

Telltale Traces of CIA Cache Found

By Jack Anderson

My associate Les Whitten has just returned from a treasure hunt for buried CIA cash in the Florida Keys where pirates once stashed Spanish gold.

He found one cache where thousands in molding \$20 bills had been buried. But someone had reached the secret site ahead of him. All Whitten found were six weathered, matted \$20 bills that apparently had been dropped about 200 yards away.

In an earlier column, we reported that the Central Intelligence Agency had delivered bales of \$20 bills to Cuban exile leaders to finance clandestine operations against Communist Cuba.

Assassination teams, sabotage squads and commando units were sent against Castro after the abortive Bays of Pigs invasion. These missions apparently were halted after President Kennedy's assassination. But the CIA continued to slip infiltration teams into Cuba to gather intelligence.

The CIA paid all expenses, apparently, in cash. Huge sums were turned over to exile leaders, who gave no accounting of how they spent it.

There were whispers that some money had disappeared into private bank accounts, that other thousands were bur-

ied in former pirate lairs in the Florida keys.

Secret CIA Site

One who perked up his ears over the whispers was Bradley Ayers, a former Army captain, who was on loan to the CIA in 1963-64 to train Cuban assault teams. One training site had been located on Upper Key Largo on land that the Monroe County tax assessor's office identified as belonging to the University of Miami.

The CIA also operated out of a front, called Zenith Technical Enterprises, on the university's south campus. Thus the respected university, wittingly or otherwise, provided the site for an extension course in infiltration and demollition.

Ayers learned enough from his former trainees to figure out where some of the CIA money might be hidden. He told us he discovered a half-buried suitcase full of molding, mutilated \$20 bills.

The suitcase was in a remote spot that he was confident wouldn't be discovered. He took out a dozen bills to make sure they weren't counterfeit. Banks redeemed all but two badly weathered \$20 bills.

Then Ayers' house was mysteriously broken into and records of his find were taken. Fearing the CIA or Cuban exiles were watching him, he dared not return to the cache.

However, he told us his story and showed us the bank records. We also checked out his veracity carefully. I sent Les Whitten to accompany him back to the keys to recover the CIA money. We notified the Treasury Department, in general terms, that all recovered CIA cash would be turned over to the Treasury.

Treasure Hunt

Whitten, Ayers and Ayers' wife flew to an air strip on Upper Key Largo. Using it as a base of operations, they reconnoitered the dark mangrove thickets, sluggish canals, treacherous swamps of sea grass and crocodile-infested creeks where Ayers had once trained Cuban commandos.

For two days, they chugged through the creeks in a shallow-draft 18-foot skiff, startled occasionally by the barks of crocodiles. When they were convinced no one was following, they plunged through underbrush so thick they couldn't see four feet ahead.

Finally they came upon the bramble-cloaked site where Ayers said he had discovered the suitcase. The soil at the hiding place had been turned up and sifted for 10 yards in all directions. The underbrush and sea grass were trampled as if by many feet.

The suitcase full of currency was gone. Disappointed, they combed the area. Within a quarter mile, Whitten spotted a tattered \$20 bill. Ayers found two more, then Whitten

discovered a sheaf of three bills matted together with mud and grass.

The bills were near scraps of a road map, which Ayers said had been used as a wrapper for the suitcase bills. Treasury records show the bills were printed between April, 1966, and August, 1968. There is no way to prove this was part of the money which the CIA continued to provide anti-Castro exiles. But the stories that led to the cache came in part to Ayers from Cubans he helped train for the CIA.

Washington Whirl

Volunteer Army—President Nixon is leading the opposition to his own proposal for a volunteer Army—at least for the next two years. At a secret White House legislative conference, he warned GOP congressional leaders: "Some votes to end the draft may look popular temporarily. But in the long view, our recommendations (to extend the draft for two years) will prove to be right." White House aide Peter Flanigan explained to the leaders that "A short-fall of 100,000 men is expected" next year. He described the administration's plans to encourage volunteers by offering financial incentives, including a \$6,000 bonus to those who will re-enlist for combat duty. But he warned this "would mean cuts in other vital areas in the Defense Department."

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