

Helms Regrets His Failure to Tell Warren Panel of CIA's Efforts to Slay Castro



LOOKING INTO THE PAST—Richard Helms, ex-CIA chief, before House assassinations panel.

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From a Times Staff Writer

WASHINGTON—Former CIA Director Richard M. Helms said Friday he regretted that he did not inform the Warren Commission in 1963 about "ongoing efforts" by his agency to assassinate Fidel Castro or topple his Cuban regime.

"We should have shoved the whole thing over to them (the commission)," Helms told the House Assassinations Committee, which is reexamining the slaying of John F. Kennedy. "I should have backed up a truck and taken all the documents down to them."

Helms, who was in charge of CIA covert operations at the time, said he had reasoned he was not the proper person to tell the commission about anti-Castro efforts, despite the fact that Lee Harvey Oswald, Kennedy's assassin, had been associated with pro-Castro groups.

Helms said John McCone, then the agency's director, as well as commission members Allen W. Dulles and Sen. Richard B. Russell (D-Ga.) knew of U.S. efforts to undermine the Cuban regime. But, Helms conceded that he alone among those men might have known about attempts to murder Castro.

As revealed during 1975 Senate hearings, the CIA initiated attempts on Castro's life both before and after the disastrous 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion. Two of those efforts involved cooperation between the agency and underworld figures Sam Giancana and John Rosselli.

Helms said he doubted the information about Castro would have altered the Warren panel's finding that Oswald had acted alone.

That was the same view expressed by former President Gerald R. Ford. He told the committee on Thursday, however, that the commission would have widened its inquiry had it known about the Castro assassination efforts.

"We never talked to anyone outside the agency about covert operations, except the Senate and House committees which had oversight over our agency," Helms said.

But Helms said the first high official outside the CIA to whom he ever revealed the Castro assassination attempts was President Lyndon B. Johnson. In response to questions by Johnson, he briefed him on May 10, 1967, Helms said.

By that time the CIA had abandoned all of its anti-Cas-

tro programs, said Helms, who had become the agency's director in 1966.

Helms also told the committee that rumors that Oswald had once worked for the CIA were false. But he said he could not explain why 37 documents were missing from a file on Oswald at the CIA.

Oswald had attracted the CIA's attention when he traveled to Russia in 1959 and tried to defect. He married a Soviet woman and returned to the United States in 1962.