

2 Attempts Reportedly Preceded Watergate Entry

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MIAMI, Sept. 8—New details of the initial break-in into the offices of the Democratic National Committee at the Watergate complex in Washington last year have been provided by participants in the operation to various law enforcement agencies here.

According to these participants, there were two bungled attempts to enter the Democratic headquarters before the first successful entry on May 28, 1972.

The first attempt failed because the planners of the operation did not know of the presence of security guards on the way to the Democrats' offices. The second attempt had to be called off because the supposedly expert Cuban locksmith could not open the door to the committee's headquarters.

In addition to State Attorney Richard E. Gerstein of Dade County, whose chief investigator, Martin Dardis, has interviewed most of the persons said to have been involved in the break-in, investigators for the special Watergate prosecutor, Archibald Cox, and from the Senate Watergate committee, as well as agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, have been interrogating scores of Miamians.

The reconstruction of events in late May, 1972, based principally on the recollections of some of the participants, as told to the investigators and to The New York Times is as follows:

Shortly after noon on May 26, 1972, six Miamians, five of Cuban extraction: Bernard L. Barker, Eugenio R. Martinez, Virgilio R. Gonzalez, Felipe De-Diego, Reinaldo Pico and Frank A. Sturgis, reportedly registered at the Watergate Hotel under fictitious names.

With Hunt and Liddy

According to a participant, the six were joined an hour later by E. Howard Hunt Jr. and G. Gordon Liddy, who also signed the register with assumed names. All eight had reservations made by Ameritas, Inc., a Miami corporation that was supposed to hold "a convention" at the hotel. Ameritas is a real estate concern in which Barker was an executive.

Later in the afternoon, the participant said, the six Miamians were given Ameritas identification badges by Hunt with their fictitious names and titles of "executives," and were told to wear them in the hotel.

At 8 P.M., the eight men, some of whom still did not

know the purpose of the gathering, met for a "convention dinner" in the Continental Room, a private room on the ground floor of the adjoining Watergate office building.

It was a pleasant meal, with off color jokes enlivening the conversation, one of the participants recalled. But after the dinner Ameritas's "president," Hunt, turned to serious business.

"You are the chosen few," a participant quoted him as telling the six Miamians. "You will have an opportunity to carry out a very important mission for the Government, a mission of national security that is related to Cuba. This will be the first of a series of operations of this type and we want to know if we can count on you for other operations, too."

Agreed to Join Team

Hunt talked in the same vein for some 15 minutes and all present agreed to "join the action team," one participant recalled.

Hunt, who had brought with him a 16-millimeter film projector, showed the group an educational movie. Some participants were disappointed, one of them said, having expected to see a film on break-in techniques. Instead, the movie was about running a school system and tried to teach how to instill democratic ideas through proper educational methods.

The movie was run several times, apparently to occupy the time, since the first attempt to enter the Democratic National Committee offices was to be made later that night, according to one of the group.

The Continental Room had to be vacated by 2 A.M., and Hunt, with a walkie-talkie, and Gonzalez, the locksmith, with his tools, hid in two closets, one of the participants said, while the rest left the room, which was closed for the night.

Too Many Guards

The plan was for Gonzalez to open the door to a staircase leading to the committee's offices. But security guards were constantly passing and Hunt and Gonzalez had to give up the attempt, one of the group said.

On the second night, the break-in tactics were changed, according to one of the participants. A frontal "assault" was reportedly begun with seven men: the six Miamians and James W. McCord Jr., who had not attended the Ameritas dinner. He was later convicted in the June 17 Watergate break-in.

As one of the participants recalled it: At about 11:30 P.M., the seven men, carrying two suitcases with bugging and photographic equipment, walked through the lobby of the Watergate building. McCord spoke briefly to two guards there who gave the group permission to enter. The seven signed an entry book and took an elevator to the eighth floor.

He said that the other six men left McCord hidden in a men's room there and walked down to the sixth floor where the Democratic offices were.

But despite many efforts, the participant recalled, Gonzalez could not open the door to the offices.

Gave Up Attempt

After about 45 minutes he gave up trying and the men walked up to McCord to report the failure.

"Hunt and Liddy were furious, especially Liddy, who acted like crazy," an investigator quoted one participant as saying. "They were so angry that Barker had to explain to the others that Hunt and Liddy were under great strain because they were being pressured from above to get results from the mission."

The tactics were again changed for the third attempt, to be made on Sunday night, May 28, according to a participant. In the meantime, he said, Gonzalez flew to Miami in the morning to get new, better lock picks and returned to Washington in the evening.

Devices Installed

The third attempt was made late that night by Gonzalez, equipped with break-in tools, and by Sturgis, who was carrying a walkie-talkie, according to a participant. The two entered the office building through a garage door, he said, and walked up the stairs to the Democratic office. Gonzalez still had trouble opening the door, the participant recalled, but he finally managed to do so and Sturgis radioed to Hunt and Liddy that the entry had been made.

The other five men, again carrying bugging and photographic equipment, followed the same route to the sixth

floor, the participant said. Only McCord, Barker, Martinez, who was the photographer, Gonzalez and Sturgis reportedly entered the offices, according to the participants, and the others stood guard at different places outside.

After about two hours when bugs had reportedly been installed on phones and documents photographed and the men had left the building unnoticed, the team gathered in the room occupied by Hunt and Liddy for what one participant called a "victory celebration."

"Hunt and Liddy were euphoric because of our success," the participant recalled. "Hunt said that this was a job well done and that the United States would be grateful to us for it. We also were very happy. We really felt like patriots that night."

The next day, Memorial Day, the Miamians returned home and Barker reportedly developed the films taken during the break-in.

A few weeks later, four of the Miamians—Barker, Martinez, Gonzalez and Sturgis—returned to Washington to enter the Watergate again, when they were caught and arrested on June 17. The four Miamians and Hunt pleaded guilty and McCord and Liddy were convicted in the case.