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S.F. CHRONICLE

Watergate burglar Sturgis dies at 68

REUTER

MIAMI — Frank Sturgis, a key player in the Watergate scandal that brought down the Nixon administration, died of cancer Saturday at a hospital here, his lawyer said. He was 68.

Ellis Rubin said Sturgis died of cancer of the lungs and kidneys at Veterans Hospital in Miami.

Rubin said Mr. Sturgis did not know he was ill with cancer until he entered the hospital a week ago complaining of shortness of breath.

Mr. Sturgis was one of five men who broke into the Democratic campaign offices in Washington's Watergate complex on June 17, 1972. The break-in detonated the Watergate scandal and ultimately forced Republican President Richard Nixon to resign in 1974.

For his role in the Watergate break-in, he served 13 months in prison on charges that included conspiracy, burglary, wiretapping and unlawful possession of intercepting devices.

Mr. Sturgis, who was born in Philadelphia and was a police officer before the scandal, was 47 at the time of the break-in.

In a 1984 Miami television interview, he said he participated in the break-in because he believed Democratic presidential candidate George McGovern was a communist sympathizer with ties to Cuban leader Fidel Castro.

"I would do it again because he (McGovern) is a traitor to this country, to the American flag," Mr. Sturgis said in the interview.

He said he did not receive any money for the break-in.

Last year, on the 20th anniversary of the break-in, he told the Seattle Times, "We were responsible for one big hell of a thing, and it really screwed up the country. But it made our government a little bit stronger. I feel the laws that came about after Watergate didn't give the president — whether it was Nixon or anybody else — the free rein to do what a dictator would do."

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Frank Sturgis: *Dies suddenly from cancer of the lungs and kidneys.*

Mr. Sturgis had been heading a Cuban exile organization for the last five years that was dedicated to ending communist rule in Cuba, Rubin said.

Mr. Sturgis' legal troubles did not end with Watergate. He was convicted about 15 years ago on charges of exporting stolen cars to Mexico to raise money for an invasion of Cuba, and was given probation.

He was later acquitted by a jury on charges of selling stolen watches.

Last year he filed a $5 million libel lawsuit against a New Jersey woman, Marita Lorenz, after she was quoted as saying that Mr. Sturgis was involved in the 1963 assassination of President John F. Kennedy. Mr. Sturgis called the charge "sheer fabrication."

Mr. Sturgis, who is survived by a wife and daughter, was the second Watergate figure to die in less than a month. Former Nixon chief of staff and Watergate conspirator H.R. Haldeman died Nov. 12 in Santa Barbara.