

SFChronicle MAY 14 1973
The Foiled Lookout

How Break-In Was Busted

Washington

If a police scout car had not run low on gas in the early morning hours of last June 17, the affair that has come to be known nationwide as the Watergate scandal might never have come to light.

According to police, scout car officer Dennis P. Stephenson received a call by radio about 2:30 a.m. to respond to a break-in report at the Watergate. Stephenson had just brought his car into Second District headquarters in northwest Washington to gas up.

Captain Ernest Garner, the watch commander, said Stephenson said he was low on gas, and asked if someone else could be sent.

A call then went to the nearest car in the area, which happened to be an unmarked vehicle manned by three tactical force members wearing old clothes, Garner said.

Across from the Watergate, in the Howard Johnson Lodge, the Watergate break-in gang had posted a lookout, Alfred C. Baldwin III. Baldwin later testified that he eventually tried to warn the others when he saw some other unidentified men in the Watergate, but by then it was too late.

Garner said Baldwin obviously had no way of knowing that the three men who got out of the unmarked car were policemen — Sergeant Paul Leper and officers John Barrett and Carl Shol-

fer. Had Stephenson responded to the call, Garner said, Baldwin undoubtedly would have spotted him and would have tried to give his associates an early warning.

“If it weren’t for the freak timing, we might never have had the Watergate affair,” Garner said.

The arrests of the Watergate break-in gang set in motion a whole series of events that resulted in disclosures that White House officials and high former Nixon administration officials were involved in the planning of the Watergate operation and the later efforts to cover up White House and administration involvement in the affair.

Washington Post Service