

How the Cuban Crisis Was Linked to JFK Plot

Jim Garrison, the flamboyant New Orleans district attorney, has fired off a series of sensational charges in his effort to prove that a widespread conspiracy was behind the assassination of President Kennedy.

Richard N. Billings was assigned to separate fact from sensation. This is the fourth article in his illuminating series.

Garrison and The JFK Plot
Part 4

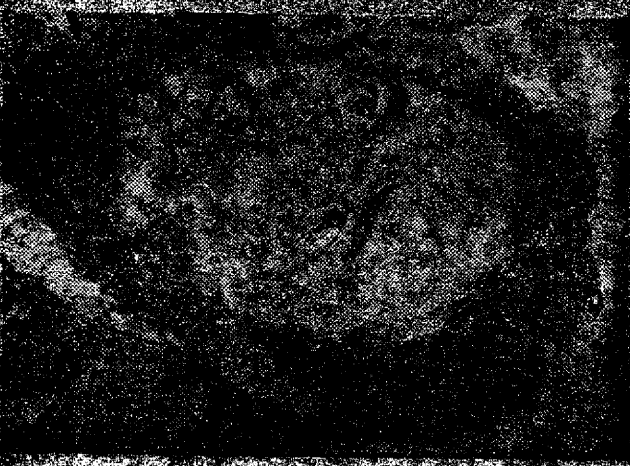
BY RICHARD BILLINGS
(Special to The Press)

Few people realize just how close John Kennedy had come to a rapprochement with Fidel Castro just before the Kennedy assassination. At the United Nations, exploratory talks were under way with Dr. Carlos Lechuga, the chief Cuban delegate, and by Nov. 19, 1963, the President was on the verge of sending a special envoy to Cuba.

The envoy, William Attwood, now editor and chief of



PRESIDENT JOHN F. KENNEDY
Came Close to Peace



WILLIAM ATTWOOD
Now Editor and Chief of

Cowles Communications, writes in his book, "The Reds and the Blacks": "I called presidential assistant McGeorge Bundy, who said the President would want to see me and to call as soon as I'd met with Lechuga. The President, he said, would not be leaving Washington, except for a brief trip to Dallas."

After the assassination, Attwood met with Lechuga again.

"He had received instructions from Castro on Nov. 23 to enter into informal discussion with me. But he assumed the situation had changed. I said I didn't know. But I informed Bundy and later was told that the Cuban exercise would probably be put on ice for a while — which it was and where it has been ever since."

THE SIGNIFICANCE of this recently revealed footnote to the history of the Kennedy administration may seem obscure. It certainly would have little pertinence to the events that led to the President's death, as they were ascertained by the Warren Commission.

From another vantage point, however, the Attwood-Lechuga affair may be of high importance. The South in the summer of 1963 — from Los Angeles to Dallas to New Orleans to Miami — was teeming with conspiracy.

Over two years after the ill-fated Bay of Pigs invasion, groups of American adventures and Cuban exiles actively were plotting the assassination of Castro and the overthrow of his regime. Money was being put up by right-wing extremists, and military support was provided by the CIA.

The Cuban premier was not the only target of assassination plots. It was known and deeply resented that since the end of the missile crisis in 1962, the administration had been working toward an accommodation with Cuba. Talk of killing Kennedy was quite common and very serious.

IT WAS KNOWN in Washington that the Cuban situation posed a grave danger to the President's life. The Miami prosecutor's office had an informant taping conversations of members of one extremist organization, and a tape made on Nov. 3 was turned over immediately to the Secret Service.

On the tape a voice said:

Kennedy would be shot with a high-powered rifle from an office building. The threat was clear, and the Secret Service also knew that Cuban sentiment ran high in Miami.

Consequently, when the President visited that city on Nov. 18, extraordinary steps were taken to guard him. For one thing, a planned motorcade from the airport to downtown was abandoned and a helicopter was used instead.

Unfortunately, the precautions were not taken in Dallas, although the Miami tape ironically offered an almost exact scenario of the assassination. Cuban resentment was strong there too, although not many people

knew it.

It could well be true: This had nothing to do with what happened on Nov. 22. But if anything, the danger there was greater, because



WILLIAM ATTWOOD
He Was JFK's Envoy

Cuban antagonism had become fused with Texas conservatism. The Kennedys were considered Kennedy anathema.

AN EXAMPLE of this is found in a speech made by a Cuban rebel, a survivor of the Bay of Pigs. He addressed a John Birch meeting on Oct. 1 in a town just outside of Dallas.

"And we're waiting for Kennedy on the 22nd plenty. We're going to see him in one way or another. We're going to give him the works when he gets in Dallas. Mr. Good Old Kennedy. I wouldn't even call him President. He stinks."

There is one Cuban who was living in Dallas who might hold the key to the conspiracy that might have been. Her name is Sylvia Odio, and the only way the Warren Commission could explain her testimony was to decide she is a psychopathic liar.

Mrs. Odio, a divorcee who lived with her sisters and four children, had escaped from Cuba, where her mother and father remained in a Castro prison. She was active in the exile movement.

