

Jack Anderson

JFK Assassination and a Mafia Hit

There was high drama behind mobster Santos Trafficante's recent appearance before the House Assassinations Committee. He had been implicated in an incredible murder plot that had been aimed at Cuban President Fidel Castro that allegedly backfired against President Kennedy.

We reported the first half of the story, in all its fascinatingly sordid details, in January of 1971. We added the last half, carefully hedging, in September 1976. It took until this month to get Trafficante to respond on the witness stand. He denied playing any part in the Kennedy assassination. "No, sir," he said firmly.

The man who implicated him, mobster John Rosselli, was not available to testify against him. The unfortunate Rosselli was executed, gangland-style, on July 28, 1976.

But before he died, he told us that the Mafia killers, who had attempted to rub out Castro for the Central Intelligence Agency, had been captured and tortured. Then Castro, as the supreme irony, turned the killers against Kennedy, Rosselli suggested. He said they belonged to the Trafficante mob.

The flamboyant Rosselli, out of life-long Mafia habit, was guarded in relating the story to us. He had come to trust us over the years, and we had dragged the story from him bit by bit. But now we have learned he confided the same story, in far more explicit detail, to his attorney Edward P. Morgan.

A former FBI official, Morgan went as far as attorney-client privilege would permit and tipped off the FBI on March 20, 1967. Because his client is dead, Morgan has now confirmed to us

that Rosselli was the confidential source who told him about the counterplot against Kennedy.

Rosselli was in a position to know what he was talking about. As the hit man recruited by the CIA to kill Castro, Rosselli developed informants close to Castro. These sources, never uncovered by Castro, kept Rosselli fully informed on how the assassination plot had boomeranged, Morgan said.

Police suspect Rosselli may have been murdered for talking too much about this bizarre plot. Twelve days before his death, he dined with Trafficante at the fashionable Landings restaurant in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. It is the custom in the Mafia to wine and dine a wayard member before he is executed.

Underworld informants told police that Rosselli was lured aboard a private boat by his executioners. It is also the Mafia practice to give murder contracts to friends whom the victim trusts.

According to the police, the 70-year-old Rosselli was strangled and his legs were sawed off so the body would fit in a metal drum. The murderers cut holes in the drum so it would fill with water and weighted it down with heavy chains. Then they heaved it into Miami's Biscayne Bay.

But apparently the gases from the body caused the drum to rise eerily from its saltwater grave. The drum, with its grisly contents, washed up on the shore.

Earlier Rosselli associates, knowing he had been in touch with us, called us to report his disappearance. They

feared foul play because of his contacts with us.

Two years later, Trafficante was summoned before the House Assassinations Committee and granted immunity to assure his testimony. He hunched down in the witness chair, a balding old man who did not appear to be the sinister Mafia chieftain whose name is feared throughout the underworld.

Chairman Louis Stokes (D-Ohio) read him our Sept. 7, 1976 column suggesting that the plot against Castro may have boomeranged against Kennedy. "Do you have any knowledge of that?" Stokes asked.

"No knowledge whatsoever," replied the mobster.

"Do you have any information concerning any retaliatory action by Mr. Castro?"

"No, sir."

"Do you have any knowledge concerning how this information could have been given to this columnist, Mr. Anderson?" the chairman pressed.

"No, sir," said Trafficante.

"Did you and Mr. Rosselli ever discuss any retaliatory action by Castro?"

"No, sir."

"Can you tell us," asked Stokes, "when was the last time you had seen Mr. Rosselli prior to his death?"

"I would say two, three weeks before his death."

"And where was that?"

"At Fort Lauderdale," said Santos Trafficante.

Footnote: As we have stressed in previous columns, Fidel Castro has vigorously denied any connection with the Kennedy assassination.

Jack Anderson's Washington Merry-go-round

FP 10/23/78

Anti-Castro backfire killed JFK?

WASHINGTON — From the grave, the gangster who accepted the CIA mission to kill Cuban Premier Fidel Castro has cried out that the plot backfired against President John F. Kennedy.

