

The Continuing Inquiry

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THE CIA'S CASTRO PLOTS: HUDKINS, HUNT AND THE DALLAS UNDERWORLD

By J. Gary Shaw and Larry R. Harris

One of the more shocking and ominous revelations concerning activities of the Central Intelligence Agency to come to light in recent years is that in seeking to assassinate Cuban Premier Fidel Castro, the Agency entered into a partnership with organized crime figures. In August, 1960, according to the Church Committee (Interim Report, 11-20-75), the CIA took steps to enlist members of the criminal underworld with gambling syndicate contacts to aid in assassinating Castro; that effort involved contacts and contracts with Mafia chieftans Sam Giancana and John Roselli. A new disclosure by columnist Jack Anderson suggests that the plots against Castro may have been but one phase of a large, ambitious program planned by the Agency in 1960. That year, Anderson reported earlier this month, the CIA wanted to create its own branch of Murder, Inc.-- a killer squad created to assassinate "undesirable" foreign leaders at \$1 million a head (Ft. Worth Star Telegram, 1-4-78). (Editor's Note: We will have more to say on this subject in a future issue).

Other recent disclosures suggest that in seeking to recruit operatives to participate in killing foreign leaders (particularly Castro), the CIA's contacts may have reached the Dallas underworld-- including close associates of Jack Ruby and, possibly, right-wing oil baron H.L. Hunt.

These disclosures appear in a postscript to the recently-released paperback edition of George O'Toole's The Assassination Tapes (Zebra Books). O'Toole, a former CIA technologist, relates new and interesting information about the activities of Alonzo (Lonnie) Hudkins, a name long familiar to students of the John Kennedy assassination. A reporter for the Houston Post in 1963, Hudkins has been the subject of much controversy, particularly in regard to rumors and allegations that accused assassin Lee Harvey Oswald might have been an informer for the Federal Bureau of Investigation. (See the lead article of TCI, Vol. 1, #8).

O'Toole writes of an interview he and writer Ron Rosenbaum had with Hudkins two years ago, in which Hudkins disclosed that in addition to his reportorial duties, he has in the past also dabbled in two other fields: petroleum engineering and assassination plots. (He admitted, too, to being involved in trying to smuggle a large shipment of arms into Cuba shortly before the ill-fated 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion). Hudkins told O'Toole and Rosenbaum that he sometimes worked in engineering positions for oil companies, and that while in the employ of the Dallas-based H.L. Hunt Oil Company, he was recruited as a member of a CIA contract assassination team assigned to kill Castro and Cheddi Jagan of Guiana.

However, like his various explanations for the origin of the Oswald/FBI rumor, Hudkins has told several contradictory versions of his purported involvement in the assassination plots. For example, Hudkins indicated to O'Toole and Rosenbaum that the CIA recruited him while he was employed as an engineer for Hunt Oil. But in 1967 he told Warren Report critic Shirley Martin of Oklahoma that while he was employed as a public relations man for the oil company, Hunt himself personally approached him about going to Mexico to help kill either Castro or Jagan. Then last month in a lengthy telephone interview with Larry Harris, Hudkins said the

plots originated in 1961, before he worked for Hunt-- as the eccentric billionaire's personal assistant and "flunky". We have not been able to verify that Hudkins has worked-- in whatever capacity-- for Hunt or the Hunt Oil Company.*

In discussing the Castro/Jagan plots, Hudkins told Harris there was much he could not disclose. He did say that he was approached about the operation by "one of the hot-shot people from Washington." When asked why the CIA would want his assistance in such an operation, Hudkins replied that he had had friends in the Agency since the 1950s and had "had dealings with them on other things and hadn't blown any whistles." But plans to assassinate the two leaders, he said, never progressed beyond the discussion stage. He and two other individuals recruited for the operation agreed that trying to hit Castro would be too dangerous; they felt it extremely unlikely that they could take Castro's life and escape with their own. As for the attempt against Jagan, Hudkins told O'Toole and Rosenbaum that the White House got cold feet and called off the plans; but he told Harris that the three men simply decided there was no discernible reason or purpose in killing Jagan. He admitted that they certainly would have killed Castro had they been able to devise a safe way to do it-- and that killing the bearded premier would not have bothered Hudkins "one iota". (Presently a newspaperman in Baltimore, Hudkins is an outspoken proponent of the Castro-Did-It theory in the Kennedy assassination; he has frankly admitted promoting the idea of Castro's involvement in order to hinder recent U.S. diplomatic overtures toward Cuba).

