

Forgotten in Watergate: Four Cubans

By Jack Anderson

All but forgotten in the Watergate wreckage are the four Cubans who were recruited to do the dirty work.

They thought they were serving their adopted country. Three of the four had been trained by the Central Intelligence Agency and had risked their lives on CIA missions.

Eugenio Martinez, for instance, slipped into Cuba at least 300 times. He carried out his CIA orders so faithfully that he wouldn't jeopardize the missions to rescue his own parents. They eventually died in Cuba. Martinez would have been tortured to death if he had been caught. Yet he risked his life repeatedly for a CIA salary of \$300 a month.

At the appeal of the wives, I interrupted a trip and flew back to Washington to speak to the four Cubans at the Rockville, Md., detention center. It was their first press interview.

We have no doubt after a long talk with the four Cubans that they were motivated by a misguided sense of patriotism. The leader, Bernard Barker, went directly to the White House for their orders. In

those impressive surroundings, he was asked by his former CIA superior, E. Howard Hunt, to handle some surreptitious, national security missions.

Not until 10 minutes before the Cuban break-in crew tried to steal Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatric records were they told the object of their mission. They had been led to believe they were after a spy who had been delivering military secrets to the Soviet embassy.

Before they broke into Democratic Party national headquarters, they were told their main mission was to seek supposed evidence of secret Communist contributions to the Democrats.

Their arrest caused international shock waves. But it was the White House plotters, not the four Cubans, who panicked.

A reported \$460,000 was slipped to the Watergate defendants and their lawyers to buy their silence. Yet only a paltry few dollars filtered down to the Cubans—less than \$14,000 to help them maintain their families, and \$13,000 to their first attorney, Henry Rothblatt. Frank Sturgis, for exam-

ple, collected a total of \$2,500 in expenses. Virgilio Gonzalez and Eugenio Martinez received \$1,600 to \$1,800 apiece.

Despite all the hundreds of thousands in hush money, those at the top were the first to break. The poorly paid Cubans, true to their CIA training, refused to talk.

They wound up behind bars while those who plotted the Watergate crimes remained free. Bob Haldeman and John Ehrlichman, even after their dismissal from the White House, were chauffeured to the grand jury in White House limousines. The four Cubans were brought in manacles by federal marshals.

Long ago, the Cubans were completely cut off by the White House. In contrast, John Wilson, the attorney for Haldeman and Ehrlichman, conferred personally with the President. Haldeman was even permitted to use secret White House tapes to help prepare his defense—the same tapes that had been refused to the Watergate prosecutors and Senate investigators.

Barker, known to the others as Macho (He Man), still talks

about "loyalty" and "honor." His real estate business has been wiped out, the office furniture sold. His wife Clara works in the restaurant of a Miami hotel to make ends meet.

Sturgis is more bitter. He attributes the death of his mother to the Watergate reaction. He owes \$3,000 in hospital and funeral bills. Some of his creditors are threatening to sue. His wife Jan is working to pay off the bills.

Martinez was divorced the day of his arrest. But he boasts of his 20-year-old stepson, Dominick, who took his name and is now a medal-winning parachutist in the Marines. Gonzalez also worries about his wife who lives alone with their 11-year-old daughter.

Cuban friends have been trying to raise a defense fund to help pay the bills. They have raised enough to distribute \$750 to each family and to pay the attorney, Daniel Schultz, \$5,500.

"We now know we did wrong," said Sturgis. "But as God is our judge, we thought at the time we were serving the country."