

Mafia men betrayed the CIA to Castro agency deputy says

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Odd tributes have been offered to the American character, but few can rival that of Senator Walter Mondale upon reviewing the total failure of the CIA's persistent efforts to kill Fidel Castro.

"Thank God," he said, "we're just not very good at that sort of thing."

Most thoughtful observers seemed to draw the same conclusion. Even the American Mafia dons who had been recruited by the agency to carry out Castro's execution were seen as too incompetent to be really evil. The account of them by the Senate intelligence committee sounds more like bumbler who never got around to making the attempt on Castro's life.

Such interpretations of these deadly undertakings are no doubt comforting, but they are unlikely to be more than exercises in wishful thinking.

An independent examination of the available record of one of the key Mafia figures involved in the plot raises the troubling possibility that at least some of the CIA's Mafia associates were working with Castro.

Hardly likely

Such a combination would hardly have seemed likely in 1960 when the CIA set out to recruit the Mafia. Almost all the major underworld families had invested heavily in Cuba and Castro was moving quickly to seize their holdings. He had even put some of their members in jail.

Sam Giancana and John Roselli



SANTO TRAFFICANTE
Said Kennedy would "get hit"

are the two mobsters generally identified with the Mafia-CIA plot. But a third, Santo Trafficante Jr., was perhaps the most important of the three, for it was his men, both in Miami and Havana, who were supposed to carry out the murder.

Trafficante is generally identified as the don of South Florida, but he is also one of the chiefs in the Mafia's loose national confederation. Once the CIA decided to turn to the mob, it was inevitable that Trafficante's assistance would be sought. Alone among the principal dons, he had lived in Cuba. He had built a large organization there and still had a number of associates in Castro's Havana.

Trafficante was one of the major crime bosses in the United States and had been the one most deeply affected by Castro's revolution. His gambling casinos had been seized and he had been jailed in Cuba.

The initial plot called for poisoning Castro in his favorite Havana restaurant, where one of Trafficante's men worked. The CIA's technical services division supplied deadly botulinum toxin which Robert Maheu, who was co-ordinating the mob's efforts for the CIA, passed to an exile associated with Trafficante in Miami Beach. From there Trafficante's courier was to deliver the poison pills to the man in the Havana restaurant.

All of this took place in March and April 1961, just before the Bay of Pigs. Accounts vary as to why the plan failed. One version is that the authorization to administer the poison never came through; another, that Castro stopped going to the restaurant.

Theory proposed

The most intriguing theory was proposed by the CIA's deputy inspector general, Scott Breckenridge, to a Senate staff member, Breckenridge, who had been responsible for investigating the CIA-Mafia plot, maintained that Trafficante had been providing Castro with details of the plot all along.

But why would Santo Trafficante, of all people, do that? One possible explanation is proposed in a July 21, 1961, report by the Federal Bureau of Narcotics: "There are unconfirmed rumors in the Cuban refugee population in Miami that, when Fidel Castro ran the American racketeers out of Cuba and seized the casinos, he kept Santo Trafficante Jr. in jail to make it appear that he had a personal dislike for

Trafficante, when in fact Trafficante is an agent of Castro. Trafficante is allegedly Castro's outlet for illegal contraband in the country."

For the next part of Trafficante's history we must turn to Jose Aleman, an exile in Miami who became involved with Trafficante in 1962 through his cousin, Garcia Bango. Aleman had been a rich young revolutionary in Havana, one of the leaders of the almost successful 1957 attack on the presidential palace of Fulgencio Batista.

Aleman's then considerable wealth had enabled him to maintain

a base in Florida, where he owned the Tradewinds Motel and other Miami real estate. The Tradewinds figured prominently in the revolution, for by 1957 most leading Havana revolutionaries, including many of Castro's followers, had fled into exile and most ended up staying in Florida at Aleman's expense.

After the revolution, Aleman returned to Cuba and stayed a year, but was forced into exile again — this time as a counter-revolutionary. On arriving in the United States, he was met by George Davis of the FBI with a subpoena to appear as a witness against a Mafioso named Norman Rothman at a trial in Chicago.

Aleman's relationship with the FBI had initially been hostile. The Tradewinds "was an armed barracks," explained George Davis, who was assigned to monitor the exile activities, and the FBI had tried to close it down. But by late 1958 the bureau had cause to change its mind. Aleman had visited the state department to warn that Fidel Castro was a Communist, and he persuaded one of the Communist revolutionaries staying at the Tradewinds to brief the FBI on the nature of the party in Cuba.