Along with Hudkins, two other men supposedly were asked to take part in the plots. In 1967 Hudkins revealed the identity of one of them to Ms. Martin. That man's name is Russell Douglas Matthews, 56, formerly of Dallas and now residing in Las Vegas.

Who is R.D. Matthews? In a December, 1963 FBI report (CD 86, p. 198) he is named as a close associate of Jack Ruby and is referred to as a "strong arm man". Hudkins calls him a "small-time gambler, sort of a soldier of fortune". In 1961 Dallas Police Chief Jesse Curry termed him "an undesirable citizen". His Dallas attorney says that at one time Matthews was "a local godfather" and "probably the closest thing to the Mafia that we've ever seen in this town". Matthews had known Ruby for 12 years prior to the Kennedy assassination. Warren Commission Exhibit 2303 reports that Ruby placed a 13-minute phone call to Matthews' wife three weeks before JFK visited Dallas.** A reliable source who knew Matthews well told Gary Shaw that another Matthews crony and gambling companion was Hudkins' purported one-time employer, the late Mr. Hunt. (Jack Ruby, it will be recalled, visited the Hunt offices on November 21, 1963).

Hudkins explained to Harris why the CIA approached Matthews with the idea of killing Castro: "The reason they wanted him was that he knew Castro. He had fought

* Following the interview with Hudkins, Harris went to the Hunt Oil Company offices and talked with James C. Oberwetter, spokesman for the Estate of H.L. Hunt. As Harris outlined Hudkins' story, Oberwetter questioned him carefully and made notes. He said he did not recall ever hearing Hudkins' name but promised he would check personnel files if Harris would prepare a letter containing a summary of Hudkins' allegations. Harris complied, but in a letter of reply Oberwetter denied that he had ever spoken with Harris about such allegations. Pointing out that Harris in his letter had questioned Hudkins' credibility, the spokesman skirted the issue of Hudkins' story and purported employment by Hunt. "Any comments we would make", he wrote, "could be totally misunderstood" and "we will have nothing to say on the matter". Oberwetter closed his letter by adding, "We are growing very weary of responding to these allegations. Lately we have noticed that most of them are coming from writers and publishers who are trying to sell books and magazines and so we'll have to leave it at that."

** Matthews has said that he was in Acapulco on November 22, 1963. There is an uncorroborated report from a source of perhaps questionable credibility who claims to have been present with both Matthews and Ruby when the President was shot. The source told Gary Shaw and Penn Jones that he and Matthews were playing cards in a downtown Dallas office when Ruby entered and said, "Come on, let's go watch the fireworks." The three men supposedly walked several blocks to Dealey Plaza and observed the motorcade and assassination from the southwest corner of Houston and Commerce streets. After the shots, the source said, Ruby silently walked away south on Houston Street toward the Dallas Morning News Building-- where the Warren Commission (Report, p. 334) placed him at the time of the assassination.

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I know that my retirement will make no difference in its cardinal principles, that it will always fight for progress and reform, never tolerate injustice or corruption. Always fight demagogues of all parties. Never belong to any party. Always oppose privileged classes and public plunderers. Never lack sympathy with the poor. Always remain devoted to the public welfare. Never be satisfied with merely printing news. Always be drastically independent. Never be afraid to attack wrong, whether by predatory plutocracy or predatory poverty.

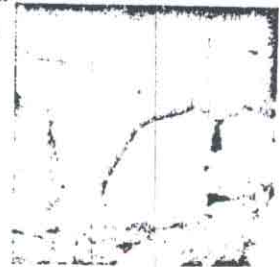
April 10, 1907 Joseph Pulitzer

with Castro down in Cuba and, apparently, under the belief that Castro would set him up with a casino or two there in Havana. And then as soon as Castro got power, Castro closed down all the casinos. So R.D., bitter, folded up his tent and left". Hudkins maintains that Matthews is "an innocent party" in the plots, because he adamantly refused to participate. Matthews, according to Hudkins, is "too nice a person to get caught up in that crap". Our files on Matthews suggest otherwise.

A glance at Matthews' rap sheet shows why Jesse Curry considered the one-time member of the notorious Lois Green Gang "an undesirable citizen". His career in crime dates from at least 1949 and includes arrests for just about everything--including burglary, possession of cocaine, illegal bookmaking and aggravated assault with a motor vehicle. He served two years in Leavenworth for possession of marijuana, and has been questioned frequently by police in robbery, burglary and murder investigations. In 1970 Matthews filed a suit seeking to declare Texas and

Dallas vagrancy laws unconstitutional, and to enjoin local law authorities from arresting him; according to the Dallas Morning News (2-26-70), he was jailed 57 times for vagrancy in 1968 and 1969. The suit was dismissed in 1972 and Matthews moved to Nevada.

