

Watergate Unit To Probe Plot On Columnist

By Bob Woodward

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The Watergate special prosecutor's office has begun an investigation of "allegations that there was a plot to physically injure" syndicated columnist Jack Anderson, a spokesman for Special Prosecutor Henry Ruth said yesterday.

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The investigation was begun after The Washington Post reported a week ago Sunday that convicted Watergate conspirator E. Howard Hunt Jr. had told associates shortly after the Watergate burglary arrests that he was ordered by a Nixon White House official to assassinate Anderson.

Three separate sources have told The Post that Hunt discussed with them in 1972 what he described as a plan to kill Anderson. According to these sources, Hunt told them he received the order in December, 1971, or January, 1972, following Anderson's publication of sensitive national security information in his daily newspaper column. The order was later rescinded, the sources said Hunt told them.

In an interview with Time magazine released yesterday, Hunt, who is in prison in Florida, said he was ordered only to make plans to drug Anderson. Hunt told Time he was ordered to plan how to drug Anderson before he appeared on his syndicated radio program so the columnist would talk incoherently and thereby be discredited.

When informed of this statement by Hunt yesterday, Anderson said, "That's ridiculous. That doesn't make sense. All my radio, and my TV shows for that matter, are taped in advance, so it wouldn't have worked."

In the Time magazine interview, Hunt said one plan to drug Anderson involved placing on the steering wheel of Anderson's car a substance that would enter the body through skin contact.

This procedure resembles the manner in which one Post source said that Hunt told him Anderson was to be assassinated. According to the source, Hunt said in 1972 that he consulted a former CIA physician and asked him to rig on the steering wheel of a car when Anderson was driving home at a high speed on River Road toward his suburban Maryland home.

Anderson confirmed yesterday that River Road is one of the routes he regularly uses to return home from his downtown Washington office.

In describing discussions about drugging Anderson, Hunt told the Time magazine reporter that he and fellow Watergate conspirator G. Gordon Liddy had lunch with a physician who worked for the CIA. Other plans that were considered but also rejected, according to Hunt in the Time interview, included placing a hallucinogen into one of Anderson's medicine bottles or putting a drug in a Anderson's cocktail at a party.

Anderson does not drink liquor, however, and, according to Hunt's account to Time, all the plans were scrapped. "It was just another wild idea that never got beyond the proposal stage," Hunt told the Time reporter. "Liddy and I engaged in a fact-finding mission, not an operation."

Hunt also said, according to Time, that the suggestion to drug Anderson came from former White House special counsel Charles W. Colson. "I simply followed orders," Time quoted Hunt as saying.

Colson denied yesterday that he had ever made a suggestion or issued such an order to Hunt. "It is the first I heard of it," Colson said. "It is totally off the wall."

The sources who provided the Post with the initial information about Hunt's allegations of an assassination plot against Anderson said they were particularly struck by the seriousness of it because Hunt had said it was one of two matters that had to be concealed from those investigating Watergate.

The other matter, according to the sources, was that Hunt feared disclosure of the 1971 burglary of the office of the psychiatrist to Pentagon Papers Defendant Daniel Ellsberg, which was not revealed publicly until much later.