

McCone denies Castro plot

FP wt 3/13/76

WASHINGTON (AP) — Former CIA Director John A. McCone flatly denied Wednesday any knowledge of an agency plot to assassinate Cuban Premier Fidel Castro or any other foreign official.

"To my knowledge there's nothing that was brought to my attention that involves any attempt against Castro or any other person during my tenure of office," McCone said in a telephone interview. "I had frequent meetings with the President and Robert Kennedy and with others who were concerned about Cuba and ... at no time at any of those meetings was any mention made of the assassination of Castro."

McCone headed the agency from 1961 to 1965 under the late Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson. Robert F. Kennedy was the U.S. attorney general during his brother's administration and during the early Johnson years.

Time magazine this week cited credible sources as saying "the CIA enlisted the expert hired-gun help of U.S.

Mafia figures in several unsuccessful attempts to kill Castro both before and shortly after the CIA planned Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba in 1961."

Two former aides to Robert Kennedy, Adam Walinsky and Peter B. Edelman, have said the late senator told them he once learned of and stopped a CIA effort to use the Mafia to kill Castro prior to the Bay of Pigs.

McCone, who took over the agency following the Bay of Pigs disaster, said he developed a very close relationship with Robert Kennedy while CIA director and "it would have been the most natural thing in the world" for the then-attorney general to tell him of the incident.

"He never said that, and he would have," McCone said.

The former intelligence chief said he was basing his comments both on his own recollection and on a search of his files, which he had ordered following the appearance of news reports linking the CIA and the Mafia to assassination plots against Castro.

McCone attributed the news reports of CIA involvement in assassinations to bitter ex-employees of the agency.

Two former close associates of Kennedy on the Senate rackets committee said in separate interviews they did not recall any CIA-Mafia plot to kill Castro. Kenneth O'Donnell, who served as assistant chief counsel to the committee and later as White House chief of staff, said he never heard any mention of such a plot.

"Bobby had no secrets from me," O'Donnell said of his years on the rackets committee. "I lived in his house for two years" and "there wasn't a memo that went through the committee that I didn't see."

According to Walinsky and Edelman, Kennedy said he first learned of the plot in the course of questioning an unidentified Las Vegas mobster. However, Carmine Bellino, a chief investigator for the rackets committee who said he was present during all of Kennedy's interviews with gangland figures, said he could not recall any mention of a plot to kill Castro.