Harris conferred with Matthews' attorney, a very prominent Dallas criminal lawyer, to see if Matthews would confirm the Hudkins story. The attorney indicated that his client is a very reticent man who is zealous about his privacy and is "allergic" to reporters or publicity of any kind. Pointing out that Matthews is both impatient and short-tempered, the attorney went on to suggest that it would be wise not to disturb him.*** However, after being told of the nature of Hudkins' allegations, the lawyer agreed to contact Matthews and get his reaction. Subsequently, Matthews said he does not remember or recognize Hudkins' name, and "very emphatically" (the attorney's terminology) denies that anyone ever approached him about assassinating Castro.



R.D. MATTHEWS
with Johnny Ross
in about 1966

Perhaps seeking to dissuade Harris from trying to personally contact Matthews, the attorney related an incident in which his client once snarled at a television cameraman and threatened to kick his teeth in if he filmed Matthews leaving a federal court. That Matthews is not a man to be trifled with is apparent in a story told to Gary Shaw by a one-time Matthews associate. According to the account, Matthews and some friends were in a Dallas lounge listening to a female vocalist. While she was singing Matthews' favorite song, a male patron at a nearby table annoyed Matthews by talking too loudly; he told the man to be quiet. When the man continued to converse in a loud voice, Matthews produced a pistol and fired a shot only inches above the offending patron's head.

Hudkins refused to divulge the identity of the third member of the trio of would-be assassins. He discounted our speculation that it might have been another Dallas underworld figure named George McGann.**** Like his friend Matthews, McGann knew Ruby well and gambled with Hunt, who reportedly owed McGann a substantial sum in gaming debts at the time of the latter's death. Judging by his associates, McGann apparently was more than a small-time mobster. They included Billie Sol Estes (who owned half-interest with McGann in an El Paso pawn shop) and Richard M. Nixon. Following McGann's death-- he died in a gangland slaying in Lubbock in 1970-- a close relative told Gary Shaw of a two-hour meeting between Nixon and McGann in a plush Miami hotel during the 1968 Presidential campaign. One of McGann's less prestigious friends was James Walter Cherry, a convict who was tried for the 1969 shootout in which Dallas Deputy Sheriff Buddy Walthers was killed (See Forgive My Grief IV, pp. 171-72).

Obviously, the idea of the CIA's tentacles reaching down to Dallas-- into Jack Ruby's world-- in search of hired assassins is of great significance. But how reliable is the word of Lonnie Hudkins? Like O'Toole, we are at a loss to know what to make of him. We concur with O'Toole's assessment that while Hudkins' stories cannot be completely accepted, neither can they be totally rejected. We cannot be certain whether discrepancies in his tale derive from a poor memory or from an attempt to mislead or disseminate false information. Perhaps, as O'Toole suggests, the mysterious Mr. Hudkins will tell all he knows-- truthfully-- only under oath. And indeed, any body conducting a legitimate investigation of a President's murder should question Hudkins extensively and with intensity.



GEORGE MCGANN
1959

Many questions arise from what has been related here. What exactly is or was the nature of the relationship between Hudkins and the CIA? Who was the CIA "hot-shot" from Washington who asked him to help assassinate Castro? Or was it really H.L. Hunt who asked him? Does J. Walton Moore of the Dallas CIA have knowledge of the alleged plots? Who was the unidentified third member of the assassination team? Did Jack Ruby or other Ruby associates figure in any way in the alleged plots? Has the CIA ever had any contacts with the Hunt Oil Company? Were any of the persons mentioned in this article in any way, wittingly or unwittingly, a part of the events of November, 1963?

The answers to these and other questions might possibly shed new light on John Kennedy's death-- considering what we know now about the CIA, organized crime, Cuba, Castro and JFK. Both Hudkins and R.D. Matthews should be made to talk about their alleged contacts by the CIA. And in view of what has happened to others the CIA contacted-- Giancana, Roselli, Nicoletti, Bompensiero-- this should be done now....

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**** Hudkins, who claims to have known Matthews "pretty good", told Harris he is certain Matthews never associated with anyone named McGann. However, Gary Shaw has photographs taken on several occasions showing the two men together. In fact, when McGann was married, Matthews was the best man--an honor traditionally accorded the groom's brother.

* * * * *

According to the interpreter, President Carter has carnal desires; previously it was lust in his heart.

His recent refusal to give poor school children a second glass of lunchroom milk, indicates a lack of compassion in his soul.