



FLECKED WITH TRUTH

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Reviewing

E. HOWARD HUNT, *AMERICAN SPY: MY SECRET HISTORY IN THE CIA,
WATERGATE, AND BEYOND*
(John Wiley & Sons 2007)

WHEN THE MAIN WATERGATE TRIAL took place in 1974 before Judge John J. Sirica in the United States District Court for the District of Columbia, the defendants included John N. Mitchell, Nixon's one-time attorney general, and H.R. Haldeman and John Ehrlichman, Nixon's closest allies.

E. Howard Hunt was a witness for the prosecution, a strange role for him. The White House had retained him to conduct the break-in of the Democratic Party office in the Watergate office building. He had pled guilty to the burglary indictment, both in order to protect his White House connection and because he did not have the energy or funds to fight on. He had been given a long sentence by Judge Sirica.

Hunt told the jury of his loyalty to his five break-in people, who faced long prison sentences. He said the White House had not provided the funds as promised for counsel fees and family support.

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He said that when the Watergate break-in turned bad, and he was linked to it, he shredded his secret collection of agents' telephone numbers. These numbers were in his Hermes notebook, which he kept in his upper right-hand pocket.

As I was one of the defense counsel, I would be cross-examining Hunt. When I heard the words *Hermes notebook*, I whispered to Plato Cacheris, who was representing John N. Mitchell, that a friend had given me a Hermes notebook. I took it from my own upper right-hand pocket and showed it to Plato. He noted that the notebook had a rigid metal spine.

He suggested that when I question Hunt I should show him my own Hermes notebook and then ask how a metal spine could go through a shredder.

I took Plato's suggestion. The cross-examination, as I recall it, went this way:

Q. You said that you shredded your Hermes notebook?

A. Yes.

Q. Did you ever put metal in a shredder?

A. No. It would break the shredder.

Q. With the permission of the court, I will give my own Hermes notebook to the clerk and I will ask the clerk to place it before you. Mr. Hunt, please look at the notebook. Don't you see that the spine is metal?

A. Yes.

Q. Would you agree with me that a notebook such as this should not be put in a shredder?

A. Yes.

Q. Do you wish to change your testimony that you put your Hermes notebook in a shredder?

A. No. Your Hermes Notebook is not the top of the line. It is a knock-off. Mine was the real thing.

Hunt enjoyed the exchange.

The defense team had somehow obtained Hunt's unpublished autobiography. It had some things helpful to the defense.

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Here is how Hunt got me again:

Q. Mr. Hunt, you have an unpublished autobiography, is that correct?

A. Yes.

Q. I am placing before you a photocopy of that unpublished autobiography and I ask you if this is your autobiography.

A. It is.

Q. Is it truthful?

A. Sir, it is flecked with truth.

During a court recess, Hunt and I passed in the corridor. He winked at me.

I now have E. Howard Hunt's posthumously published autobiography, *American Spy*. In it, Hunt mentions the Hermes notebook and his first autobiography, the one "flecked with truth."

In *American Spy*, Hunt informs the reader that the world does its day-to-day business on two tracks. Track One is in the shadows. Its people tap phones, make secret entries, forge documents, drop behind the lines and upset governments, spread misinformation and sometimes shoot and get shot at. Its adventurers are an elite group who believe that they have insights that justify what they do.

Track Two is out in the open. Its people are in positions of authority, they make speeches, they run for office, they hold press conferences, they run the government and they spread the word that law and order must be preserved. Nevertheless there are times when there is a need to use what Track One has to offer.

When these separate tracks intersect, as they inevitably do, the public learns of the Bay of Pigs, black bag jobs, the attempt to assassinate Castro, Watergate, and Iran-Contra. These intersections occur about 20 years apart. There are Congressional inquiries, Fifth Amendment pleas, and perjury prosecutions followed by curative legislation. Then things settle down again until the next intersection. Hunt, as a Track One man, got caught in the intersection.

He graduated from Brown University in 1940 and then entered the Naval Academy. During World War II he did intelligence work

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in China. He also sold a thriller novel to the Warner Brothers. He had a gift for writing spy and adventure novels (some 50 of them under various names), and for playing the trumpet.

He joined the CIA in 1949, and pursued a life of adventure and danger. His good luck carried him along until 1961 when he directed the Bay of Pigs attack against Fidel Castro. It was a disaster.

He left the CIA in 1970 and joined a public relations firm. A year later he was invited to join the Nixon White House and do the things that later were called the White House dirty tricks, such as burglarizing the office of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist. Daniel Ellsberg had given the Pentagon Papers (the secret history of the Vietnam War) to the newspapers. This, too, proved to be a disaster. It was followed by the June 17, 1972 Watergate disaster which led to Hunt's extended imprisonment.

Hunt, in the first pages of his autobiography, blames President Nixon for most of his troubles.

If I had known that the president and his staff were deriding me as a bungler, I might have behaved differently and not tried to take the blame for my superiors, ending up with a thirty-five-year provisional sentence by perjuring myself in front of the grand jury. I wouldn't find out about the insults heaped upon me by the rats in the president's sinking ship until the White House tapes were seized and made public under the power of subpoena.

Hunt says that Nixon lived in a reality of his own (as Hunt did). Nixon's flaws were "paranoia, vanity, pride, and obsession with self-preservation at the expense of the public's governance."

Hunt died on January 23, 2007 at age 88.

