



E. HOWARD HUNT

Burglars differ on Watergate 20 years later

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MIAMI (AP) — Twenty years after Watergate, most of the burglars who helped bring down a president work or rest in the Miami sunshine, but the wounds left by the events of June 17, 1972, have yet to heal.

In a rare interview, spy novelist and former CIA agent E. Howard Hunt expressed bitterness that he spent 33 months in prison while President Nixon was allowed to resign.

"I felt that in true politician's fashion, he'd assumed a degree of responsibility but not the blame," he said. "It wasn't my idea to go into the Watergate."

But Mr. Hunt, 70, defends the

(Continued on Page A-4)

Watergate

(Continued from Page A-1)

constitutionality of the break-in that brought Nixon down. The conspirators who planned and executed the burglary of the Democratic National Committee headquarters had no reason to question their orders.

"Who's to say it's illegal if it's directed by the chief law enforcement officer of the land?" Mr. Hunt said. "Legality and illegality were never discussed."

From the comfort of the canal-side home he shares with his school-teacher wife and younger children, Mr. Hunt reflected on how little he believes the United States learned from Watergate.

"I was astonished a few years ago when the Iran-Contra hearings took place," he said. "Again, we have a situation in which men of assumed probity and character were acting on what they believed to be the desires of the commander in chief.

"And then the roof falls in, and they look around, and there's nobody there to back them up," Mr. Hunt said.

Across Miami lives burglary team member Frank Sturgis, 67, a Philadelphia-born former cop, sometimes-investigator and constant anti-Castro conspirator.

As he sat by his pool worrying about plans for his 13-year-old daughter's slumber party, he was more upbeat than Mr. Hunt about the meaning of Watergate.

"We were responsible for one big hell of a thing, and it really screwed up the country," said Mr. Sturgis. "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 reign to do what a dictator would do."

In Miami's western suburbs lives another burglar, Bernard Barker, 75, a retired city code inspector who recently brought his childhood

sweetheart from Cuba and married her.

He compared Watergate to his days as a World War II bomber crewman over Germany.

"I see no difference between this and being a bombardier in World War II — I was doing my duty," he said.

The day of the Watergate burglary was bad in more ways than one for Eugenio Martinez, 69, who now sells cars in Miami's Little Havana neighborhood.

The morning of the break-in, Mr. Martinez received his final decree after a bitterly contested divorce, then raced to Washington. After his arrest that night, he learned that the judge in his divorce case died without signing the decree, and his wife was contesting its validity.

"You don't know how bad it was," he sighed.

He was the only burglar to receive a pardon, winning his from President Reagan in 1983.

The conspirators don't agree on why they went into the Democratic National Committee offices at Washington's Watergate hotel and office complex.

Mr. Hunt said they needed to replace a malfunctioning electronic bug. Mr. Barker is certain it was to photograph the contents of 40 mysterious file cabinets. Mr. Sturgis thinks the White House wanted sexual blackmail material against Democratic politicians. Mr. Martinez said he was told to photograph financial records.

Mr. Barker insisted he has no regrets about what he did and said Watergate is a badge of honor in Miami's conservative Cuban-American community. But he hates being called a burglar.

"To me, a burglar is a guy who goes into your bedroom at night and steals your family jewels," he said. "I could never do that."
