

Frank Sturgis-- Soldier of Fortune



Jack Anderson

LONG BEFORE Frank Sturgis joined the world's most celebrated burglary crew and broke into the Watergate, he was my friend.

I knew him as a soldier of fortune, a pilot and gun runner, a romantic who bloomed ill-timed in a programmed age, an adventurer whom humdrum could never quite assimilate.

He was also a Don Quixote, square jaw set against the enemy, drawn irresistibly to such calamities as the Bay of Pigs and Watergate.

We have kept in touch over the years, but he has periodically dropped out of sight, forever chasing adventure, usually finding misadventure.

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ONCE IN his youth, he confounded the odds and became part of a legend, one of the ragged few who persevered in the mountains with Fidel Castro.

After their incredible victory; he could be seen on Havana's streets in the regalia of an air marshal. For a time he was Castro's man in charge of "liberated" gambling casinos and luxury hotels.

On matters of principle, having to do with Castro's repression and his turn toward Russia, Frank defected from the revolution to become again the longshot gambler against the house. Thereafter, he risked his neck against Castro in foredoomed ventures of the Cuban "freedom fighters."

He progressed from the Bay of Pigs to Watergate, where he thought he was seek-

ing evidence that Castro was contributing to the George McGovern campaign.

After Frank and his friends were arrested at gunpoint inside Democratic headquarters, they were pictured on the press as figures of fun, bunglers and petty thieves.

And in Miami, the Justice Department solemnly charged that Sturgis had recruited mercenaries, a dirty dozen, ostensibly to fight Castro but really to steal cars. The prosecutors waited until after Watergate to bring the charges. When they couldn't convince the jury, they convened another jury which finally convicted Frank of transporting stolen cars to Mexico.

Frank has told me that the Watergate figure he admires most is G. Gordon Liddy who has maintained a grim, tight-lipped silence in the face of a harsh, 20-year sentence. So Sturgis, Liddy-like, sat through the car theft trial without testifying in his own defense.

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IHAVE ALWAYS known Frank Sturgis as a man of touching sincerity, sober habits and fierce patriotism. Although misguided, he fully deserved the sentence for his role in the Watergate break-in. But the car theft conviction, I believe, is a bum rap.

Footnote: U.S. Attorney William Northcutt noted that Sturgis "had every break. If he failed to bring forth evidence that was material, the prosecution was not to blame." Northcutt also emphasized: "There was no relationship between the car case and Watergate."