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Jury says Hunt not libeled in article about JFK plot

Associated Press

MIAMI — A federal jury concluded yesterday that Watergate burglar E. Howard Hunt had not been libeled in an article by a former CIA agent suggesting that he was part of a conspiracy to assassinate President John F. Kennedy.

In a trial four years ago, Hunt was awarded \$650,000 in damages. That verdict was overturned on appeal in 1983 because of a flawed instruction to the jury.

This time a six-member jury found in favor of Liberty Lobby, an ultra-conservative Washington group that publishes the Spotlight tabloid, where the article appeared in 1978. Hunt had sought \$1 million in damages.

One juror, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, said the panel believed that no evidence was presented showing malice by the publication toward Hunt. The judge had instructed the jury that evidence of malice — that the article was published with the knowledge that it was false or with reckless disregard as to whether it was true — was necessary to find in Hunt's favor. A public figure such as Hunt must prove malice to win a libel suit.

Hunt, 66, displayed little emotion as the verdict was read, and he declined to comment afterward. His attorney, William Snyder, said the two would confer about a possible appeal.

Attorney Mark Lane, long a critic of the Warren Commission findings and other investigations of the assassination, defended Liberty Lobby. In his closing argument Tuesday, he repeated accusations that he presented during seven days of testimony,



E. Howard Hunt
Had sued ultra-conservative group

including assertions of cover-ups and flawed investigation. He also told the jury that Hunt, also an ex-CIA agent, and the agency both disliked Kennedy.

"The government of the United States has never conducted a serious investigation to tell us the truth," said Lane, author of the 1966 best seller *Rush to Judgment*.

The focus of the suit was an article written by former CIA agent Victor Marchetti contending that a 1966 CIA memo purportedly said that Hunt was in Dallas the day Kennedy was slain and suggested that he had a role in the murder. The Warren Commission concluded that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone in the assassination.