CONFESSIONS
OF A
WATERGATE
BURGLAR
Aid from a
Democratic staffer
got him in.
Sex played a
surprising part in
the break-in.
John Mitchell told him not to worry.

THE
"WALKING TALL"
SHERIFF
STILL FEARS FOR
HIS LIFE

Jim Bede's
Dream Plane:
You build it
from a kit!

THE MAN
WHO
IS
KNOCKING
HELL
OUT OF THE
SPORTS
ESTABLISHMENT

AID FROM A
DEMOCRATIC STAFFER
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THE BREAK-IN.
JOHN MITCHELL TOLD HIM NOT TO WORRY.
"We used sex to get information"
"A Democratic staffer let us in"
"John Mitchell told me not to worry"

BY ANDREW ST. GEORGE

The man in the photograph under the first Watergate burglary headlines in June 1972 is familiar to me, even though the oddly wrenched chin, the milky eyeballs, the stretched skin recall the last mug shots of men with broken necks. The photo is captioned, "F. Sturgis, arrested Watergate burglar." But I know that is wrong. The man in the picture is not "F. Sturgis"; he is Frank Fiorini, an old friend from the days when I worked as a correspondent in Cuba during Fidel Castro's revolution.

Early that October I find myself in Miami, where Fiorini lives, and knowing he's out of jail on bail, I drive to his home to see how Frank is getting along. Now, sitting in his living room, he looks tanned and trim, like the Fiorini I used to know. His black wavy hair is still full; his dark-eyed olive face juts into a heavy Mediterranean, seafaring jaw, his broad shoulders square with a stocky midriff. No wonder, I think, even *Time* magazine, with its close-checking researchers, mistakenly keeps calling him one of the "Cuban-Americans," despite the fact that Fiorini is a third-generation Italian-American from Philadelphia. He looks nothing at all like that June newspaper photo. Except perhaps in the eyes, where there is a troubled, opaque shadow of hurt. The White House has dismissed the Watergate break-in as a "third-rate burglary." Frank Fiorini—World War II Marine, ex-motorcycle cop, veteran gunrunner, revolutionary and intelligence agent—has never before been called "third-rate," and he is not pleased.

"We were never complete fools about making an 'entry' anywhere," Frank says of his activities with the "plumbers." "When we were told to make an entry at the Democratic National Committee or some other office, Rolando [Martinez, a Watergate burglar] and me, we bought a couple new ties, and sort of hung around the place for a few days, and met some of the office girls. We dated them; and, often as not, we ended up in the sack with them."

Frank, who doesn't drink, lights up a cigarette, and says, "Some of the girls gave us a complete rundown about their office setup just to hear themselves talk. More than one girl—we propositioned them and they agreed to work for us, more for the thrill of it, I guess, than money or anything else. Campaign volunteers and Washington secretaries are a special lot. And supposing that nothing came of a date like this except maybe a few busy nights? We'd still drop around and visit our dates at their jobs and really get oriented about the place we planned to enter. You know, after we were arrested, the FBI agents who questioned us tried to scare us by pretending they'd known about us a long time and had even bugged our team operations. I told the FBI guy, 'If you had done that, you'd have an awful lot of tape by now with nothing on it but loudly creaking bedsprings.'"

As he pauses, I think that the mask Frank Fiorini has worn for 20 years—as a political adventurer, an intelligence operative, a para-warrior, the emblematic underground man of our age—the mask has begun to strangle him. Choked by the mean dripping brick walls of the D.C. jail, by the waist chains and restraints which (Continued on page 74)
are regulation when the marshals move you around in custody, by the sting of snake-black headlines. Frank Fiorini wants his own face back. He is trying to convince me, an old friend, that he did not at any point deliberately become a bungler.

"Hey, listen—we didn't do so bad. Not at first, anyhow. What did they tell you we were looking for in the Watergate, that time we got busted—proof that the McGovern campaign had some of Fidel Castro's money in its coffers? Well, that's true, far as it goes. It's true there were intelligence reports that Castro was giving money to help elect George McGovern. You say that's dumb? Well, we never did find the evidence. But, hey, let me tell you something—that proposition was not so far out. The idea was for Castro to support a left-wing candidate for the presidency; if he won, with Cuba's trade and aid, the Castro government could make bigger deals. There's been a lot of talk about Cuba in a lot of newspapers and magazines, even the most puritanical guerrilla leaders. Underground suppliers like Frank were expecting to look out for themselves. Fidel himself was, for once, taken aback—he had learned in the jungle that a gunrunner who accounts for two-thirds of his cash is an okay gunrunner—and he said again, this time in a tone of soft incredulity: "Eso si es un yanqui barbado!"

