

'The CIA's big rub-out'

R.T. GAULT
Columnist

Sometime in 1960, during the Eisenhower administration, the CIA approached Robert Meheu of the Hughes empire. Meheu was to get the Mafia to put a contract hit on Fidel Castro. Meheu stated in a suit against Hughes in 1974, that he spent most of 1960-61 working for the CIA with Howard Hughes' full knowledge. He contacted Johnny Roselli, a mafia man who hung out in The Desert Inn, watching Las Vegas interests for Sam Giancana Of Chicago.

Roselli and his boss may have liked the plot for several reasons. Both of them had immigration problems, and may have thought being in with the CIA would get them off the hook. Giancana had lost a lot of investments when Castro threw organized crime out of Havana. There is also evidence that Giancana's influence in Mafia circles was declining. Most of the money and the power had moved south in the 50's and was associated with the Marcello Clan of New Orleans, and the Trafficante clan of Tampa. Giancana may have seen the CIA plot as a way to increase his power and influence within the big board."

John Eisenhower has recently stated that Ike never approved any such plan. At the same time Kennedy aide Richard Goodwin has stated that the assassination plots of the early 60's were approved by "high-ups" at the Eisenhower White House. This is not as contradictory as it may seem. Ike's military staff method of running the executive branch left many compartments that were laws unto themselves. The man who worked on the "Cuban projects" for the White House was Richard M. Nixon.

Parts of the story leaked out fast. On Oct. 31, 1960 the Las Vegas police picked up a Miami private investigator who was keeping an eye on Sam's latest girl friend, Phillis McGuire. It was later learned that the detective had been hired by Meheu for the CIA. It was a little favor for Giancana, who reportedly, was running the Castro project from the Fontainebleau Hotel in Miami. Giancana's presence in Florida suggests that the Trafficante organization may have been aware of the plot also.

Giancana's main problem was the FBI's constant surveillance of his movements. Roselli and Giancana's personal assistant Richard Cain, a former Chicago cop, began to tell F. B. I. agents to lay off, because "we're all on the same team." Word got back to J. Edgar Hoover, who reportedly went into a blue rage and stepped-up surveillance.

According to ex-CIA contract man Bradley Ayers, (The Minneapolis Star) he trained from 75 to 100 mob-oriented Cubans for John Roselli in 1960 through '64. They were trained in all classic paramilitary tactics, in preparation for an attempt on Castro's life.

When Robert Kennedy took over the Justice Department in 1961, he made Sam Giancana, Carlos Marcello and Jimmy Hoffa prime targets for his war on organized crime. This was at cross purposes to CIA plans.

With no warning, on April 4, 1961, Justice Department agents surprised the underworld by deporting Carlos Marcello to Guatemala. Marcello spent the Bay of Pigs period in relative comfort at the expense of his friend President Ydigoras of Guatemala. Ydigoras had recently suppressed a rebellion with the assistance of the CIA/Cuban army training on Guatemala soil. By Mid-June, Marcello was back in this country—either smuggled in by shrimp boat (legend) or flown by an ex-CIA pilot named David Ferrie (JFK assassination theorists).

By May of '61, Hoover had notified RFK of what he knew about the CIA/Mafia link. And then the picture begins to get murky. According to Richard Goodwin, the assassination plots against both Castro and Trujillo were vetoed by the White House. Yet the attempts continued. Alan Walinsky of RFK's staff has stated that the Attorney General thought that he had stopped the CIA/Mafia hit plans by late '61. Later in early 1962, CIA General Counsel Lawrence Houston "notified" RFK of the whole Roselli/Giancana plot. RFK then dressed him out for compromising the Justice Department's hardline on organized crime. By May of '62, RFK had sent a memo to J. Edgar Hoover, telling him what he knew, and expressing the belief that he had stopped the plan. Recent CIA sources have placed the end of the plan at about 1965.

In the past few months, Ed Lansdale of Saigon Military Mission fame, has come forward to say that he drafted CIA assassination plans at RFK's direction, in the days right before the Missile Crisis (Aug.—Oct. '62). When pressed on this, Lansdale's memory became blurred. Lansdale was drafting plans for an anti-Castro operation called "Operation Mongoose." No one else who attended the Special Group meeting (the little elite which approves CIA clandestine acts — now called the 40 Committee) can remember any such directive. Notes provided by the CIA on this meeting have a curious element of a frame. Senator Richard Schweiker (R—Pa.) recently charged that Senate investigations were receiving doctored, erased and "fudged" notes and memos of this period from the agency.

