

Cuban Veterans Group Linked To Raid on Democratic Office

NYTimes

By TAD SZULC JUN 23 1972

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, June 22—

An organization made up of Cuban veterans who served in the United States Army after participating in the Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961 was reported by Cuban sources today to have been involved in last Saturday's raid on the Democratic National Committee headquarters.

The organization, believed to be composed of scores of 800 Cubans trained at Fort Jackson, S. C., in 1963, is known by its Spanish name of *Los Combatientes Cubanos de Fort Jackson*.

According to Cuban sources, a number of the veterans, enlisting the aid of other Cuban refugees, met several times in Miami with American friends from Washington and agreed on direct action to combat what they viewed as left-wing causes in the United States.

The group and its associates are said by Cuban sources in Miami to have had a role in four incidents here since then, beginning in early May. But it is not known whether the *Combatientes* decided alone on specific actions or in response to requests by others.

The Miami sources said that Angel Ferrer, president of the *Combatientes*, and Humberto Lopes, a member, were in Washington, staying at the Watergate Hotel, at the time of the alleged attempt to install secret listening devices at the Democratic headquarters, which

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is in the office building adjoining the hotel.

They were also said to have visited here previously. Eight persons from Miami were registered at the hotel under false names and four of them were arrested when the police foiled the break-in. The fifth arrested man was from the Washington area.

Cuban sources said that two of those detained were or had been members of the *Combatientes*. Mr. Ferrer and Mr. Lopes could not be found in Miami today. Four persons are being sought for questioning by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Washington police.

Among other developments in the case today were the following:

President Nixon said at a news conference that the White House had "no involvement whatsoever" in the incident at the Democratic headquarters.

Some Democratic leaders had charged that "all the lines" in this affair pointed to the White House because E. Howard Hunt Jr., a former ranking Central Intelligence Agency official whose name has been linked to the raiders, served until last March as a part-time White House consultant.

But Mr. Nixon said that this kind of action had no place in the electoral or government process, and that "the matter is under investigation by the police and the F.B.I."

Mr. Hunt, who has been unreachable since last Sunday, telephoned his present employer—Robert F. Bennett, president of the Washington public relations firm of Robert R. Mullen Company—last night to say that he was leaving his suburban Maryland home because of the "impact" the publicity in the case was having on his children.

Mr. Bennett said that Mr. Hunt did not tell him where he was going or for how long. Mr. Bennett said that Mr. Hunt was informed that the Mullen company had suspended him from his job.

The District of Columbia Superior Court reduced the bail of the five jailed suspects by \$10,000 each. Four of the five were allowed by Judge James A. Belson to post 10 per cent of the bail as bond with the court.

None of them were released today, however, because Judge Belson also ruled that the suspects must appear before him in court to explain the sources of the bond money.

Bail was reduced from \$50,000 to \$40,000 for Bernard L. Barker, a wealthy Cuban-born Miami realtor, and Frank Sturgis, an American with past involvements in Cuba.

It remained at \$50,000 for Eugenio R. Martinez, a notary public and an employe of Mr. Marker, and Virgilio R. Gonzales, a locksmith. Cuban sources said that these two men appeared to have had links with the combatants.

Judge Belson reserved his decision on letting Mr. Gonzales post the 10 per cent bond until it could be ascertained whether he worked as reported by

the police, for a Miami locksmith company.

The bail was kept at \$30,000 for James McCord, formerly associated with the Central Intelligence Agency and until last Monday the security chief for the Republican National Committee and the Committee to Re-Elect the President.

The judge also ordered all five, after their release, to remain within the District of Columbia area and to report at frequent intervals to the District's bonding agency.

An Assistant United States Attorney, Earl J. Silbert, told Judge Belson in court that Federal charges might soon be brought against the five. Thus far, they have been charged only with burglary in the District's jurisdiction.

Mr. Silbert said that Mr. McCord was a "poor risk" in terms of remaining here after his release because in the last two months he "traveled extensively."

He said that Mr. McCord, on his last trip to Miami, about two weeks ago, rented two different apartments.

Cuban sources reported earlier that both Mr. McCord and Mr. Hunt had made several trips to Miami since late March, apparently to meet with Mr. Barker and his Cuban political associates.

Mr. Bennett of the Mullen company said that Mr. Hunt had made at least one trip to Miami this spring.

Mr. Hunt was the principal C.I.A. official in charge of the Bay of Pigs invasion, using the code name "Eduardo." Mr. Barker, then known as "Macho," was closely associated with him in the invasion preparations, as was Mr. McCord.

Bank Records Studied

The F.B.I. investigation in Miami spread today to a local bank where records were subpoenaed because of suspicion that some of the \$100 bills, totaling \$5,300, found on the raiders and in their hotel rooms had come from there.

It was Mr. Barker, according to his business partner, who made the arrangements to book the rooms at the Watergate for nine persons.

Miguel R. Suarez, a Miami lawyer, said that sometime last month Mr. Barker obtained from his office letterheads of Ameritas, Inc., a corporation set up in April, 1969, to put up an apartment building in Hialeah, Fla.

Mr. Barker is associated with Mr. Suarez, who head Ameritas, which, in turn, is a wholly owned subsidiary of the latter's All-State Investment Fund, S.A., incorporated in Panama.

Mr. Suarez said that Mr. Barker, or his wife, used the gate for the group's arrival there from Miami last Friday. All the reservations were made under false names.

The prosecutor also told the court that four of the five alleged raiders refused yesterday to answer questions put to them by the FBI agents.

According to other sources, Mr. Hunt, the former White House consultant, also refused to answer F.B.I. questions earlier this week.

The *Combatientes* organization was formed by former officers and men of the Cuban contingent that had served at Fort Jackson and elsewhere with the United States Army.

Link to Reserve Unit

Cuban sources said that a number of these veterans banded together in the *Combatientes* organization, which for a time had a small office in Miami. They said that Mr. Hunt and Mr. McCord maintained loose contacts with the group over the years.

These sources also reported that some contact existed between the Cubans and a special Washington-based United States Military Reserve unit preparing and updating plans for the wartime information security program.

The 16-man unit, which is allegedly also concerned with radicals in the United States, operates under the Office of Emergency Plans and Preparedness, which is a part of the Executive office of the President.

Mr. McCord, a former Air Force lieutenant colonel, belonged to this unit until several months ago.

James H. Landis, a retired Army colonel who heads the unit, refused to comment today when he was asked by a reporter whether he knew Mr. Hunt or ever head of him before this week.

* See typed excerpt from Potomac Magazine, 3 Oct 72, this file.