

Hunt Admits Lying About Watergate

Washington

E. Howard Hunt admitted yesterday that he had lied at least a dozen times about his demands for hush money and his protection of higher-ups in the Watergate scandal.

In a dramatic courtroom confession, Hunt, 56, told how he gradually had come to realize that the men he had been protecting were not worthy of his loyalty, and how he had finally decided "to tell the truth once and for all."

He said he saw that even his own children had come to doubt him.

Testifying at the Watergate coverup trial here, the former CIA agent said his "rude awakening" began last spring with the White House's publication of edited versions of many of former President Nixon's Watergate tapes.

"I felt a sense of rude awakening," Hunt said. "I realized that these men were not worthy of my continued and future loyalty."

At first, Hunt said, he still did nothing. "It was in my self-interest to leave the situation as it was," he said.

Then, over the summer, he said, he was subpoenaed as a coverup trial witness. "I was faced with the hard decision of whether I should continue to lie to protect others or to tell the truth once and for all," he said.

Hunt said he decided to end the deception. He said he knew Watergate prosecutors had "certain reservations" about his past testimony, but even beyond that, he realized that his family did, too.

"I sensed all along even my own children were not persuaded that my testimony in various forms was, in all respects, factual and candid," Hunt said. Urged by his attorneys to make a full disclosure, Hunt said he

finally resolved just in the past month "to testify to the entire truth."

"Have you done so in this courtroom today to the best of your ability, Mr. Hunt?" assistant Watergate special prosecutor Richard Ben-Veniste asked him in the fi-

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nal question of the day.

"I have," Hunt said firmly.

The one-time secret agent prefaced his confession with a stream of details about the involvement of former Attorney General John N. Mitchell in pre-Watergate break in planning and Hunt's subsequent collection of hush money payments as the price of his keeping quiet.

Hunt took the stand as a "court witness" called by U.S. District Judge John J. Sirica, a step that the prosecutors had requested so they could ask him leading questions and, in effect, treat him as though he were under cross-examination. The prosecutors had told the judge that even after Hunt was granted immunity from further prosecution in the spring of 1973, he had not been "entirely candid" in subsequent, repeated appearances before the Watergate grand jury here.

Before he stepped down from the witness stand yesterday, Hunt admitted, statement by statement, to false testimony in claiming that he had never been told who had approved the political espionage that led to the Watergate bugging, in denying contacts with former White House special counsel Charles W. Colson, and in disavowing threats to expose other "seamy things" that he, Hunt, had done for the White House.

Hunt began with a quick recitation of his work at the White House in 1971, first as a consultant for Colson and then as a member of the secret White House "plumbers unit" that burglarized the offices of the psychiatrist of Pentagon papers figure Daniel Ellsberg that fall.

In late November, 1971, Hunt said, G. Gordon Liddy, who also had been with the plumbers unit, told him he was moving to the Commit-

tee to Re-elect the President, not only as general counsel but with "other equally important functions as head of a large-scale, political intelligence gathering and political action unit."

Hunt said Liddy told him the budget "related to certain projects which were desired by the attorney general, John Dean and (Nixon campaign deputy director) Jeb Stuart Magruder." Giving his own description of the scheme, Hunt said it had two major categories: electronic surveillance and "what we termed the human resources side."

Under questioning by Ben-Veniste, Hunt said the "human resources side" included the proposed abduction schemes, prostitutes to compromise Democratic politicians, and a surreptitious-entry team such as the one caught on June 17, 1972 in the Watergate bugging and break-in at Democratic National Headquarters here.

Hunt said Liddy told him Mitchell had called for a less expensive plan, first at a meeting in the attorney general's office in January of 1972 and then again at a followup session on February 4.

An entry from Hunt's daily appointment diary for February 4 listed successive notations showing a luncheon meeting he had with Liddy that day and then a 4 p.m. meeting that Liddy was to have with the attorney general.

Underneath, in capital letters, Hunt had jotted down the final results of the day's work: "DISASTER."

In mid-February, Hunt said Liddy asked him to arrange a meeting with Colson, whom Liddy admired "as a man who could get things done, a mover and shaker" in the administration. Hunt said he arranged a get-together that same afternoon and left the two men talking while he retired to the other side of Colson's office, where "I smoked my pipe and read a magazine."

From there, Hunt said, he could see Colson pause "perhaps a dozen times" for phone calls. During one of them, the witness said, "Mr. Liddy leaned forward in a demonstrative fashion, using his hands."

Stepping out in a corridor after the meeting, Hunt said Liddy turned to him and said, "I think I may have done us some good . . . the only thing he could have done us some good on at that time was Project Gemstone."

Hunt said he and Liddy scaled the budget down to slightly less than \$250,000. Then, in early April, he said Liddy told him that it had been approved, saying:

"The big man said OK and the word is go."

Over the protest of Mitchell's lawyers, Hunt said Liddy meant the attorney general, whom Liddy often called "the big man . . . and/or the big boy." Mitchell, Hunt emphasized, was "the biggest man, rank-wise and stature-wise" in the planning and development of "the entire operation."

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