

JUL 4 1974

A Different Account of 'Hush Money'

SFChronicle

Washington

The House Judiciary Committee heard testimony yesterday that Watergate conspirator E. Howard Hunt did not make a blackmail threat against the White House in the explicit terms that John W. Dean reported to President Nixon during their key March 21, 1973, conversation.

But some committee members generally agreed that Hunt's reported remarks were an implied threat, which Dean, then White House counsel, may have embellished because he had other information about what Hunt knew.

The witness at the closed impeachment inquiry hearing was Paul L. O'Brien, a lawyer for the Committee to Re-Elect the President, to

Back Page Col. 5

From Page 1

whom Hunt made his request for \$120,000 on March 16, 1973.

O'Brien relayed Hunt's message to Dean, who sent it on to Frederick C. LaRue at the Committee to Re-elect. LaRue has testified that \$75,000 was delivered to Hunt's lawyer the evening of March 21 as payment for Hunt's legal fees.

Members said O'Brien testified yesterday that he understood it was not hush money but funds for legal fees, which under some conditions would be proper.

However, Dean told the President on March 21, according to the White House transcripts, that hush money had been paid to the Watergate defendants and that more was needed. The President made several statements which seemed to agree and at one point said, "For Christ's sake, get it."

The morning of March 21, 1973, Dean told the Presi-

dent in detail about the attempts to cover up White House involvement in the Watergate break-in. He said this about Hunt's threat:

"Hunt has now made this direct threat against Ehrlichman . . . he says, 'I will bring John Ehrlichman down to my knees and put him in jail. I have done enough seamy things for him.'"

Members said O'Brien told the committee yesterday that Hunt had told him he had done "some seamy things" for Ehrlichman and would have to "review his options" if he did not receive more money.

The President and Dean agreed that one of the "things" was the break-in of the office of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist which Hunt supervised.

Representative Hamilton Fish (Rep.-N.Y.) said it was plain from O'Brien's testimony that O'Brien was just an attorney from the Committee to Re-Elect the President who was conveying a message he did not entirely understand.

Fish said Dean "obviously embellished" on what O'Brien had told him in reporting to the President. However, Fish said that Dean, who admitted to being in on the Watergate coverup from the beginning, had the advantage of knowing more of what was going on than O'Brien.

"What difference does it make whether he threatened to put Ehrlichman on his knees?" asked Representative Jack Brooks (Dem.-Tex.). "It was a blackmail threat."

Members said that O'Brien testified that he understood the money was requested for legal fees and living expenses. Hunt was to be sentenced a few days later for his involvement in the break-in of Democratic headquarters at the Watergate complex.

But Dean in his March 21 conversation with the President said, according to the White House transcripts, that money had been paid to the Watergate conspirators since just after the June 17, 1972 break-in to pay lawyers and buy silence.

O'Brien was named as an

unindicted co-conspirator by the Watergate grand jury that indicted seven others for involvement in the coverup.

O'Brien was the first Judiciary Committee witness to be called at the request of the President's lawyer, James D. St. Clair. St. Clair's thesis is that the only offense for which the President might be impeached would be involvement in the Watergate coverup, and specifically for involvement in payment of hush money.

He is focusing almost solely on trying to convince the committee that the President was not involved, and that any money that was paid was for legitimate expense.

The committee then began questioning LaRue and will continue on Monday. St. Clair hopes to show that Dean set in motion the payment of the \$75,000 on March 21 by telephoning LaRue before rather than after his meeting with the President.

If the call were made before the meeting, St. Clair contends, it would tend to show the President was not involved.

Washington Post