

STRONG-ARM PLAN LINKED TO BARKER

MAR 19 1973

Aide Says 1972 Team Was Recruited for Attacks on 'Hippies' and 'Traitors'

NYTimes

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Special to The New York Times

MIAMI, March 18—An associate of four convicted Watergate conspirators says he was recruited for a team that planned strong-arm activities against "hippies" and "traitors" in various parts of the country last year.

Reinaldo Pico, a 36-year-old Cuban exile who accompanied the four twice to Washington for such operations last May, said in an interview that he believed their activities bore the Nixon Administration's "official seal of approval."

The group's projects and intentions, as Mr. Pico described them in a voluble, gesture-punctuated Spanish, would have run parallel to sabotage efforts widely attributed to Republican agents in last year's political campaigns.

His sometime confederates, who were arrested with bugging equipment in the offices of the Democratic National Committee on June 17 had been organized by officials of the White House and of the Committee for the Re-election of the President.

Mr. Pico, a veteran of the ill-fated Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961, said he had been left out of the June 17 foray and did not know why. He denied any prior knowledge of the burglary and wiretapping scheme.

In his first public discussion of the affair, Mr. Pico appeared loyal to his old comrade-in-arms, Bernard L. Barker.

Barker, a Miami real estate broker who is a former agent of the Central Intelligence Agency, pleaded guilty during the Watergate trial to burglary, eavesdropping and conspiracy, and he is now in jail awaiting sentencing.

Mr. Pico went to Miami in December, 1960, and in the following year he was put in touch with Barker, then active in organizing the C.I.A.-backed Cuban invasion, in which Mr. Pico participated. Barker is known to friends as "Macho."

"My impression has always been that Macho was a man who had the confidence of the United States Government," Mr. Pico said. "First with Eisenhower, then with Kennedy, then with Johnson, and I thought with Nixon, too."

"I thought this thing [last year's operations] had an official seal of approval of the United States Government," he said at another point. "At least what we were doing was not against the security of the country."

Told About Hoover

On May 2, 1972, Barker summoned Mr. Pico to his real estate office to tell him that J. Edgar Hoover, director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, had been found dead that morning and would lie in state at the Capitol the next day.

"There are hippies and men who are traitors to this country and democracy," he quoted Barker as telling him, "who are going to make demonstrations and perpetrate an outrage to Hoover."

Antiwar demonstrations had been scheduled before Mr. Hoover's death. The protests, on the west steps of the Capitol May 3 and May 4, included an appearance by Dr. Daniel Ellsberg, now on trial in the Pentagon papers case.

Barker, Mr. Pico and six or seven other men—"almost all who worked with Macho"—flew to Washington, checked into a hotel and "awaited instructions" from a source unknown to Mr. Pico.

At about 6 P.M. on May 3, he said, the men went to the Capitol. Barker engaged in a heated argument with a long-haired young man and, in the midst of it, Mr. Pico said, he knocked the protester down.

Frank A. Sturgis, who accompanied the group and who was later arrested at the Watergate complex, also hit one of the antiwar demonstrators, Mr. Pico said. Both attackers were immediately "seized" by Capitol policemen.

As they were led down the steps, Mr. Pico said a third member of the group explained to a police lieutenant that the two in custody were "anti-Communists" and "good men." They were then freed with a warning, Mr. Pico said, and left.

He acknowledged that the Barker group had gone to the Capitol to disrupt the rally. Although the group was outnumbered, he explained, the protesters followed a "Communist tactic": they didn't fight back.

There had been reports that the Capitol operation, unconfirmed by the police, was the first project mounted by the Barker group. Mr. Pico's is the first public account by a participant, however.

The effort to "end" the peace rally went virtually unnoticed and the men quietly returned to Miami on the following day, he said. He was asked whether the trip had seemed at all worthwhile.

"We saw that persons went there from all parts of the country," he replied, apparent-

ly meaning that the group felt some kind of conspiracy had been confirmed. "And," he added, "we had to make our protest."

About three weeks later (Fed-

eral officials have fixed the date as May 22), Mr. Pico said six members of the group returned to Washington under false names [Mr. Pico's was "Joe Granda"] and checked into the Hamilton Hotel.

"Macho told me there were persons who were going to protest in front of the White House or other places and asked me if I was willing to go," he said. "I said I was. I always considered that Macho was inspired by true patriotic fervor."

A Government witness, Thomas J. Gregory, testified in the Watergate trial that he had met in the Hamilton Hotel with most or all of the seven defendants in the case, including G. Gordon Liddy, E. Howard Hunt Jr. and James W. McCord Jr.

On May 26, the Barker group moved to the Watergate Hotel and was joined there by Liddy and Hunt. It was then that initial wiretaps were covertly placed on the Democrat party telephones.

Neither at their once-daily gatherings held to receive any news of protests nor at any other time, Mr. Pico said, did he see Liddy, Hunt, McCord or anyone else not in the Miami group within the hotel rooms.

In addition to Barker and Sturgis, the conspirators from Miami who made both trips and who were later arrested in the Watergate were Eugenio Rolando Martinez and Virgilio Ramon Gonzalez.

Mr. Pico asserted that he had received only expense money for the two trips. But he added that he had warned Barker after the long second journey that he might ask reimbursement for lost salary if future expeditions took so long.

The six men left Washington,

with not a single protester sighted throughout their second stay, and returned to Miami on May 30. After they arrived, Barker spoke with Mr. Pico again.

"Macho told me that demonstrations were going to be carried out in other parts of the country. He asked me, 'Are you ready to go?' I said, yes."

Barker did not elaborate on the future activities.

Infiltration Reported

Witnesses at the Watergate trial and elsewhere have said that McCord and other officials of the President's campaign organization had arranged to infiltrate radical groups and were spying on them in May.

The Nixon committee had budgeted \$250,000 in cash for such activities, trial testimony showed. There also has been evidence of payments used in efforts to disrupt opposition rallies and speeches.

Mr. Pico was interviewed by F.B.I. agents on a number of occasions but presumably satisfied the Government that he had had no part in the bugging itself. He read about the arrests on June 18.

He said during the interview that the Barker group had "sincerely believed we were doing something for the Cuban cause" in their early excursions. He was asked whether he now felt he had been used.

"I don't feel that I've been misled," he replied. "I don't know what they were doing in the Democratic headquarters, but I'm sure it had something to do with Cuba if Macho went there."

"It was a great surprise when I learned that something had happened and I didn't know about it," he said. "I thought I was a friend of Macho's."