

Originals of the attached clipping and this memo are going to DW for the files if he wants them. I'm sending these copies to you since this is not a new topic, at least at this end of our long correspondence.

Regarding Hougan's theory, you may recall that at the time Jenifer and I did some extensive speculating based on the same set of circumstances plus others which fitted the same pattern -- that the Watergate break-in, at some critical point or points, and as a result of careful and determined planning, was designed to be detected and exposed. The bungling was simply too universal and too thorough to permit any other truly logical conclusion.

(On one point, I think Hougan is wrong because he apparently knows little or nothing about the properties of adhesive tape. Placed vertically along the door's edge the tape could not have withstood the pressure of the spring behind the bolt. Placing it horizontally, around the two corners and along the face and back of the door, is the only way the frictional properties of the tape could be used to keep the bolt recessed in spite of the strength of the spring.)

Hougan does not go beyond describing the circumstances which led him to postulate an intention to sabotage the break-in; he puts a high priority on finding the motive behind such an intention, however, and says coyly he'd look first at CIA counter-intelligence.

You may recall that at the time we explored this area speculatively. Our postulates ran more or less like this: If the break-in actually was planned to be sabotaged, the probable political effects were obvious -- damage to the Republicans and Nixon's chances of re-election with a corresponding benefit to the martyred Democrats and McGovern's chances of replacing Nixon as President. We then had to ask: who the hell could want McGovern to defeat Nixon at such cost to the whole political process? Certainly not the Republicans. And the Democrats were not much likelier candidates, since if discovered the caper could only result in retaliation and plunge the whole campaign to a level wholly incompatible with McGovern's whole image. So there had to be a wild card, a joker in the deck which came from outside the normal political apparatus. The presence of so many ex-CIA figures in the picture was obvious from the beginning, of course, and the CIA itself -- with its need-to-know modus operandi and its chronic condition of operating with its right hand never knowing what the left was doing, -- appeared to be the only group within which a sub-clique could have the resources as well as the privacy with which to conceive and effect such an unorthodox way of wrecking a favored candidate and electing an underdog. Why would they want to? The answer would have to have nothing to do with right-wing or left-wing politics in this country, not fundamentally. The central reason would have to lie in the usual motive of the kingmaker -- to insure his own future. If elected, McGovern would have been a weak president, with a hostile Congress and therefore a weak administration. Nixon, on the other hand, especially after his daring volte-face on China, appeared likely to be an even stronger president than before, hard to control, fully capable of destroying anything in his path. McGovern, of course, would have been easily intimidated and far less likely to try cracking down on the whole CIA set-up, including our kingmaker clique.

Of the figures who have surfaced since then, Angleton strikes me as the most plausible guru to this element, if it existed.

Suggestion of a Trap

Startling Watergate Theory

Washington

If on the night of June 17, 1972, James McCord had told his team the coast was clear when he saw the last employee lock the door and leave 100 Democratic National Committee history might have been changed.

In all likelihood, the team of burglars would not have been caught, the break-in would have gone unnoticed, and the investigation and impeachment hearings against Richard M. Nixon never would have been held.

But McCord, who was watching the offices from across the street, did not tell his team for nearly an hour that the coast was clear.

Meanwhile, the building guard discovered the taped doors and notified the police.

Now comes investigative reporter Jim Hougan, a Washington editor of Harper's Magazine, with the thesis that anomalies and discrepancies in testimony and actual mistakes made during that break-in, have never been — and cannot be — explained away as accidental or unlucky.

In an article entitled "Watergate: Computer, Duped, Follow Burglars" in Harper's January issue, Hougan suggests that convicted burglar McCord, leader of the five-member team arrested in the Watergate that June night, deliberately sabotaged the break-in and "led his associates into a trap."

McCord was a senior Central Intelligence Agency official who retired after 14 years from his active duty role in 1962 to set up a private security firm in Washington. His only clients were the Republican National Committee and the Committee to Reelect the President.

When the investigation committee was set up, McCord became its chief of security. And when the door was closed, McCord's investigation called for putting liberal bugs on the Democratic headquarters telephones. McCord was put in charge.

Confusion over contradictory testimony about the break-in was

dismissed by the Senate Watergate committee as impossible to resolve since at least three and possibly four break-ins had occurred in the weeks before June 17 and the witnesses could have been referring to one or another of the earlier incidents.

There it remained, undisturbed, until Hougan became interested while researching a libel suit filed for a former McCord

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employee, now deceased, against the Washington Star.

In his article — which may later be expanded to book length — Hougan indicts McCord on a long list of mishaps or inaccuracies, including:

- Placing the now-famous tape horizontally across the latch to the Watergate garage, so it was visible. If it had been placed vertically

along the side of the door it could not have been seen unless the door was opened.

- Telling his colleagues at the "command post" at the Howard Johnson motel across the street that he had been delayed because he had checked the doors and "the tape was still there." Actually guard Frank Wills had found the tape and stripped it off.

- Insisting the operation should go forward after associate E. Howard Hunt learned the tape was missing and argued that the break-in should be halted.

- Much later, it was McCord who "blew the whistle" on the entire operation in a letter to Judge John Sirica — in an attempt, he said, to avoid a jail term.

There were other examples. But the most serious was the hour-long delay in informing his colleagues that the coast was clear although, watching from the Command Post across the street, McCord had seen the last employee leave, deactivating the lights and locking the door, and had watched the employees cross the street to the

Howard Johnson restaurant with Wills, the building guard.

Even as he told his colleagues the offices were still lit, Hougan says, he not only knew they were dark and empty but that the guard was away from the building.

"I can think of no innocent explanation for the deception," Hougan writes.

That hour, he says, may have changed the course of U.S. history. "Had McCord told the truth, and had the burglary begun at this time rather than much later, it would almost certainly have gone undetected..."

And it was, of course, the investigation of the burglary that began the long road leading ultimately to the House Judiciary Committee's approval of impeachment resolutions for abuse of power, obstruction of justice and tax evasion — and Nixon's resignation in disgrace.

So how, and why, did it happen?

McCord was a well-thought-of operative and administrator at the CIA, and an experienced investigator and security man, yet at every juncture he made decisions that proved catastrophic, applied trade-craft that was ludicrous, and misled his accomplices.

"That a career CIA officer such as McCord should blunder so completely is about as likely as a pediatricist accidentally precipitating his patient. Indeed, it is even less likely, since incompetence will not suffice as an 'explanation,'" the article says.

But Hougan also says, "To know that McCord sabotaged the break-in and that another Watergate cover-up continues into the present was not an end to the matter — merely a beginning."

The writer's investigation is continuing, and he gives high priority to finding the motive that led McCord to do as a double agent.

Hougan was asked in an earlier telephone interview where he would look. All he would say was that the CIA — particularly the counterintelligence division — is high on his list.