In late September, 1963, she testified, three men came to her apartment. Two of them were Mexicans or Cubans, the other was an American.

One of the Latins who called himself "Eduardo" said, "You are working in the under-

ground . . . we wanted you to meet this American. His name is Leon Oswald."

In a phone call the next day, Mrs. Odio continued, the man told her to say this "Leon Oswald" was an ex-Marine who fell President Kennedy should have been assassinated right after the Bay of Pigs.

WHEN OSWALD'S picture appeared on television after his arrest on Nov. 22 she swore she recognized him immediately.

Fantastic as her story seemed, the Warren Commission counsel who took her testimony, Wesley J. Liebeler, assented from a position that would refute Mrs. Odio completely. On Sept. 14, 1964, when the Warren report was going to press, he wrote in a memorandum:

"The Odio analysis should be based primarily on the apparent likelihood that LHO (Lee Harvey Oswald) was elsewhere. There are problems. "Odio may be right. The commission will look hard at it turns out that she is."

If Mrs. Odio was right, the commission did indeed have a problem, one that goes far beyond the fact that Oswald might have been in Texas, when he was supposed to be enroute to Mexico. If Mrs. Odio is to be believed, Oswald probably was not the lone assassin.

In August, J. Lee Rankin, the commission general counsel, asked FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover for an additional investigation "to determine the possibly validity of Mrs. Odio's testimony."

Hoover replied on Sept. 21 that a Loran Eugene Hall had been located in Johnsondale, Calif. Hall, an anti-Castro activist who, though an American, is swarty and could be taken for a Latin, told FBI agents he had been in Dallas in September, 1963.

He said, Hoover continued, that he visited Sylvia Odio along with Lawrence Howard, a Mexican-American from Los Angeles, and William Seymour, an Arizonian.

"Hall stated that William Seymour is similar in appearance to Lee Harvey Oswald," the director wrote.

The commission was satisfied and it appended this version to its report.

HOOVER WAS either falsifying the facts, or his agents were withholding the full story from him. His Sept. 21 letter neglects to mention that FBI agents questioned Seymour on Sept. 18 and Howard on Sept. 20.

Both denied ever having laid eyes on Mrs. Odio. They each had been to Dallas with Hall in the fall of '63, but at separate times.

Confronted with the Howard and Seymour statements, Hall decided he must have been mistaken — he didn't remember meeting Mrs. Odio. Nevertheless, Hoover preferred to let the commission accept Hall's original account in an entry in the historical record.

FBI investigators might well have had a further interest in Hall, Howard and Seymour.

That isn't known, since commission document No. 1085, "Cuban Exile Groups and Individuals," remains classified. But their activities in the summer and fall of 1963 are extremely interesting.

Hall, Howard and Seymour were a breed of adventurous American warriors. Ex-service-

men, they had been in the military and had seen the world. They were in Miami, Fla., in the fall of 1963, along with about 20 other anti-Castro Cubans, chugging around Miami most of the day, talking endlessly about the future of Havana, the economy or never state. The only person who ever got to Cuba was a young man from Miami called No Name, Key.

THE ORIENTATION of Hall, Howard and Seymour in the anti-Castro movement was extremely right wing, meaning an appeasement of any kind. Their financial backers were principally hard-line militants in Southern California and Texas. Barry Goldwater was their political idol. John Kennedy they didn't go for one bit.

In September, 1963, Hall and Howard drove from Los Angeles to Dallas, hauling a trailer-load of arms. They were heading for Miami, but they had no place to hide the trailer there, so they left it in Dallas.

In October, Hall and Seymour returned to Dallas, where they were arrested for possession of drugs. They were released after an intercession by one of their backers, a Cuban official. Then they drove back to Miami with the trailer.

The raid they showed was in October when as they were enroute to a jumping-off point in the Florida Keys, Hall, Howard and Seymour, a photographer and some Cubans, were arrested by Customs officials. No charges were filed, but their equipment was confiscated. They returned to Miami disgusted, and in early November they headed west.

A LETTER from Seymour to the photographer who was with them in the keys placed him and Howard in Houston on Nov. 9. Hall says he took a plane straight back to Los Angeles.

They all apparently can prove that on the day of the assassination they were back home, Hall and Howard in California, Seymour in Arizona. But from that day on they never had any more to do with the campaign against Castro.

District Attorney Jim Garrison assigns a high priority to the Cuban theme. It is true he has obscured the issue of motive by accusing an endless number of conspiratorial groups, until it includes an entirely unmanageable number of defrocked priests, Ku Klux Klansmen, John Birchers, Minutemen, Neo-Nazis, CIA agents and Dallas cops. But his suspicion of anti-Castroites has been consistent.

Garrison knows that New Orleans in 1963 was a center of Cuban plots and counterplots and that Oswald was deeply involved in them, on one side or the other. It was his deep conviction that Oswald used the Fair Play for Cuba Committee as a cover for a commitment to the Castro opposition.

TOMORROW: Garrison's motives — is he a certifiable nut with a paranoid obsession to solve the assassination riddle? (Chicago Daily News)



CARLOS LECHUGA
Chief Cuban Delegate