

Behind the News

To Murder Castro

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PKLSS accounts have identified Cuba's Fidel Castro as the target of an unsuccessful CIA assassination plot. The headlines couldn't have been of a worse ten: for Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. He is in the thick of "most delicate negotiations," according to our White House sources, to restore some kind of diplomatic relationship with Cuba. Actually, we reported as far back as Jan. 18, 1971, that the CIA had arranged six assassination attempts against Castro in the early 1960s. Now that the story has been revived, it might be useful to recount the details.



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The plot began as part of the discredited Bay of Pigs operation. The strategy was to eliminate the Cuban leader before the CIA invasion force landed on the island. Without the charismatic Castro, it was thought, the defenders would become demoralized and disorganized.

To carry out the assassination, the CIA selected an underworld figure who could be disowned. He was hawk-faced John Roselli, identified in confidential FBI files as "a top Mafia figure" who watched over the concealed interests in Las Vegas casinos of the Chicago underworld."

ROSELLI'S CIA contacts were William Harvey and James O'Connell, who accompanied him on hush-hush trips to Miami to line up the assassination teams. No one else was told, however, of the CIA's role in the murder mission.

Roselli represented himself as an oil man seeking revenge against Castro for his seizure of oil holdings. The assassination weapons were also carefully selected from foreign makes, mostly Belgian, to prevent any link to the United States.

Each attempt to kill Castro was meticulously planned, like an episode from the TV drama, "Mission: Impossible!". For the first try, the CIA furnished Roselli with special poison capsules to slip into Castro's food.

The poison was supposed to take

three days to act. By the time Castro died, his system would throw off all traces of the poison, so he would appear to be the victim of a natural if mysterious ailment.

Roselli arranged with a Cuban, ~~named to one of Castro's chefs,~~ to slip the deadly poisons in the ~~leader's food.~~ On March 13, 1961, ~~the capsules~~ ~~of Miami Beach's glamorous Fontainebleau Hotel.~~

A COUPLE weeks later, just about the right time for the plot to have been carried out, a report out of Havana said Castro was ill. But he recovered in time to rout the Bay of Pigs invasion on April 17, 1961.

Although both the murder plot

and the invasion failed, the CIA continued trying to get rid of Castro. The Cuban who had sneaked the poison into Havana was never seen again. Therefore, the CIA, unsure whether the plotters had failed or the poison hadn't been strong enough, decided to try again with a more powerful dose.

Roselli arranged for triple-strength capsules to be slipped into Castro's food several weeks after the Bay of Pigs. But once again, the plot failed and the conspirators disappeared.

Four more attempts were made on Castro's life, thereafter using assassination teams equipped with high-powered rifles, explosives and two-way radios. Roselli personally made midnight powerboat dashes to deliver the teams at secret landing spots on the Cuban coast. Once Roselli's boat was shot out from under him, but the occupants were quickly fished out of the murky water by companions in an accompanying boat.

THE assassination teams never got a shot at Castro, although the CIA learned that the last group reached a rooftop within range. This occurred around the last of February or first of March 1963.

Nine months later, President Kennedy was gunned down in Dal-

las by Lee Harvey Oswald, a fanatic who had been active in the pro-Castro movement and had paid a mysterious call upon the Cuban embassy in Mexico City a few weeks before the dreadful day in Dallas.

Sources familiar with the CIA conspiracy can't shake a nagging



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suspicion — unsupported by the Warren Commission's findings — that Castro may have become aware of the U.S. plot upon his life and, therefore, may have recruited Oswald to retaliate against President Kennedy.

Some sources believe this is why Robert Kennedy, tormented by grief, went into semi-seclusion after his brother's assassination. After the Bay of Pigs fiasco, President Kennedy had put Robert in charge of the CIA with instructions to shake it up. It is unlikely that the final attempts upon Castro could have been made without Robert's knowledge.

Could he have been plagued by the terrible thought that the CIA plot, which he must at least have condoned, put into motion forces that brought about his own brother's murder? The last surviving brother, Sen. Ted Kennedy, told us his brothers had never spoken to him about any assassination attempts against Castro.

Footnote: Sources familiar with the secret review of the CIA's activities have now acknowledged that Castro, as we reported four years ago, was marked for assassination by the CIA. A CIA spokesman refused to comment.