

Watergate: How It All Started

by Fred Blumenthal

WASHINGTON, D.C.

Below is a police blotter—a document familiar to law enforcement authorities everywhere, but which the general public seldom gets to see.

This particular police blotter is perhaps the most important of its kind in U.S. history, for it marks the beginning of one of the gravest internal crises this country has ever faced—the Watergate case. It is the formal police record of the apprehension and arrest of the five men who tried to burglarize the Democratic National Headquarters early on the morning of June 17, 1972.

Smart police work

That arrest, which triggered the whole train of events climaxing in the current Senate investigation, was the result of smart police work by three Washington cops, stupidity by the five supposedly expert burglars, and sheer luck. Yet for all the subsequent publicity, most people are still unfamiliar with the tension

and drama that took place at the Watergate itself on the night it all began, and of the many "ifs" that played a part in the breaking of the case.

If, for example, unmarked Car 727 of the Metropolitan Police Department hadn't been the particular vehicle to respond to the call about an apparent break-in at 2600 Virginia Ave., N.W., the whole affair might never have developed.

Actually, Car 727 had no business answering. Under normal circumstances the call would have been taken by Squad Car 80, a clearly marked and easily identifiable police vehicle. But Car 80 was temporarily out of service, and No. 727 was patrolling the area. And it was manned not by three uniformed officers, but by three casually dressed members of the "Bum Squad," or Casual Clothes Squad. Sgt. Paul Leeper and Officers John B. Barrett and Carl M. Shoffler. Leeper, who was at the wheel, was typical in his garb—a

sloppy golf hat, a light-blue V-necked T-shirt, light-blue trousers, brown construction boots and a dark-blue nylon windbreaker jacket with "George Washington University" in white letters emblazoned on his left breast. He didn't look like a cop, and he wasn't supposed to.

'That extra step'

"Nearly every department has a 'Bum Squad,'" explains the 35-year-old Leeper, a 12-year veteran of the Washington force, who sports a Fu Manchu moustache. "It gives us that extra step when we're covering street robberies, burglaries, and muggings. We don't come roaring up with a siren. We blend into the background. When someone's about to commit a crime he usually looks around at the last minute. With us he doesn't see anyone he's afraid of. We have a very high percentage of arrests."

This police blotter, published here for the first time, is the official transcript of the original Watergate arrests. Here are some notes to help you follow it.

There are 45 spaces to be filled out, but not all are pertinent to this case.

Space No. 1 erroneously gives the complainant's name as the Democratic National "Convention" rather than "Committee."

In Space No. 8, "Burglary II" means forced entry into unoccupied premises. Space 10 indicates that the arrests took place at 2:10 a.m., Saturday, June 17, 1972.

In Space 13, 0502 is a code for the data processing computer at Police Headquarters.

Space 14 indicates that eight extra copies were made for distribution to various police units throughout the city. In Space 17, CB528 indicates a geographical location on the Police Department's master map of the city.

In Space 22, the name Stanley Greig is that of the Executive Director of the Democratic National Committee at the time.

In Space 25 the letters "WM" indicate "white male." The names of the arrested burglars are all aliases.

In Space 40 the indication "Closed" refers only to the police phase of the case. In view of all that has followed, the term seems ironical.

Space 44 bears the signature of Sergeant Leeper.

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SERGEANT LEEPER

As it turned out, the casual dress of men in Car 727 was crucial to the Watergate arrests. There were five burglars actually in the offices of Democratic National Headquarters on the sixth floor of the Watergate office building. Across the street, they had posted a lookout in the Howard Johnson Motel, which has a clear view of the Watergate. He was Alfred C. Baldwin 3rd, a former FBI man. He had a walkie-talkie, and his job was to alert the burglary squad if anything went wrong.

The call to the police was made just before 2 a.m. by Frank Willis, a Watergate security guard whose suspicions were aroused by a piece of tape placed over the door through which the burglars had entered the building. It took Car 727 only two minutes to drive the six blocks from 30th and K Streets N.W., where it received the call, to the Watergate complex on the Potomac.

Lookout foiled

When the car arrived, instead of double-parking at the entrance of the building, Sergeant Leeper found a normal space about 50 feet away. Then he and his two fellow officers walked—not ran—into the building. The lookout across the street watched the entire arrival—and didn't give it a second thought.

"Looking back on it," says Leeper, "there were four crucial things in our favor. The lookout told me later why he failed to spot us as police officers—the unmarked car, the legal parking space, the lack of uniforms, and that we just walked into the building."

This is how Leeper tells the rest of the story:

"After searching a number of offices and finding nothing, we went into the Democratic headquarters. There, one of my partners spotted what appeared to be a man's elbow jutting out from behind an office desk. He said: 'Put your hands up and lean against the wall!'"

"We all had our guns out and expected to see two arms go up in the air. But we were flabbergasted when 10 arms shot up toward the ceiling—rubber gloves and all."

The three officers had only two pairs of handcuffs between them, Shoffler

having left his in the car. So two pairs of the burglars were linked together, one pair of cuffs each, while a close surveillance was kept on the fifth man until the paddy wagon arrived.

While they were still at Democratic headquarters, Sergeant Leeper read to the five men their constitutional rights. The action was repeated by Assistant Police Chief Charles Wright at Second District Police Headquarters. There their mug shots were taken.

At Second District, the police blotter was filled out. All five of the men gave phony names, and some refused to tell their age or their home address.

Something big

James McCord gave the name of Edward Martin, Bernard Barker said he was Frank Carter, and Frank Sturges, Virgilio Gonzales and Eugenio Martinez used respectively the aliases of Edward Hamilton, Raul Godoy and Jene Valdes.

Leeper and his fellow officers suspected almost immediately they were onto something big. For one thing, the suspects were found to be carrying a total of \$1528, most of it in \$100 bills numbered in sequence. For another, they declined the option of phoning for a lawyer, saying simply: "An attorney is on the way."

Apparently they surmised that arrangements had been made for a lawyer to be called if they didn't reappear from the Watergate. Sure enough, at 10:30 a.m. attorney M. Douglas Caddy, walked into police headquarters.

Says Detective George Badovnick: "When I saw that lawyer wearing a \$300 suit arrive to represent them, I knew we were really onto something."

MUG SHOTS OF THE HAPLESS FIVE

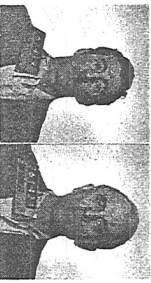


McCord



Barker

Sturges



Gonzales

Martinez