By 1963, according to Ed Reid's book on the Mafia, *The Grim Reapers*, Roselli and Giancana were the undisputed bosses of Las Vegas. Johnny Roselli was admitted to the elite Hollywood Friar's Club, sponsored by Frank Sinatra and Dean Martin. Carlos Marcello was expanding his operations in New Orleans. In 1963, Marcello decided to move into New Orleans and take over. Until then, New Orleans crime was centered in next-door Jefferson Parish. Reid reported that in 1963, Jim Garrison, then DA of New Orleans Parish, turned down a \$3,000 a week bribe in return for letting Marcello move his operation into Garrison's jurisdiction.

Presumably, Giancana continued to run the CIA hit team, but it's a mystery how. The FBI followed him everywhere, and bugged all his telephones. In June 1963, Sam Giancana called an underling in Chicago and said "I've got a belly-full of being hounded. I'm going to Frankie's (Sinatra) place at Tahoe for a while." The Chicago phone had been tapped by the FBI, so they knew within hours of

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Sam's plans.

Shortly after John Kennedy's death, Hoover had a meeting with RFK concerning the confinance of the Mafia/CIA alliance. He feared that Glancana would use the plot as blackmail against the government. This was about the same time that parts of a Mafia-connected CIA operation against Cuba was discovered by Warren Commission investigators—then buried.

Robert Menue has described Roselli as a man who could be very useful. In 1966, when Hughes was trying to buy the Desert Inn, Roselli "smoothed" the way for Hughes' entry into Las Vegas. What he most likely did was get Sam Glancana's "O.K." for Hughes' entry into Las Vegas' real estate. Hughes, you may recall, was the man the news media applauded for buying Las Vegas and squeezing the mob out. Roselli reportedly got a substantial finder's fee for his services.

Roselli used the hit attempts on Castro as a lever against the Justice Department. After Sam Glancana tied to Mexico in 1966, the Department attempted to have Roselli deported. Roselli used the CIA connections at his hearing, and when that didn't work, he flew to Washington to "confer" with influential friends. It must have worked. He's still there.

In 1968 Roselli was indicted in Federal District court along with five others accused of working a complicated card-cheating system at the Friars Club in Hollywood. Roselli had worked out a system of peep holes and electronic gear that ripped off the stars. One of the defense team lawyers was Grant Cooper, who was handling another famous client—Sirhan B. Sirhan. Cooper kept putting off Sirhan's trial for shooting Robert Kennedy while he defended the conspirators. On Dec. 2, 1968, Roselli was declared guilty and Cooper went on to defend Sirhan the following day.

From time to time, the Mafia/CIA plot has become a part of Kennedy assassination lore. As early as 1967, a European author, "James Hepburn," (probably a pseudonym) had suggested that John Kennedy's death was the result of an "establishment" committee made up of oil interests, "rightist military personnel, the intelligence complex and the Mafia. From 1967 to '70, New Orleans DA Garrison's investigation turned up part of an anti-Castro plot involving a CIA front group, the Liberation Front." Most startling was the fact that Lee Harvey Oswald had the Cuban Liberation Front's address on his pro-Castro Fair Play For Cuba leaflets.

More recently, West Coast doubters of the official story on Sirhan Sirhan have come up with another possible suspect—a security guard named Thane Eugene Cesar. Cesar was standing right behind RFK with a drawn gun at the time Sirhan was firing. The fatal bullet hit RFK behind his right ear. Mr. Cesar had worked as a bouncer and security guard at the big La Costa Country Club, San Diego, a major Mafia gathering spot. Unfortunately, Mr. Cesar seems to have disappeared.

So far, few of the prime movers in the CIA/Mafia plot have talked. Johnny Roselli and Robert Menue gave limited testimony, in connection with the Glomar explorer affair, that the Hughes organization was "the biggest cover" the CIA ever had, "adding even more frightening scope to the web of alleged corruption." Sam Glancana's assistant Richard Cain was gunned down in 1973. On the night before he was scheduled to appear before Church's investigating committee, Glancana had 6 or 7 reports conflict). 22 rounds pumped into his head and neck, while sitting in his fortress-like home in Chicago. Chicago police thought maybe a pillow was used to muffle the shots, though they knew the .22 is an ideal caliber to use with a silencer. Jack Anderson is suggesting it was done by a jealous girlfriend.

It's hard to swallow that Sam just knew too much about both CIA and the Mafia. As the New York Times suggested, for once life did really imitate art—in this case, had spy novels. Meanwhile we are left with Frank Church's frightening suggestion that the CIA has acted "like a rogue elephant," and has become an uncontrolled corrupt and oppressive institution more at home with the Mafia than the U.S. Constitution.