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Barker Admits Raid Role But Won't Involve Others

In Interview, He Refuses to Disclose Reasons for Watergate Break-In

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The accused leader of the Watergate Raid admits his role in the break-in but says he would endure a long prison term rather than implicate others or disclose the reasons behind the affair.

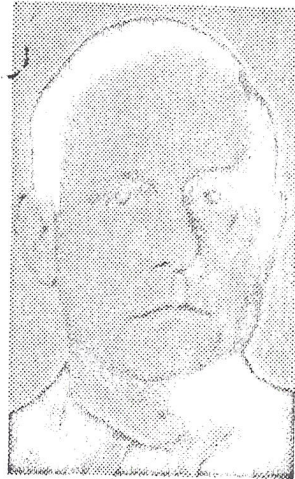
Bernard L. Barker gave the impression repeatedly, in an interview with The New York Times here on Friday night, that there were, in fact, names to be named and motives to be cleared up. But it will not be done soon, he indicated.

Mr. Barker, a 55-year-old former employe of the Central Intelligence Agency who was among five men captured inside the offices of the Democratic National Committee on June 17, suggested that he would never talk.

Various persons, including officials of President Nixon's campaign organization, have been accused by Democrats of being connected with the raid. Mr. Barker was asked whether he would take responsibility for anyone else actually involved.

"Just because I get in trouble," he said, "I don't want nobody else to get in trouble." He said he had "always dealt with the paramilitary, the intelligence movement, the people who live by their word."

Mr. Barker declined to discuss such key questions as who



Associated Press

Bernard L. Barker

hired him for the break-in at Democratic National Committee headquarters, or what its purpose was. But he gave some insights into the operation and painted a fascinating account of his background, making the following major points:

¶ He acknowledged his role in the aborted break-in. "I was caught in national Democratic [headquarters] at 2:30 in the morning," he said at one point. "I can't deny that."

¶ He praised the three men from Miami who were arrested with him and said that his main regret was that "those people that I have motivated under me" had been caught with him.

¶ He also spoke highly of a onetime White House consultant who has been linked to the raid, E. Howard Hunt Jr. He said he had "never known anybody who this country is so indebted to as Howard

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Hunt," but he declined to elaborate.

While he was instrumental in igniting a major election-year issue, he maintained that he had little involvement in politics. "I don't even trust the politicians, to be quite frank with you," he said.

He asserted that most Cuban refugees, himself included, believe that an election of McGovern would be the beginning of a trend that would lead to socialism and Communism, or whatever you want to call it.

Mr. Barker's attorney, Henry B. Rothblatt of New York, was present during the interview. It had been made clear in advance that certain sensitive areas could not be discussed.

A remarkable self-portrait emerged nonetheless. Uneasy at first and maintaining at one point that "I don't know how to say things very well," Mr. Barker seemed to grow steadily more confident.

Elaborating on his refusal to implicate others, Mr. Barker said:

"This is the way these things are. You know it before you get there. You work, you help because you're supposed to help, because you're needed. And when you're not needed, then you forget about it."

The Way It Is

"It's the way it is. Everybody that does it knows about it. It's just that if they want to cry in their beer later on and think that people owe them something, that's their own hard luck."

Mr. Barker and his four confederates had been caught with cameras and electronic bugging equipment. There was other evidence of political espionage. But he said he had withstood pressures to explain.

He said that after his arrest, but before he could secure his release on bail, Government prosecutors had said they would "keep me in that jail and (let me) rot in there until I talked."

"I said, 'This was tried by Nazi interrogators (during World War II) with a hell of a lot more going for them than you have.' I said, 'This has been tried by experts, and it just doesn't work.' I don't talk, period."

Mr. Barker has much of the bearing of an Army master sergeant. He is a short, stocky, powerfully built man with a squarish face, a high forehead, and very fine brown hair that is beginning to thin and turn gray.

He is an American who was

born in Cuba and he says he is a passionate, unrelenting enemy of Fidel Castro. The subject brings a flash of fire to the eyes behind the outsized horn-rimmed glasses.

Mr. Barker suggested that he tries to behave like the men he seems to admire most: Men he has known in one covert operation or another over the years, men whom he says this country "can't pay" for their services.

"They're anonymous men," he said. "They hate publicity; they get nervous with it. They don't want to be spoken of. They don't even want to be known or anything like that."

The men who sneaked into the office building in the Watergate complex with cameras and microphones did so, he suggested, not for money or security but for "something else": A case they considered righteous.

