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# The Watergate's Cubans

## — burglars with a cause

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MIAMI — It began simply, two hours past midnight in the dark recesses of an office building on the Potomac.

"They got us."

That calm whisper inside the Watergate office building began what mushroomed into a scandal that swept Richard M. Nixon from the presidency 10 years ago today.

"I shall leave this office with regret," Nixon said in resigning on Aug. 9, 1974.

Watergate ended with a torrent of regrets and recriminations as the men around the President sought to save themselves from total disgrace — or worse, from prison.

But the Watergate burglars, the men who turned up in the glare of police officers' flashlights in Democratic Party headquarters that morning in 1972, were without regret 10 years ago and they will have none of it today.

"Am I gonna cry about it?" said Frank Sturgis. "I do not feel one bit ashamed. I felt I was serving my country."

"We'd do it again," said Virgilio Gonzalez. "Because we protect this country. I don't regret for one minute the things I do."

"I thought it was consciously right," said Eugenio Rolando Martinez. "I never thought that carrying out orders from the White House could lead me to become a criminal."

"When you're in the intelligence community," said Bernard L. Barker, "and you're sent out on a mission and you get caught, you take your medicine and you keep your mouth shut."

Sturgis, Gonzalez, Martinez and Barker did just that and were shipped off to prison. But the revelations of the fifth man arrested inside the Watergate, James B. McCord, linked higher-ups in Nixon's re-election campaign to the break-in.

### All but forgotten

The four men who kept their silence were all but forgotten amid the enormity of Nixon's fall, consigned

to history as a quartet of burglars caught in what Nixon press secretary Ron Ziegler initially sought to dismiss as "a third-rate burglary attempt."

But here in Miami, in the sprawling Cuban colony called Little Havana, no one mistakes them for common criminals. Because here, if nowhere else, perhaps, people understand what they did and why.

Here they are cast larger than their roles in Watergate — remembered as heroes in the struggle to oust Fidel Castro from Cuba so that tens of thousands of their fellow expatriates could return home.

All four men were deeply involved in covert CIA actions against Castro long before they were recruited by E. Howard Hunt to work for the Nixon administration.

"Remember, Howard Hunt was one of the chiefs in the Bay of Pigs invasion," said Gonzalez. "Everybody respected him. He called us and said let's go. And after we found out he was working for the White House, he got a connection with the CIA, with the FBI, we trusted that man all the way."

They say they were told of a need to determine whether Democratic presidential candidate George S. McGovern was receiving funds from Havana. But Hunt's call alone was sufficient inducement.

"My motivation was that we figured we were going to help the United States government, so maybe we could get more help overthrowing Castro," Gonzalez said.

Eugenio Rolando Martinez plucked a fat berry from a basket at an open-air market in Little Havana and chewed slowly as he mulled over the question.

"Remember that I was in the CIA and everything that I did was against the law if you go by the book," he said. "It was lawful only because I was working for a national security agency. As far as I was concerned, Watergate was like any other action."

Martinez, now 62, had 354 CIA missions to his credit at that time, and he said he never doubted that this new set of orders coming through Hunt had originated with the CIA as well.

"For anyone who was not connected with my operation, it could be surprising, but for me it was just another operation," he said.

G. Gordon Liddy, in his autobiography, *Will*, described Martinez as "afraid of absolutely nothing" and recalled him as saying, "Use us. Please use us. We want to help!"

Directed by Liddy and Hunt, the team first broke into Democratic headquarters at the Watergate in May, planting concealed microphones, taking photographs and escaping unnoticed. Three weeks later, on June 17, they were ordered back to fix a faulty "bug" and to photograph hundreds of documents.

"In all my experience as [a CIA] operative, I never saw so many well-organized errors as we made in Watergate that night," Martinez said, shaking his head. "To begin with, we never put tapes on the door before and they decided to put tapes on the door. . . ."

Those tapes, used to keep doors from locking automatically, twice were discovered by a security guard, who alerted police.

Handsome, white-haired and intense, Martinez has been a manager at a huge Chevrolet dealership since serving a 15-month federal prison term after pleading guilty to charges of burglary, wiretapping and conspiracy. He was pardoned by President Reagan in May 1983.

"I believed so much in the law in this country that I believed everything was properly authorized," he said. "I thought, something will come out and we will be cleared."

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