

Washington merry-go-round

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WITH LES WHITTEN

WASHINGTON — Dictator Rafael Trujillo was gunned down on May 30, 1961, thus ending his 31-year tyranny over the Dominican Republic. His military police efficiently rounded up the assassins and tortured them to death.

We have now learned that before they died, they gave detailed confessions implicating the Central Intelligence Agency in the assassination plot. The tortured men believed the CIA not only supported them but would save them.

According to their confession, the CIA was supposed to prevent the old tyrant's murderous son, Ramfis, from returning to Santo Domingo. Nevertheless, he flew home in a chartered plane and personally directed the torture.

His father had been bushwhacked on a lonely highway by a few military and civilian marksmen, backed by a conspiracy of 20 to 40 others, with supporters in the hundreds. The military security forces hauled in dozens — some say hundreds — for torture. From their agonized confessions, a detailed summary was written and presented to Ramfis, who has since died.

The existence of the summary, however, is attested to by sources close to the surviving Trujillo family members. We have also been in contact with the family itself, but they refuse to discuss the CIA's role in the assassination.

They would say only that they regret Rafael Trujillo was not informed by the CIA of the plot against him. "After all, he was not an enemy. He should have been told," a family spokesman said.

One Trujillista veteran, now a respected businessman, acknowledged that he had helped compile the summary. "The CIA helped get the guns and gave the plotters encouragement," he said in a statement to us.

He charged that the plotters "were urged on by Lear Reed," a former U.S. embassy aide in Santo Domingo, who was regarded by his colleagues as a CIA man, but left the Dominican Republic about eight months before the assassination.

After Reed left, according to the death-throes confessions of the assassins, they kept close contact with two U.S. diplomats whom they call "Mutt" and "Jeff" after the tall and short comic strip characters.

Messages were carried from the plotters to the CIA, according to the tortured men's last words, by a brave young Dominican pediatrician, Dr. Robert Reid. After the assassination, he

hid three of the plotters. When the secret police closed in, the doctor committed suicide.

"The assassins believed that the CIA was going to head off Ramfis..." claims the former Trujillo aide. "But he chartered a plane and got back to Santo Domingo in time to take over the old man's apparatus. I can't swear that the CIA ever tried to delay Ramfis, but the plotters under torture — and it was very, very ugly — swore they'd never have

killed Trujillo unless they thought the CIA was going to save their skins somehow."

Footnote: U.S. intelligence sources confirm they were aware of the plot and kept abreast of it in a general way. But they deny that the CIA was a direct participant. Lear Reed has died. One of the surviving conspirators, Gen. Antonio "Tony" Imbert has also denied that the CIA helped him kill Trujillo. But denials or not, the tortured men thought they had U.S. approval and they expected U.S. help.

**PUFF BAGS:** Rep. John Moss, D-Calif., is making a behind-the-scenes attempt to obtain White House tapes which he suspects may prove President Nixon sold out air bag safety to Detroit's auto makers.

The puff bags, according to federal data, would save 10,000 lives a year, prevent countless injuries and save the nation's drivers and insurance companies \$4 billion annually in hospital and other costs.

But Ford and Chrysler have fought strenuously against the bags for years. General Motors has been lukewarm and now President Ford is personally wavering on the devices.

In a private letter to Special Watergate prosecutor Henry Ruth, Moss, as House Commerce Investigations chairman, suggests that meetings between the White House and Ford and Chrysler officials may be behind the air bags' political problems.

Hoping to get Watergate-style dialogue on the secret talks, Moss asked Ruth to "review White House tapes...to determine whether conversations took place (on) air bag standards."

The tapes are presently tied up in the courts.

But in 1971, we told of an April 27, 1971, meeting between Henry Ford II and Nixon involving auto safety. A confidential Moss subcommittee memo now says this meeting and others were held amid "talk of Henry Ford (playing) a role on behalf of Nixon's re-election."

After one meeting, attended by White House aide John Ehrlichman, Transportation Secretary John Volpe "retired with the White House staff" and later told a top aide, "We are in trouble on the air bag..."

Volpe was right. The White House shelved the air bag for at least five years by replacing it "temporarily" with the ill-fated starter interlock belt system which was installed on 1974 cars. It was so unpopular with drivers it was scuttled.

A few days ago, falling in line with his predecessor, President Ford bucked his own Transportation Department experts and questioned whether the air bag was "cost-effective."

Footnote: The Transportation Department plans hearings on air bags in a few days, once again with heated auto industry opposition to the safety device.