"For a man to enter a place in the dark of the night is very risky," Mr. Barker said. "I know, because I have gone through a lot of experiences in my life and I know how scared a man can be. But he does it anyway."

"I've never looked at myself as a burglar," he remarked at another point in the interview. "It is very repulsive to me when I read [about myself as] the 'alleged burglar'—this gripes me."

"I think more as a cop and not as a burglar. I'm of that formation. I have been a police officer, and I can't conceive of myself as a burglar. But I just have to live with that phrase, and that gripes me."

A Series of Questions

Q. The implications of the case so far are that high-ranking officials of the Government may be involved in this. Now shouldn't newspapers pursue that if they can?

A. Yes, yes. Right, right. I think you have that right to do that completely. And I also have my right to remain silent in some of these things. This is my constitutional right.

Q. What do you think is going to happen? How is all this going to turn out for us whodunit readers and whodunit writers? Are we going to come to a final chapter in which it is all revealed and explained. A. Yes, I have a very good attorney and I think that he'll try to get me off as well as possible.

Q. But getting you off may involve never having that last chapter written.

MR. ROTHBLATT (laughing). Let me say this: It probably will be told but not be told directly. It will be told indirectly.

MR. BARKER. I've always thought, though — I'm 55 years old, I'm old enough to know what I am doing, and I have always faced up to all my responsibilities. And when the time comes, I will face up to whatever responsibility I have, and I won't cry in my beer and that will be the end of it. And, like I said, if I have to go to jail and so forth—well, I did 16 months in a German prison camp and this sure as hell isn't going to be as bad as that.

Q. How many falls can you take for other people?

'Make the Best of It'

MR. ROTHBLATT. The answer is: You undertake a mission, and you do a thing voluntarily. You take the consequences and make the best of it.

MR. BARKER. You make the best of it, right? [Mr. Rothblatt had previously referred to his client as a "good soldier."]

A. Well, but other people are soldiers, too. They may be majors or colonels or generals, but they're still soldiers just like the privates and the sergeants and the lieutenants are. And there are responsibilities for the officers as well as for the enlisted men.

MR. ROTHBLATT (laughing). Well, we hope the officers will carry out their responsibilities!

MR. BARKER. No, I won't go along with that. No. Just because I get in trouble I don't want anybody else to get in trouble.

MR. BOTHBLATT. No, we didn't say—I didn't say—

MR. BARKER. No, No, but basically this is the way I feel about it, you know.

MR. ROTHBLATT. No. I say the majors and the generals—the majors and the captains have their responsibility to help their troops.

Q. I gather what you're saying is that you're not... what we used to call a squealer. A. Right. Yes, that is a principle that I guess we're all—we all think that way.

Born in Havana

Mr. Barker's grandfather was a potato farmer from Columbia, Tenn., who went to Cuba as a supplier for Theodore Roosevelt's Rough Riders. The family remained in Cuba after the Spanish-American War.

Mr. Barker was born in Havana on March 17, 1917. His American father and Cuban mother (who became an American citizen and who died in

this country) were divorced, and he was raised by aunts on a farm near Mariel Bay.

He attended Roman Catholic schools in Cuba. Later, he came to live with his mother on Long Island and graduated from the high school in Farmingdale in 1936.

He worked in a steel mill in Baltimore for two years, then entered the University of Havana as a civil engineering student. He was a sophomore when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor.

"I was the first volunteer from Cuba into the United States Army," he said. "[as] an American, I guess I was teed off at Pearl Harbor just like everybody else. So I just joined."

He went into the Army Air Force and flew his first mission as a bombardier ("I was a pretty good bombardier") over Germany on Christmas Eve in 1943. On his 12th flight a fighter shot down his B 17, and he bailed out over German territory. He was imprisoned for 16 months.

Threat of Execution

One of his Nazi interrogators offered him a cigarette, Mr. Barker said, but he refused it even though "it was quite an effort." They also threatened to have him executed as a spy, he recounted.

"They sent me back to a cell the second day and they just said, 'Well, we're just going to have you executed.'"

The Germans marched him to the end of a long corridor, Mr. Barker related, but there was no execution. He said he supposed "a lot of guys broke" under the pressure.

Mr. Barker was liberated by the Russians toward the end of

the war and he left the Army late in 1946. He married the daughter of a Cuban senator, and his wife's "very well-to-do" family presented the newly-weds with a home.

For about a year in 1947 or 1948, Mr. Barker served in the Cuban national police. He said he had joined this agency "with the full consent and the cooperation" of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Worked With F.B.I.