This helluva Yankee showed none of the civilized instinct for skimming a little something off the top.

"Hey, chico, make no mistake this Watergate was not a jerk deal. We had a lot of targets. First off: any document with money on it—that, any references to covert espionage and sabotage and counterintelligence activities, whether contributions to the McGovern campaign or other transactions. I was told that Mitchell and Ehrlichman suspected Democratic National Committee bosses were profiteering from these "subversive forays" against Cuba. The complaints were especially bitter about various attempts made to assassinate the Cuban leader. The "whole memo ended with a proposition, from the Cubans to the Democratic leadership; if McGovern got elected President, and if he then stopped the 'subversive forays' against Cuba, then Castro would be willing to talk a deal with the McGovern Administration, a deal about resuming diplomatic relations and trade, and so forth. We looked high and low for this document—we broke in a couple of times—and although we found a piece of it in the Xerox office, we never did find the entire thing."

Odds, this obsession with Cuba in a man who once seemed destined to enter history as a minor hero of the Castro revolution, I think. And the obsession held through all of our talks over the succeed-

...
That was the good year—1959—even though it didn't quite last 12 months. Frank was happy. We were all happy in Havana. Fidel kept shouting, "Eso es barbaro!" and "De pelicula!" his other favorite exclamation, which meant things were going as beautifully as in a Hollywood movie. Then everything suddenly broke in mid-laughter, like a badly threaded film.

Frank Fiorini was among the first rebel officers to fall out with Fidel over the issue of Communist encroachment in the Cuban forces. "Those of you who betray me," Castro raged at the defectors, "will end up among the lumpen [drops] of Miami." As I listen to Frank's account of Watergate, a spilt of words now defiant, now troubled, it occurs to me that Castro's prediction had in a sense come true.

"Hey, listen, our bunch was a good team—all except that faking, brown-nosing [Bernard] Barker. Liddy was the C.O., and he loved it—he loved playing the commanding officer of a special-ops team. Liddy was like an Eagle Scout who finds he's passed the exams and become a CIA chief. He was a nut about guns and silencers and combat daggers and so on. And he was always talking about 'disposal'—about killing people. I told him once, if it ever came to that, I'd use my bare hands and a piece of wire, and poor Liddy turned gray. Killing wasn't really in him, except in talk. Hunt was different: he was a professional. He'd been a clandestine services officer all his life. That's another thing everyone is snickering about—how Howard tried to assassinate Castro, and Castro is still around bigger than ever. Alright, but hey, listen: Howard was in charge of a couple of other CIA operations that involved 'disposal,' and I can tell you, some of them worked."

Frank was born in Norfolk, Virginia, but his parents separated when he was an infant, and he grew up with his mother's family in Philadelphia's Germantown section. Not yet 18 in late 1940, he went from high school into the Marines, and then it was four years of front-line combat in the Pacific. With the First Marine Raider Battalion, the legendary Edson's Raiders, Frank made the entire circuit, from Guadalcanal to Iwo Jima and Okinawa. There were amphibious landings; commando raids; diversionary assaults; three serious combat wounds; jaundice, malaria, bush fever. He made sergeant, got busted for an unauthorized junket, made corporal again; toward the end Frank probably went a little mad. His final hospital stay, at the Sun Valley Naval Medical Center, involved treatment for combat injuries as well as "exhaustion" and possible psychoneurosis. Along with his honorable discharge, Frank was awarded lifetime disability pay: $51 a month.

Fiorini spent the years after the war wandering up and down the eastern seaboard—Norfolk, Virginia Beach, Washington, Miami—trying one job after another—motorcycle cop, bartender, nightclub manager. In 1949 he reenlisted; this time in the Army—looking for what? Looking, (to page 76)
run a big sweep on Teddy Kennedy: 'Get
tion—had not yet struck this rootless
an approach: we called on them one by
of four girls who were said to have been
pert, we really needed him. Before he
with him on a trip—and we worked out
all the
romancing Teddy—one went to Hawaii
one, saying we were from a Democratic
himself in a new job or a new city, that
these girls, it became plain in the end we
afterward to see who they called to report
McCord installed the lowest-powered
and Spencer Oliver. To avoid suspicion,
inaudible to radio units not specifically
transmitter bugs he could rig up. The
trouble bugging the DNC. Not because
was all a waste. McCord was a hell of a
savvy
transmitter bugs he could rig up. The
result was that the transmissions were
we planted in the office of Larry O'Brien
long-legged, mean-mouthed Cuban night-
indifferently through several meaningless
Batista, Frank Fiorini melted into the
mittee?' Frank asks me angrily. "He said
ported bits and things about other Cuban
jobs, through an empty marriage to a
underground organizers), sometimes cargo
night flights into Cuba for former Presi-
peror of men who accepted him as a leader and
found what he had so deeply and un-
"operators." Not because
money to spend, no connections, no prom-
out of jail in Havana for plotting against
Country lawyer named Fidel Castro, just
estate holdings had made him one of the
his nickname. A man who is
risk-takers. And Rolando has
dangerous work. And Rolando has
is not a Cuban shoeshine boy who'd ac-
years
in Cuba it was
traditionalists, estimators, climbers. Op-
be stress-seekers and risk-takers, they
are not trimmers, they are not
bitterly noted, "chose to operate outside
"operators." They
are stress-seekers and risk-takers, they
are not trimmers, they are not
were one of the