Police believe the late John Roselli was rubbed out, gangland-style, to keep him from talking. But unknown to his executioners, he had already told the startling tale to his attorney, Edward P.

Morgan, a former FBI official, who tipped off the FBI on March 20, 1967.

We have obtained a confidential FBI report quoting Morgan's cautious account. Because of attorney-client privilege, he did not identify his informant to the FBI. But he has now acknowledged to us that the details came from Roselli.

Morgan told the FBI that his client, with "the highest government approval," had plotted to assassinate Castro. Even to the FBI, this was explosive news in 1967. But Morgan's next statement was even more explosive.

Recounted the FBI report: "The project almost reached fruition when Castro became aware of it and arrested a number of suspects. By pressuring captured suspects, he was able to learn the full details of the plot against him."

The Cuban leader, as the supreme irony, decided to turn the tables. "He too could engage in the same tactics," Morgan recounted to the FBI. "Castro thereafter employed teams of individuals who were dispatched to the United States for the purpose of assassinating President Kennedy."

Morgan explained to the FBI that his clients had planted informants "in key posts . . . close to Castro." The clients learned about the counterplot, said Morgan, from "feedback" from these confidential informants.

Added the FBI report: "(Morgan) further described how one client, when hearing the statement that Lee Harvey Oswald was the sole assassin of President Kennedy 'laughs with tears in his eyes and shakes his head in apparent disagreement.'"

Morgan had Roselli's permission to pass on the tip but not the specifics to the FBI. Now that the mobster is dead, Morgan told us he could identify his informant and confirm the story. "Roselli told me very definitely and dramatically about the feedback he got from Cuba on the counterplot against President Kennedy," Morgan said.

Fidel Castro has denied repeatedly and emphatically that he had anything to do with Kennedy's murder. But Roselli had confided the same story to us, albeit in less certain terms.

We first encountered the debonair Roselli more than seven-years ago. We were investigating his role in the CIA plot to assassinate Castro.

The CIA case officer, William Harvey, told us that Roselli had been the hero of the abortive adventure. Harvey broke his oath of secrecy because he thought it might help Roselli, who was in trouble with the law. The CIA agent had nothing

but praise for Roselli's daring.

In the strictest of confidence, Roselli himself confirmed that he had directed six assassination attempts against Castro. We protected his confidence, so he came to trust us. We were the only newsmen he would talk to.

Speaking cryptically from a lifetime of Mafia habit, Roselli told us the same basic story that he had outlined to his attorney. He suggested that Castro had enlisted the underworld elements whom he had caught plotting against him. They purportedly belonged to the Santos Trafficante organization.

Working with Cuban intelligence, they supposedly lined up an ex-Marine sharpshooter named Lee Harvey Oswald, who had been active in the pro-Castro movement. It has been established that Oswald called at the Cuban embassy in Mexico City before the dreadful day in Dallas.

According to Roselli's version, Oswald may have shot Kennedy or may have acted as a decoy while others ambushed him from closer range. When Oswald was picked up, Roselli suggested, the underworld conspirators feared he would crack and disclose information that might lead to them. This would have brought a massive U.S. crackdown on the Mafia.

So Jack Ruby was ordered to eliminate Oswald, making it appear as an act of reprisal against the president's killer. At least this is how the late mobster explained the tragedy in Dallas.

There is no proof, of course, to support Roselli's version. He also modified his story when he was hauled behind closed doors of the Senate Intelligence Committee.

The transcript is stamped "Top Secret." We can report, however, that Roselli said merely that it was his opinion that the plot against Castro had backfired and that Castro had arranged for Kennedy's death. Roselli stressed this was merely his speculation.

It would be in character, however, for Roselli to clam up under government cross-examination. He would be more likely to tell the truth to his attorney and a trusted newsmen.

There is reason to believe the mob thought he was talking to someone. This may be the reason he was brutally stangled, his body stuffed into an oil drum and heaved into Miami's Biscayne Bay.

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Late Mobster's View of JFK Killing

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