Series of meetings

After his appearance at Rothman's trial, Aleman continued to meet regularly with his contacts at the FBI to report on exiles he suspected of being Castro agents. He also told them of an extraordinary series of meetings with Trafficante.

When Aleman's father died, his stepmother inherited most of the fortune and the inheritance taxes were so high that Jose Jr. (who had already lost his land holdings in Cuba to the revolution) had to sell

the Tradewinds. By 1962 he was in debt, with his only asset the three-story Scott Bryan Motel in Miami Beach.

In September, 1962, an old revolutionary colleague who rented an apartment at the motel told Aleman that Trafficante wanted to see him. The colleague explained that Trafficante felt indebted to Aleman's cousin, Garcia Bango, and wanted to express his gratitude by helping Aleman out of his financial difficulties. He was prepared to arrange a sizable loan from the Teamsters Union. Aleman's friend assured him that the loan was perfectly legal and that it had already been cleared by Jimmy Hoffa himself.

Aleman was understandably wary — particularly since he had so recently testified against a Mafia leader. But sure enough, the Tampa godfather did visit Aleman at the Scott Bryan and offered him the loan — \$1.5 million to replace the ramshackle motel with a 12-storey glass wonder, complete with a penthouse apartment for Aleman.

Aleman says that Trafficante spent most of the evening philosophizing. "He spoke almost poetically about democracy and civil liber-



JOHN ROSSELLI
Interviewed by committee

ties." But then he turned to the Kennedys: They were not honest, they took graft and they did not keep a bargain. He complained about their attacks on his friends, saying, "Have you seen how his brother is hitting Hoffa, a man who is a worker, who is not a millionaire, a friend of the blue collars? He doesn't know that this kind of encounter is very delicate. Mark my words, this man Kennedy is in trouble, and he will get what is coming to him." Aleman says that he argued that Kennedy would get re-elected, and Trafficante replied, "No, Jose, he is going to be hit."

Aleman says that he reported this conversation to his FBI contacts, who expressed interest only in Trafficante's business proposals.

Aleman says that late in 1962 and through the summer of 1963, three Cubans he had known in Havana and at the Tradewinds, who had gone to work for Castro after the revolution, appeared in Miami and then left for Texas. He suspected them of being Cuban agents and he told this to the FBI.

"I advised the FBI in long conversations that I thought something was going to happen . . . I was telling them to be careful." By this time Aleman says he was meeting quite frequently with his FBI contacts. They listened to what he said but rarely seemed interested in his speculations.

Call from FBI

On the day of the Kennedy assassination, Aleman arrived home to find that the FBI had telephoned. What they were interested in was Trafficante's previous statement that Kennedy was going to be "hit."

"Two agents came out to see me. They wanted to know more and more. I finally had to tell them he didn't say he was going to do it. He just said Kennedy was going to get hit." The agents stayed until they had explored every possible angle and then told Aleman to keep the conversation confidential.

The only source for all of this is Aleman, who claims that he personally repeated everything to various officials of the FBI, especially George Davis and Paul Scranton. Both agents declined to comment on Aleman's conversations with Trafficante.

In seeking to destroy both the Cas-

tro regime and the Mafia empire, the Kennedys had aroused two desperate enemies, each with a tradition of violence and covert action. No proof that either was connected with the assassination of President Kennedy has ever been produced. But their traditions and their predicament at the moment when Kennedy was shot down make either an eligible suspect. And when the two-front war that the Kennedys were waging is viewed through the experience of Santo Trafficante, it becomes at least interesting to speculate on the possibility of these two powers operating in concert.

The possibility becomes even more intriguing if one takes seriously a memorandum to the director of the CIA recently declassified from the Warren Commission files. It reports the conversation of a British journalist, John Wilson (also known as Wilson-Hudson) at the American Embassy in London just four days after Kennedy was killed.

'Gangster-gambler'

Wilson said that in jail in Cuba after the revolution in 1959 he had met an American "gangster-gambler" named Santos who could not return to the U.S.A. because there were several indictments outstanding against him. Santos opted therefore to remain in prison for a period of time paying Castro in dollars for his rather luxurious and definitely non-prisonlike accommodations . . .

"While Santos was in prison," Wilson says, "Santos was visited by an American gangster-type named Ruby."

It is tempting to make much of such a document but more needs to be known about the English journalist, about the memo and about Jack Ruby's travels before any conclusions can be drawn. Probably the only witness who could help answer the questions raised here are the CIA's old Mafia associates. The Church committee only managed to interview one of them, John Roselli. Sam Giancana, due to give his testimony, was executed the day before. Santo Trafficante was never called as a witness. The committee staff claimed he could not be found.

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