"operators.") Shame
on Kirkpatrick for seeming surprised.
that operators were not just the agents and the
control officers who ran the invasion project
and run it into the ground: operators were the
men who would not play by Estab-
ishment rules, men who, as Kirkpatrick
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friends, stubborn, reckless, real country law-
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ishment rules, men who, as Kirkpat
In the old days, let’s face it, Hunt was a hell of a guy. The trouble was, wherever Hunt went, Barker went with him. Let me tell you one or two things about how we got caught. First of all—here’s something you’ve never heard before—we had an inside man in the DNC office at Watergate. A student who as a volunteer worker for McGovern was scouting for us on the side. The first time that downstairs entrance was taped open it was this inside guy who did it. He had asked Barker how to make sure we got in that night, and Barker goes out and does it the cheapest way, buys a 39-cent roll of plastic tape at People’s Drug and hands it to this inside man, to tape the lock for us. Barker kept bragging about it all afternoon: ‘For 39 cents, the problem is taken care of.’ The hell it was. The guard noticed the tape on the door. There were a dozen ways of keeping that lock open—ways that wouldn’t have been spotted. Barker was just as stupid about his goddamn walkie-talkie. Macho wanted to be on the team, be a big man, so Hunt told him he’d be in charge of ‘security.’ His only job was to keep his ear to that goddamn walkie-talkie, listening to our lookout across from Watergate in case there was any outside problem.

“Now monitoring your own personal walkie-talkie is not a big job, is it? But Barker has to do it the cut-rate way, like everything else. He’s too cheap to install a fresh battery in the thing before an operation; no, he keeps the old battery going week after week by never turning up the volume. It didn’t matter on our other break-ins, because no problem occurred. “But the night we got arrested, the minute we get safely inside the DNC, Macho turns the volume of his walkie-talkie all the way down. I remember McCord asked him a question about it, and Barker said something about ‘too much static, too noisy.’ But it wasn’t that; it was just Macho saving the battery. He also kept us from picking up the first warning call from the lookout across the street, Alfred Baldwin, who was standing watch with a walkie-talkie of his own on the balcony of the Howard Johnson motel, saw the unmarked police car arrive, saw the cops begin turning up the lights on
one floor after another. In the meantime we had begun to remove the ceiling panels in the DNC office suite, to make a nest for a new bug. We had set up our photo equipment. We suspected nothing until finally Barker heard the footsteps of the cops pounding outside our door and turned up his walkie-talkie. Hunt was stationed in another section of the Water-gate complex and his voice came in, squaky with tension, "Alert! Alert! Do you read me? Clear out immediately, we have an emergency...." But by then it was too late; the cops were in the corrid-or. Barker saved his damn walkie-talkie battery and blew our team.

It was, of course, not just Howard Hunt who led Frank to Watergate. The Bay of Pigs had been a personal disaster for Frank. By the mid-Sixties his livelihood came from a thinning patchwork of freelance assignments, mysterious "special projects" for unnamed intelligence agencies. There were occasional night flights over Cuba. For the CIA? For the DIA? For a "study project" managed jointly by both? Frank never knew for sure on any given night.

What Frank knew was that his unlisted home phone would ring the evening before the flight, and a familiar voice would signal an assignment. Once in his plane, Frank would follow a precisely charted course. By the time he approached his target, it was dark. His arrival, the noise and radar blips generated by his plane, excited the Cuban coastal defenses. They began to chatter, to track, to communicate, to warm up night fighters and electronic night-vision devices. And this was the whole point of Frank's mission, for the invisible electronic alarms and excursions in the night air were unfailingly recorded by a U.S. intelligence-gathering ship's huge antennae.

The Cuban gunners would track him with their four-barreled radar-guided cannon, and the rocket crews would fix his position on their target display boards. Still, Frank had a set "time frame" for his mission, and a set course to follow. He was a slow and obsolete sort of mechanical rabbit working a lot of high-powered hunters into a frenzy below. Frank, sweating as he maneuvered, was frequently shot at. For $600 per flight. No insurance. Frank's second wife, Janet, would get double the fee in the event of his death. Still, Frank Fiorini kept making the flights.