"I did an awful lot of work in cooperation with the F.B.I.," he said. "Most of my cases involved Americans. I was personally in charge of the group that escorted Mrs. Truman and Margaret down there."

There were a variety of other jobs, he said. He spent about a year with his wife on her farm, then worked for a number of years as a "typewriter salesman."

When Fidel Castro came to power early in 1959, Mr. Barker said, he was a housing inspector in the Havana suburb where he and his wife lived. When the revolution occurred, "I just left and went home."

This exchange followed:

Q. When did you leave Cuba? A. I—about a year—let's see, it took me about a year.

Q. So, late fifty-nine or very early sixty? A. Right, late fifty-nine, early sixty.

Q. What had you done in the course of fifty-nine, just stayed at home? [Mr. Barker turned to Mr. Rothblatt, who laughed. Mr. Barker smiled.]

MR. BARKER. I'm entering a sensitive area.

Q. You left involuntarily, more or less? A. Oh, quite involuntarily, yes. As a matter of fact when I left Cuba

they had been looking for me to execute me for quite some time.

Q. So you had been living underground for some time? A. Oh, yes, for quite some time.

Q. Did you get out by boat, or— A. I can't say.

Q. The people for whom you were engaged in this last period in Cuba were unwilling to aid and abet you after you got out by the skin of your nose?

A. Well, this is the way these things are. I've always been able to make a hell of a lot more money outside of that [whatever secret work he was doing] than I did inside of that. So it didn't bother me too much. And as a matter of fact that's how you become involved again. It seems like it's a current that takes you. You think, "Well, I'm finished," and then you never are. And a little of it gets in your blood, in a way.

Q. What did you do after the window-making and car-parking [in Miami]?

MR. ROTHBLATT. This we won't talk about.

MR. BARKER. There's a lagoon in my life there until after the [1961 Bay of Pigs] invasion.

Q. Let's go back to this sensitive area...about 1961...everybody keeps saying that you played a role in the Bay of Pigs.

A. Yes, well, you see there's—I just don't know my grounds on that.

MR. ROTHBLATT. It's a sensitive area and he doesn't know. He may be ruffling some feathers.

MR. BARKER. Not only

that but like, for instance, you know when you leave certain intelligence organizations you state—they make sign statements and try to—

Did Not Land

Q. Well, you didn't land at the bay of pigs. You were not in the landing? A. No, I never got to the landing. No, No. I was turned back. [It has been reported many times that Mr. Barker was an employe of the Central Intelligence Agency who served during the invasion as paymaster, handling huge sums of currency].

Q. I guess generally in Miami that you impressed a lot of people by the fact that so far as anyone ever told not 10 cents of the money that you handled ever went [astray]? A. Yes. I've always made an effort in everything I've always done to give a good accounting of money. I believe that when you are handling taxpayers' money without being required to give an account of it you are then placed on some degree much worse, you know. . . .

After the ill-fated invasion, Mr. Barker worked for a variety store and for two real estate firms in Miami. Then, in June, 1971, he established his own real estate company, Barker Associates, Inc.

It was through this company's trust account in the Republic National Bank of Miami that Mr. Barker passed \$114,000 in checks that had been intended for President Nixon's campaign treasury.

Some of the money, in the form of \$100 bills, was found in Mr. Barker's possession when he was arrested. The Republicans have asserted that most was returned before the

break-in, but the details are not clear.

Before the break-in, Mr. Barker employed 10 salesmen. Now he has only five, and he is facing a felony charge which, if he is convicted, could cost him his license to do business in Florida.

Mr. Hunt, the former White House consultant, is a former C.I.A. agent who played a major role in the planning of the Bay of Pigs landing. He has also been connected with the arrested men on the one hand and with the Nixon Administration on the other.

Mr. Barker also talked at some length about the three Miami men who were arrested with him, Frank A. Sturgis, Eugenio R. Martinez, and Virgilio R. Gonzalez, all anti-Castro partisans. Mr. Barker said "I have three men with me and I know that these men are only motivated by certain things—and not money—that is not a motivation. These are people who have been involved in the liberation of their country for years."

Mr. Barker is a registered Republican in Florida, and he made it clear that one of the main reasons was the party's opposition to Castro and its nonrecognition of the Cuban Government.

He also applauded the "Republican concept of a strong state government" as opposed to "a centralized government," and he favored "the approach to a man going out and working."

"Nobody owes nobody nothing," he said. "You go out and you work for it. [People] should take an example of what the Cuban people have done, who came here with nothing. They got two jobs and they worked their rear ends off."