

McCord's Version Of Plot to Blame CIA Is Supported

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Two of the original Watergate defendants supported yesterday charges first made by convicted Watergate conspirator James W. McCord that there was a plot as late as December, 1972, to blame the Central Intelligence Agency for the Watergate break-in and bugging.

The claims came in affidavits filed by Bernard L. Barker and Eugenio Martinez in support of their motions to withdraw their guilty pleas and face a jury trial using the defense that they felt the break-in was government-approved.

McCord had claimed that the December attempt to blame the CIA was aborted by his threats to expose it, a contention that one of the Miami men supported as well yesterday. McCord alleged also that CIA Director Richard Helms was fired from his job because he would not go along with the cover-up plan.

Barker and Martinez claimed in their affidavits that Helms' departure from the agency was told to them in advance by coconspirator E. Howard Hunt Jr. Hunt had previously told them, they claimed, that he worked for a national security intelligence agency "that had greater jurisdiction than both the FBI and the CIA."

They said that their attorney at the time, Henry Rothblatt, told them shortly before their January trial that they could use as their defense that the Watergate operation had been a CIA operation.

"It was at this time that Mr. Hunt informed me of Mr. Helms' leaving the directorship of the CIA and I believed that there was some connection between that fact and what I thought had been an approval by the CIA to accept responsibility for the operation," Barker said in his sworn affidavit.

"Later, I was told that we could not use the defense of the CIA and in particular that Mr. McCord was objecting to it. I talked with Mr. McCord because I could not understand why he objected if the CIA had approved the plan."

"Mr. McCord told me that my information was incorrect and that the CIA had not approved it," Barker continued.

Martinez said in his affidavit, meanwhile, that "... I believed that Mr. Helms' leaving the directorship was connected in some way with our ability to disclose at the trial the nature of the operation we had engaged in. Later, I was told that we could not use the defense of the CIA ..."

It was reported in May that the CIA resisted an extraordinary series of pressures by top White House aides to assist in a cover-up of the Watergate scandal over an eight-month period beginning in June, 1972. At the time, McCord said he believed Helms was fired in order to lay the foundations for a claim that the bugging and break-in were conducted under CIA auspices.

President Nixon has said he initiated a meeting among Helms, FBI Director L. Patrick Gray III, and White House aides H. R. Haldeman and John Ehrlichmann immediately following the Watergate break-in out of concern that the Watergate probe may lead to exposure of CIA activities.

Helms, however, testified before the Senate Watergate committee that the meeting and subsequent "feelers" put out by White House counsel John W. Dean III left him with a feeling that an attempt was being made to "use" the CIA.

He said his departure as CIA director came when "I had a conversation with the President after the election, I believe it was on Nov. 20 at Camp David, and we talked about it, my future, and he indicated that he wanted to make a change, and this was in the context of making a lot of changes in the administration."

In the affidavits filed yesterday

by Martinez and Barker, they spell out details of what they felt indicated CIA involvement in the Watergate break-in and related cases, and why they feel they should be allowed to state as a defense that they thought the burglary was government-approved.

They pointed repeatedly to the position of Hunt, whom they called their supervisor, on the White House staff as evidence to back their claims.

On two occasions, Barker said, "I learned from Mr. Hunt that he was in possession of nonpublic information which I considered to be the type that only a high-ranking intelligence officer would have access to."

One of those occasions was Hunt's prior knowledge that Helms was leaving the CIA, and the other was when Hunt knew in advance the substance of President Nixon's speech concerning the mining of Haiphong harbor.

Hunt is scheduled to file an affidavit in support of his request to change his plea to innocent by Friday. Watergate conspirator Frank Sturgis has already filed such an affidavit, and one was filed yesterday by Virgilio Gonzalez as well as by Martinez and Barker.

Gonzalez' statement told how he was recruited by Martinez, and Martinez related how he was recruited by Barker. Barker pointed to Hunt as his recruiter.

Barker began by telling how he first met Hunt during the Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961. Then, he said:

"I had not seen Mr. Hunt for a number of years when, on April 17, 1971, the anniversary date for the Bay of Pigs invasion, I found a note pinned to the front door of my home (in Miami) from Mr. Hunt."

He told of subsequent meetings with Hunt in a Miami hotel room and in the Executive Office Building in Washington. He said he waited for Hunt to "explain why he had renewed contact with me."

"In August, 1971, Mr. Hunt asked me if I would be willing to help him on a matter of national security. He did not at that time tell me any details with respect to the operation itself, but he did explain to me that it involved a traitor to this country who had been giving information to the Russian Embassy."

Barker said he was asked to recruit two persons for the operation, which turned out to be a break-in at the office of the psychiatrist for Pentagon papers defendant Daniel Ellsberg. "It was at that time (of the burglary) that I was first informed by Mr. Hunt that the traitor he had referred to was ... Ellsberg," Barker said.

At this time as well, Barker said, Hunt "confirmed my belief and advised that (the equipment, disguises and fake identification papers used in the burglary) had been provided by the CIA."

Barker also said Hunt had "asked me to commence preliminary organizational efforts for purposes of establishing intelligence and counter intelligence units primarily in anticipation of activities by left-wing radical groups at the conventions." He said he was later informed by Hunt that this plan had been canceled, "but that certain other national security operations were going to be implemented."

He said the treatment of the persons arrested in the break-in, the appearance of attorneys who never discussed fees, and later reimbursements continued to prove to him that the break-in was a government operation.

Barker, Martinez and Gonzalez said Hunt's guilty plea and silence concerning the operation reinforced their belief, and was an indication for them to take the same action. They also pointed to their subsequent incarceration as a unit, and Hunt's continued association with them, as further points to back up that belief.