman.

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

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

But according to reports of those at the January 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 "news-paper office and too many people" were present.

One Justice Department lawyer, asked if there was a "legal obligation" on the President or his assistants 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 upon the President and Mr. Haldeman after April 14 of last year, and upon Mr. Ehrlichman before that, to report any suspicion or knowledge of an illegal conspiracy between Mr. Hunt and Mr. 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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but Not Acted on Las Vegas Burglary