

Watergate Caper:

From the Folks Who Brought You the Bay of Pigs

WASHINGTON—The affair has become popularly known in the capital as the "Watergate Caper." But what it means no one is quite sure.

It all began at about 2 A.M. Saturday, June 17, when three Washington policemen answered what they thought was a burglary call to the elegant hotel and business Watergate complex overlooking the Potomac River. In the offices of the Democratic National Committee on the sixth floor of the Watergate Office Building the police surprised five men carrying electronic listening devices and special cameras. Upon being questioned they proved to have unusual political links and Central Intelligence Agency backgrounds.

One of them was James W. McCord, a former C.I.A. official and the security expert for the Republican National Committee and the Committee to Re-Elect the President. The others were Bernard L. Barker, a wealthy Cuban-born Miami realtor (equipped for the job with walkie-talkie radios, canisters of Mace, burglar tools and 53 sequentially numbered \$100 bills which the F.B.I. later discovered were part of the proceeds of four checks drawn on a Mexican bank deposited in a Miami Beach bank and then withdrawn in an \$89,000 lump by Mr. Barker in May); a Florida notary public of Cuban origin; a onetime Havana barber and locksmith; and an American soldier of fortune.

And looming behind the group was an even more adventurous figure—E. Howard Hunt Jr., a former top C.I.A. official who planned the abortive 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba. Mr. Hunt until last March had been a \$100-a-day White House consultant and has worked as a writer for a Washington public relations firm connected with efforts to raise funds for President Nixon's re-election campaign. He is also a prolific author

of spy novels.

Mr. Hunt appeared to be the chief of what some investigators said was a loosely organized Cuban-American, right-wing commando team. In his Bay of Pigs days, Mr. Hunt was known under the code name of "Eduardo;" one of his closest associates at the time was "Macho," the nom-de-guerre of Mr. Barker.

Mr. Hunt, who would not talk with the F.B.I., vanished from sight. Mr. Barker would not talk with the F.B.I. either. But various sources said he had recruited three of the operatives arrested at the Watergate Office Building, plus four others who escaped. The men were said to have been flown from Miami to Washington, driven from the airport in a 1972 Chrysler and installed at the Watergate Hotel under false names as members of a Miami real estate corporation. After a lobster dinner, they moved next door for the break-in.

What was the reason for the job?

Judging from the equipment found on the suspects when they were arrested in the office of Lawrence O'Brien, national chairman of the Democratic party, Mr. Barker and his companions were trying to install a secret transmitter in the ceiling and photograph Democratic files.

The incident apparently was not an isolated event. This commando team or its associates were suspected of having pulled off several other jobs recently. One of them was a burglary at the Chilean Embassy, during which documents were apparently micro-filmed. And there was an earlier attempt on the Democratic headquarters.

For the Republicans the affair was, of course, an embarrassment. They deplored it, officially, as un-American. President Nixon told a news conference last Thursday that the White House had "no involvement whatsoever." But neither he nor any of his staff explained why Mr. McCord—who was later freed on bail—was among the raiders captured. Nor was there any explanation of the relationship between Mr. Hunt and Charles W. Colson, a special counsel to the President who had recommended hiring Mr. Hunt as a part-time White House consultant.

For the Democrats the affair produced some satisfying anti-Administration publicity. "I wish it had happened in October instead of June, but I don't want to sound ungrateful," one Democrat said. The party moved to exploit the case by filing a million-dollar suit against the Republican National Committee and the Committee to Re-elect the President. That could keep the topic alive through the summer.

—TAD SZULC