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Did Mob assassinate JFK?

By JACK ANDERSON with Les Whitten

WASHINGTON — Mafia mobster John Roselli may have taken the secret of the John F. Kennedy assassination with him to his death. He was brutally murdered a few weeks ago, his hacked-up body stuffed into an oil drum and dumped into Miami's Biscayne Bay.



Before he died, Roselli hinted to associates that he knew who had arranged President Kennedy's murder. It was the same conspirators, he suggested, whom he had recruited earlier to kill Cuban Premier Fidel Castro.

By Roselli's cryptic account, Castro learned the identity of the underworld contacts in Havana who had been trying to knock him off. He believed, not altogether without basis, that President Kennedy was behind the plot.

The Cuban leader, as the supreme irony, decided to turn the tables and use the same crowd to arrange Kennedy's assassination, according to Roselli's scenario. To save their skins, the plotters lined up Lee Harvey Oswald to pull the trigger.

Roselli could never be pinned down on names or details. It was also difficult to assess whether he knew what he was talking about or whether he merely described what he thought might have happened. There is no real evidence to support Roselli's story. But there are enough curious circumstances to justify telling it. Here are the fascinating highlights.

The ruggedly handsome Roselli, a flamboyant mobster with underworld contacts in Havana, was recruited by the Central Intelligence Agency in 1960 to assassinate Castro. He had no authority, however, over the underworld elements in Havana.

They were under the loose control of Florida's Mafia chieftan, Santos Trafficante. His gambling enterprises in Havana had been closed down by Castro after the 1959 revolution. In fact, Trafficante had been lodged for a period in a Cuban jail, an indignity that didn't endear Castro to him.

After Trafficante made it back to his Florida haunts, he left part of his organization behind in Havana. Some of his henchmen even managed to develop contacts in Castro's inner circle. These were the people Roselli wanted to use to knock off Castro.

But Roselli didn't have the stature inside the Mafia to make the necessary arrangements with Trafficante. So Roselli called in his patron, the Chicago godfather Sam Momo Giancana, to deal with Trafficante.

As Roselli's associates tell it, he persuaded Giancana that it would be to their advantage to win the good will of the CIA. Convinced, Giancana flew down to Florida to make the preliminary arrangements.

Once Giancana and Trafficante set it up, Roselli used the Havana underworld to plot Castro's demise. At first, they tried to plant poison pills, supplied by the CIA, in Castro's food. The pills would have made it appear that he died of natural causes. When this failed, snipers were dispatched to a Havana rooftop. They were caught.

The word reached Roselli that some of the plotters had been tortured and that Castro had learned about the whole operation. The CIA called off the Roselli operation in March, 1963, but recruited a Castro associate named Rolando Cubela to murder Castro.

In an impromptu, three-hour interview with Associated Press reporter Daniel Harker, Castro indicated that he knew about the attempts on his life and warned the U.S. leaders also might not be safe. That was September 7, 1963.

According to Roselli, Castro enlisted the same underworld elements whom he had caught plotting against him. They supposedly were Cubans from the old Trafficante organization. Working with Cuban intelligence, they allegedly lined up an ex-Marine sharpshooter named Lee Harvey Oswald, who had been active in the pro-Castro movement.

According to Roselli's version, Oswald may have shot Kennedy or may have acted as a decoy while others ambushed him from closer range. When Oswald was picked up, Roselli suggested, the underworld conspirators feared he would crack and disclose information that might lead to them. This almost certainly would have brought a massive U.S. crackdown on the Mafia.

So Jack Ruby was ordered to eliminate Oswald, making it appear as an act of reprisal against the President's killer. At least this is how Roselli explained the tragedy in Dallas.

What a way to go