"Getting arrested at Watergate wasn't a big deal. We were told, time and again, that fail-safe arrangements had been made to get us out of trouble if anything ever went wrong. Liddy told us over and over not to worry; the men behind Watergate had 'contingency plans.' [John] Mitchell told me the same thing: don't worry. We'd be protected. [Mitchell has denied any prior knowledge of the Watergate entry.] We were told that if we did get arrested for illegal entry, the charges would be just that: illegal entry, a Class A misdemeanor, but nothing like a felony. We were told that we would be out on bail within hours if anyone tried to arrest us; that the ball would not be set higher than $500 or so; that if anything we did in the course of our operations ever came before a court, the prosecution would go very, very easy, and if worse came to worst, we'd walk away with something like a three-months' suspended sentence and a $5000 fine. All taken care of, of course; all taken care of by the White House."

What went wrong is hard to tell. There is speculation that the Liddy-Hunt team did too much of a job. The idea behind the Watergate break-in does not seem so absurd if we keep in mind that it was never meant to be a one-shot operation. In the course of the "special operations" undertaken during a two-year period by the Hunt-Liddy-Fiorini team, a number of "surreptitious entries" (burglaries), "electronic surveillances" (phone taps and bugs) and other "countersubversive activities" (i.e. harsh harassment of President Nixon's opposition) occurred. Some of the targets: the Chilean Embassy in Washington; the Chilean Delegation to the United Nations in New York; the law office of Sol Linowitz, former U.S. Ambassador to the Organization of American States (and sometime chairman of the board of the Xerox Corporation) who, in 1972, served as a confidential foreign-policy adviser on Latin America to the McGovern campaign; Senator Edward Kennedy; CBS Washington bureau chief Dan Rather; Senator Jacob Javits; and a number of others whom White House counsel Charles Colson was wont to call the "treason merchants."
By the time Frank and his teammates were arrested at Watergate, no one in authority dared execute the "fail-safe arrangements." If, in fact, there ever were such things. I have seen Frank Fiorini in many different moods since we first began our talks about Watergate in October 1972; but I have seen him only once with tears in his eyes. The occasion was my first visit to Frank in the District of Columbia jail on January 18, 1973. Six days had gone by since he and the other Miami defendants pleaded guilty before Judge John Sirica. On this day Frank was in prison, behind the pane of glass which separates visitors from inmates. Talking to me, Frank suddenly formed a gun with his fingers and held it to his head: "I will never leave this jail alive," he whispered hoarsely, "if what we discussed about Watergate does not remain a secret between us. If you attempt to publish what I've told you, I am a dead man." He feared the other Watergate operatives, who were all then imprisoned with Frank in the D.C. jail.

Bail money for Frank Fiorini was not set at "$500 or so." It was set at $40,000. Despite all the "big people" behind Watergate, it took six weeks to raise the bail. Six weeks which Frank spent in the District of Columbia jail. At the trial there was no fix, no talk of lenient Class A misdemeanors: it was felony counts all the way, and the wrath of Chief Judge John Sirica gave each count a lethal sting all its own. Existential man, doomed to define himself in action, has no national or cultural roots to lean on; there is nothing to support him but the essential matrix of action, the team. In the moment of his ultimate peril, the team let Frank Fiorini down.

What happens to a man when that happens—the collapse of the last prop, the utter solitude that follows the ultimate betrayal? Frank Fiorini is not given to philosophical exegesis, but anyone who spends an hour talking to him, now that he has been released on appeal after more than a year in various federal penitentiaries, will sense a new hardness, a narrow-eyed withdrawal into the wounded self.

"The liberals..." Frank says bitterly, his voice grating. That—when he was betrayed by the Republican administration—he speaks bitterly of "liberals" says much about the state of Frank's mind these days. Fiorini, of course, is damning not a political perspective, but a cold world full of betrayal, an invisible legion of double-crossers, hypocrites, bureaucrats, power-brokers, hand-washing Pontius Pilates who had let him down. Frank worked for John Kennedy's election in 1960, he had been a registered Democrat all his life, and "liberals" has never been a term of opprobrium for him before. But now his eyes are cold and his mouth rigid with hatred. "The liberals have twisted everything. There's no use trying to explain. If I had my way, just one chance..." his voice dropped and rose again, a harder, deadlier voice than I'd ever heard him use, "If I had my chance I'd kill every one of them. Every one."

I stare at Frank, at this well-dressed, hard-faced stranger, this friend of 15 years who is displaying a face I have never seen before. And I hope to God that this is not the real face which Frank Fiorini has been struggling existentially all these years to reveal to himself and the world. 