

Retired Colonel Tells of Action Against Castro

Associated Press

A retired Air Force colonel said the CIA once requested a plane under his command and flew two men into Cuba to kill Fidel Castro.

L. Fletcher Prouty said he came forward now with an account of his involvement in the abortive plot in "late 1959 or early 1960" because of a verbal attack Monday by former CIA Director Richard Helms against CBS newsman Daniel Schorr for reporting possible CIA involvement in assassination schemes.

"It got me a little upset," Prouty said of Helms' denunciation, which was widely reported and televised.

Prouty, who handled Air Force liaison with the CIA, said in a telephone interview Tuesday that he was positive Helms knew about the plot to kill Castro. Helms has claimed to have no knowledge of CIA responsibility for any assassinations, but hasn't mentioned the possibility of unsuccessful attempts.

At the time of the Castro assassination attempt, Helms was in almost total control of the CIA's clandestine operations against Cuba, Prouty said. Helms was assistant to Richard Bissel, then-CIA deputy director of plans, the agency's so-called "dirty tricks" department.

Prouty said he dispatched a specially equipped Air Force plane at the CIA's request to land two Cuban exiles on a road near Havana. The would-be assassins were "equipped with a high-powered rifle and telescopic sights" and "knew how to get to a building in Havana which overlooked a building where Castro passed daily," Prouty said.

He said the five-seat, single-engine plane landed and re-

turned safely to Eglin Air Force Base in Florida, but the two exiles "as far as I know were picked up between where they were left off and town."

Prouty said one of the exiles was named Oscar Spijo and that the plane had been flown by "mercenaries" on the CIA payroll.

Now an Amtrak official, Prouty was with the Defense Department's Office of Special Operations at the time of the plot. He retired from the Air Force in 1963 and wrote a book called "The Secret Team," detailing his experiences as Air Force liaison with the CIA.

The incident that triggered Prouty's disclosure followed a 3½-hour appearance by Helms before a closed-door meeting of the Rockefeller Commission, which is investigating CIA domestic activities.

As he emerged from the session, Helms spotted Schorr in the hallway and denounced him with profanities and referred to him as "Killer Schorr" for reporting that the "CIA goes around killing people."

Schorr has reported that President Ford is concerned that an unlimited investigation of CIA activities could uncover agency involvement in foreign assassinations.

Bissel, who left the agency after the Bay of Pigs fiasco, said in a recent interview that there had been high-level discussions about killing Castro but that the plans were vetoed by then-CIA Director Allen Dulles.

Prouty said he knew of "one or two" other assassination attempts against Castro after the Bay of Pigs, but said he did not know details of the missions because he was not directly involved in them.