

More on the New Coverup Scandal



Jack Anderson

SOME of the biggest names in America have been linked to a Texas Watergate scandal, which involves a bungled wire-tap operation, a coverup attempt and some accompanying shenanigans.

The story is every bit as fantastic as the Washington Watergate drama. The roots go back to the late oil curmudgeon, billionaire H.L. Hunt, whose children and aides split up in a classic struggle over his enormous wealth. One faction was led by the Hunt brothers, Bunker and Herbert, who suspected another faction of siphoning funds from the old man's empire.

To satisfy their suspicions, the government charges, they hired wiretappers who, in Watergate style, botched the job. A wiretapper, spotted outside the house of a former Hunt executive, was arrested on Jan. 16, 1970. The trail led to the two Hunt brothers, who began frantically pulling political wires to keep their names out of the scandal.

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WE HAVE Already reported the sworn testimony of two witnesses who told of a \$50,000 to \$60,000 "payoff" to the powerful Senate Judiciary chairman, Senator James Eastland, (Dem-Miss.), whose committee has jurisdiction over the Justice Department. He made calls in behalf of the Hunt brothers to Richard Kleindienst, who was then the deputy attorney general, and to House Appropriations Chairman George Mahon, whose nephew, Eldon Mahon, was one of the prosecutors.

Kleindienst called both the head of

the Criminal Division, Will Wilson, and Wilson's aide, Henry Patersen, about the case. Wilson and Mahon then spoke to Mahon's prosecutor-nephew. But all deny that they brought any political pressure to help Hunt.

The Hunt brothers managed to ward off an indictment for three years. But on Feb. 28, 1973, they were indicted. Both have pleaded not guilty.

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HERE ARE a few other allegations in this bizarre case:

- There is sworn testimony that Bunker Hunt discussed his pending prosecution with President Nixon at a barbecue, which former Treasury Secretary John Connally threw at his Texas ranch. A Hunt spokesman conceded that the multimillionaire had business dealings with Connally but denied a payoff of any kind.

- The case almost broke in open court last March when a lawyer started telling Federal Judge John Singleton in Houston about his suspicions of a coverup. Astonishingly, the judge abruptly silenced him.

- A key witness swore that lawyers hired by the Hunts offered him \$1250 a month if he would go to jail and keep his mouth shut. A second witness testified that he was also offered \$1250 a month for his silence. The money was never paid.

- Two witnesses in the case swore they were threatened with death if they testified against the Hunts. A Hunt spokesman called the charge absurd.

Today's column is by Jack Anderson and Les Whitten