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Watergater: Came to Help, Not Murder CIA Ex-Spy

By WILLIAM FEDERICI

Watergate burglar Frank Sturgis denied yesterday that he had ever threatened the life of ex-CIA spy Marita Lorenz, explaining that he had come to New York to "help Marita" at her invitation.

At the same time, the Police Department began an inquiry to determine whether two detectives who arrested Sturgis in Ms. Lorenz' apartment Monday night had sufficient grounds.

At a press conference yesterday, the 53-year-old Sturgis said: "Marita is a lifelong friend. I have helped her many times in past years. I never threatened her; in fact, I'm still not angry with her. She told me there were pressures that made her tell government investigators that I was involved in a conspiracy to kill President Kennedy and that I took a shot at him . . . and I believe her."

Sturgis and his attorney, Henry Rothblatt, said that a News reporter had been "involved" in the arrest.

The arrest came after the woman pleaded with the reporter, Paul Meskil, to help her. Meskil, an investigative reporter who has been probing Ms. Lorenz' background, called police after the woman claimed her 15-year-old daughter had a gun and was waiting to kill Sturgis.

Refused to Answer

Police arrested the daughter and seized a loaded, 22-caliber gun. Claiming to be in mortal fear of Sturgis, Ms. Lorenz again asked Meskil for help and he called two detectives who went to her apartment. She told them the death-threat story and that Sturgis was due to arrive within the hour.

Sturgis appeared at the 18th-floor upper East Side apartment and was greeted by the two detectives, Matthew Rosenthal and James Rothstein. It is alleged that Sturgis refused to answer police questions and, after being searched and read his rights, he was placed under arrest.

Normal procedure would be for a person who was threatened to swear out a complaint in court. This would be followed by a court hearing. Only in cases of serious injury or where a crime is witnessed would an arrest be made.

Charged with coercion and harassment, Sturgis was freed in $10,000 bail from Rikers Island late Wednesday for a hearing today.

Sturgis said the only reason he had come to New York was to "help Marita" because she was worried about information "she stole from a Russian consulate in New York and we turned over to a congressional security committee."

He said Ms. Lorenz had asked him to talk to her "in person because she didn't trust the telephone." Sturgis displayed a roundtrip air ticket which, he said, was "prepaid by Marita."

As for Meskil's role in the arrest, Rothblatt said: "Sturgis isn't mad at Meskil or Lorenz. He just feels he was wrongfully arrested. He's not mad. He's annoyed that she should lie. Meskil acted in good faith and tried to do the right thing. There's no doubt in my mind."