

An Air of Mystery Surrounds Suspect

Cuban Native Dropped Hints of High Connections, Friends Say

By Peter Jay

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MIAMI, June 26—Bernard L. Barker, who was arrested nine days ago with four other men in the Washington offices of the Democratic National Committee, liked to sound mysterious, according to people who know him.

He had been involved in the abortive 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion, and, acquaintances say, he was given to dropping veiled hints that he is well-connected in U.S. intelligence circles and that interesting things were afoot.

Like many of Miami's more than 200,000 exiles, he is known as a political conservative and a strong anti-Communist. He supported President Nixon's mining of North Vietnamese harbors, and had urged exile groups to oppose war protesters at this summer's two national political conventions here.

Of the five suspects arrested in connection with the attempted bugging of the Watergate, three (including Barker), were born in Cuba. All have a background in intelligence, anti-Castro activity or both. Four of the five, including Barker, are in D.C. jail pending release on bond.

Except perhaps for James W. McCord Jr., a veteran of 19 years with the CIA and, at the time of his arrest in the Democratic offices in Watergate, chief of security services for the Committee for the re-election of the President, Barker is the man who has attracted the most attention.

Despite his Anglo-Saxon name and appearance, his American father, service in the U.S. Army as an officer in World War II in the European theater and his residence in Miami, Barker is a Cuban. He was born in Havana 55 years ago, served with the secret police of the dictator Fulgenico Batista before Castro came to power, and associates almost



BERNARD L. BARKER
... political conservative

There are various stories about Barker's clandestine activities in circulation here, but many of them seem to trace back to the man himself. A number of Cubans, noticing this, dismiss the Watergate caper as a quixotic effort by an aging braggard to recapture the excitement of his espionage days and to win the acclaim of the exile community.

"Barker? A big talker," said a businessman in the La Havana Vieja Shopping Center here, where Barker's small real estate office—Barker Associates—is located. "But don't use my tion, Barker's code name is name."

In the Bay of Pigs operation said to have been "Macho"—a nickname he still uses, 11 years later. The word simply means "male," but it has stronger connections: the equivalent nickname in English would be "stud"—an unusual, rather adolescent sobriquet for a 55-year-old.

Barker's role in the Bay of Pigs invasion, exile sources say, was significant—but more organizational than operational. He was said to be close to Manuel Artime, who commanded the landing force, and to have been a major conduit for Central Intelligence Agency funds.

His association with the CIA is believed to have lasted at least through 1964, when commanders were being trained in Nicaragua for anti-Castro harassment raids.

If Barker has met Howard

entirely with Cubans in Miami.

"Someone said to me once that for a Yanqui, Barker spoke beautiful Spanish," recalls a Cuban journalist here. "I had to tell them he was as much a Latin as we are."

E. Hunt, the mysterious raider-spy-White House consultant who dropped from sight after a reporter told him his name has been found in notebooks carried by the suspects in the Watergate bugging, it probably would have been through the CIA.

According to a Miami architect, Barker often mentioned that he had a "fantastic connection in Washington. . . . He said his name was Howard Hunt," said the architect, Leonard Glasser.

It has not been established that Barker and Hunt were in communication or that—according to one unconfirmed report—Hunt came to Miami and met with Barker about three weeks ago. (As recently as Sunday, FBI sources could not confirm that Hunt was in Miami.)

In Miami, Barker has frequently been involved in anti-Castro or other anti-Communist activity, most recently by organizing a motorcade of Cubans supporting President Nixon's decision to mine the North Vietnamese harbors. But he appears to be neither influential nor popular in the major exile organizations.

His business career is hard to chart. Barker Associates, which he opened last year after getting his real estate license, has been involved in a few big transactions—but only a few.

And these seem to have been due to Barker's friendship with Miguel (Mike) Suarez, an ambitious and highly political lawyer who once ran for mayor of Miami as a Republican (he came in a poor fifth) and is the attorney for Barker's firm.

Ameritas, the organization that police first said was a shadowy anti-Castro group to which the Watergate five belonged, turned out to be a real estate corporation headed by Suarez. Suarez says the use of the name and stationery by Barker and the others when they registered at the Watergate Hotel was unknown to him and unauthorized.

Barker lives 50 blocks west of downtown Miami, in a predominantly Cuban section.

It is a neighborhood of small square bungalows, parched lawns, and wilted palm trees that cast little shade. As in working-class neighborhoods in other cities, there are pick-up trucks with campers and American flag decals, outboard boats on trailers, small children on tricycles. It looks comfortable, clean and decent—but by no means affluent.

Barker's neighbors, like other Cubans here, say they still don't know what to think of the case. They have read in the newspapers of an attempt by Barker to get the architect's plan of the Miami convention center, where the Democrats will meet in two weeks; that reminded one friend, at least, of Barker's remark about "doing something about the convention."

But what? And also why? Those are the questions the neighbors keep asking, for which neither the newspapers nor the police nor the politicians on either side have yet to offer an answer.