

What the CIA didn't tell the Warren inquiry

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with LES WHITTEN

WASHINGTON—After President John F. Kennedy was struck down on Nov. 22, 1963, the Central Intelligence Agency received evidence suggesting that Cuban Premier Fidel Castro arranged the assassination in retaliation for the attempts on his own life.

Yet sources privy to the secret discussions at the highest levels of the CIA during those hectic days now tell us that the CIA deliberately withheld the evidence from the Warren Commission.

Our sources cite two reasons for holding back this crucial evidence. One was a resolve to cover up the ugly secret that the CIA had enlisted Mafia mobsters to kill Castro. But there was also a legitimate concern that the Castro revelations might inflame the American people, who had just lost a beloved President. The grief could have turned into a terrible wrath, which might have precipitated some rash action.

Within hours after President Kennedy's death, the U.S. embassy cable information from Mexico City suggesting that the Cubans may have been behind the assassination. Our sources say that the CIA developed similar information in Washington. The first person to reach Robert Kennedy's side after the shooting was CIA Director John McCone, who remained alone with Robert at his McLean, Va., home for nearly three hours.

Yet incredibly, no one brought the Cuban connection to the attention of the Warren Commission. We were the first to get word of the anti-Castro plot to Chief Justice Earl Warren, the commission chairman, four years later.

We are now free to reveal our role in the drama. Two of

our confidential sources, CIA agent William Harvey and mobster John Roselli, are dead. A third source, attorney Edward P. Morgan, has waived the confidentiality we had promised him.

Morgan told us in January, 1967, about the CIA-Mafia assassination plot against Castro. He raised the possibility that the plot could have backfired against President Kennedy. There were suspicious circumstances, he pointed out, indicating that Castro may have learned of the attempts on his life and may have retaliated against Kennedy.

Morgan refused to identify his sources because it would have violated the attorney-client privilege. But he was an attorney of such stature that we didn't doubt his word.

Therefore, we asked Morgan to repeat the story to our associate, the late Drew Pearson, who was a close personal friend of Earl Warren. Pearson listened carefully and then went straight to the chief justice with the story. On Jan. 31, 1967, Warren called in Secret Service chief James Rowley and asked him to investigate. Rowley passed the buck to the FBI. But nothing happened.

We got Morgan's permission, therefore, to write a cautious story. We confirmed the general outlines from a CIA source. Then on March 3, 1967, we wrote that Robert Kennedy "may have approved an assassination plot which then possibly backfired against his late brother."

On March 7, 1967, we reported still more details. "A reported CIA plan in 1963 to assassinate Cuba's Fidel Castro," we wrote, "... may have resulted in a counterplot by Castro to assassinate President Kennedy."

This story finally stirred President Johnson into demanding a full report from the CIA. Afterward, Johnson told intimates that he was convinced there had been a Cuban conspiracy to kill Kennedy. The evidence, however, is still circumstantial.

NY Daily News

9/9/76