

Jack Anderson

Mob may have hired JFK's assassin

WASHINGTON — In past columns, we have unraveled the mystery of the century — who really killed John F. Kennedy. We have studied evidence that had been covered up, and we have interviewed witnesses who had been silent for 25 years. We will present our findings to the nation tonight (Nov. 2) in a television documentary. Here are the highlights:

The Central Intelligence Agency dispatched assassins to Cuba in 1961 to kill Fidel Castro. The operation was so sensitive that only six people had knowledge of it. No written record was kept until May 14, 1962, when a summary was prepared for President Kennedy's brother Robert at his request. Only one copy was kept by the CIA.

The killers were hand picked for the CIA by Santo Trafficante who had been the Mafia boss of the pre-Castro underworld in Havana. After six professional hit teams failed, the CIA reportedly learned that Mr. Trafficante had double-crossed them and had tipped off Mr. Castro. The CIA immediately cut the Mafia out of the conspiracy, but continued the operation.

Without Mr. Trafficante to alert him, Mr. Castro no longer knew when or where the CIA assassins would strike. So, in September 1963, he delivered a public warning that if the CIA continued its attempts to kill "Cuban leaders," then "American leaders will no longer be safe."

Participants in the plot on Mr. Castro's life claim that the Cuban ruler then enlisted Mr. Trafficante to turn the Mafia guns against President Kennedy. Mr. Trafficante allegedly got the blessing and backing of two other Mafia godfathers, Sam Giancana and Carlos Marcello, who had come to hate Mr. Kennedy bitterly for his vigorous crackdown on the mob.

For a crime of such magnitude, the Mafia would have needed someone to divert suspicion from themselves. They allegedly were led to Lee Harvey Oswald, a perfect fall guy. He was a political crackpot who once defected to Russia. Yet, he had also been a Marine Corps sharpshooter with an assassin's skills. To the public, he would look like a

misfit who could well have acted alone.

Two months after Mr. Castro's warning, President Kennedy was gunned down in Dallas. The Mafia scheme, our sources say, was to pin the assassination on Mr. Oswald, then eliminate him before he could incriminate any conspirators. But the police found Mr. Oswald first.

That made it all the more urgent for the Mafia to get rid of Mr. Oswald. But who would pull a gun in front of dozens of armed police and shoot their prize prisoner? Such a killer would have to be crazy, or under terrible pressure. The man who did it, Jack Ruby, was not crazy. Our sources say he was a small-time hood under Mafia pressure. He had no choice, one source said.

The CIA veteran who directed the abortive attempt to assassinate Mr. Castro, William Harvey, told his superiors that the operation had backfired against President Kennedy, associates recalled. They were told that the CIA had confirmed this from other sources. Then-CIA Director John McCone shared this shocking report with the late president's brother, Robert Kennedy, and the new president, Lyndon Johnson, our sources said.

In a private conversation with television commentator Howard K. Smith two years later, Mr. Johnson declared, "President Kennedy tried to get Mr. Castro, but Mr. Castro got Mr. Kennedy first." Mr. Johnson made similar comments to others including television's elder statesman Walter Cronkite.

In the mid-'70s, a congressional committee investigated the CIA's use of Mafia hit men to knock off Mr. Castro. Senate investigators started asking questions about the possibility that Mr. Castro used the Mafia to retaliate against Mr. Kennedy. The committee issued subpoenas for Santo Trafficante, Sam Giancana and the mobster who worked with Mr. Harvey on the operation, Johnny Rosselli.

Mr. Trafficante fled to the Caribbean and hid out on his yacht, our sources say. But Mr. Giancana and Mr. Rosselli did not escape. Before they could say anything that might link Mr.

Trafficante to the crime of the century, both mobsters were murdered — Mr. Giancana in 1975 and Mr. Rosselli in 1976. Police concluded from the available evidence — most of it inadmissible in court — that the two were hit by Mr. Trafficante. Mr. Trafficante, who died in 1987, eventually appeared before the committee but refused to answer questions.

Why would Mr. Trafficante want to silence Mr. Giancana and Mr. Rosselli? Both had retired and were not even possible mob rivals. Both had joined him in the assassination plot against Mr. Castro — an alliance that probably would make them heroes to some Americans. But both could also link him to the tragedy in Dallas.

CAUTIOUS OPTIMISM — The Soviets appear to be mending their ways and their reforms could end the Soviet-American rivalry which has dominated world affairs since World War II. They are pulling out of Afghanistan. They are helping to reduce tensions in most of the world's trouble spots. They are allowing more independence in their satellite nations and permitting nationalist demonstrations in their Baltic republics. But we have detected a note of caution in secret intelligence reports coming out of the Soviet Union. The Soviets have continued to boost their combat forces under Mikhail Gorbachev's rule, buying more tanks, artillery, bombers and fighter planes.

MINI-EDITORIAL — Mikhail Gorbachev won thousands more converts to glasnost last week when he allowed a Lithuanian cathedral to be returned to the Catholic Church. The 14th century Vilnius Cathedral was confiscated by the government in 1950 and turned into an art gallery. The Lithuanian Communist Party chief dampened the announcement by warning that Lithuanians should not take the concession as an invitation to secede from the Soviet Union — a tempting idea to many Lithuanians. "Let us learn to wait," the party chief advised. That is something Soviet Christians have already learned.

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JACK ANDERSON and DALE VAN ATTA

Death in Dallas: A Plot That Backfired

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Without Trafficante's help, Castro no longer knew when or where the CIA would strike. In September 1963, he publicly warned that if the CIA continued its attempts to kill "Cuban leaders," then "American leaders will no longer be safe."

Participants in the plot against Castro claim that Castro then enlisted Trafficante to turn the Mafia against President Kennedy. Trafficante allegedly got the assistance of two other Mafia godfathers, Sam Giancana and Carlos Marcello, who hated Kennedy for his crackdown on the mob.

For such a crime, the Mafia needed someone to divert suspicion from themselves. They allegedly were led to Lee Harvey Oswald, a political crackpot who once defected to Russia. He had also been a Marine Corps sharpshooter. He would look like a misfit who could well have acted alone.

Two months after Castro's warning, Kennedy was killed in Dallas. The Mafia scheme, our sources say, was to pin the assassination on Oswald, then eliminate him before he could incriminate any conspirators. But the police found Oswald first.

The Mafia now needed to get rid of Oswald desperately. But who would shoot the prize prisoner? Such a killer would have to be crazy, or under terrible pressure. The man who did it, Jack Ruby, was a small-time hood under Mafia pressure, our sources said.

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In the 1970s, a congressional committee investigated CIA use of Mafia hit men to kill Castro. Senate investigators asked questions about whether Castro used the Mafia to retaliate against Kennedy. The committee subpoenaed Santo Trafficante, Sam Giancana and the mobster who worked with Harvey, Johnny Rosselli.

Trafficante fled to the Caribbean, our sources said. But before Giancana and Rosselli could say anything that might link Trafficante to Dallas, they were slain. Police concluded from the evidence that the men were hit by Trafficante. Trafficante, who died in 1987, refused to answer committee questions.

Why would Trafficante want to silence Giancana and Rosselli? Both could link him to the tragedy in Dallas.