

Washington Merry-Go-Round

CIA Deliberately Hid Facts on JFK Death

Washington — After President John F. Kennedy was struck down on Nov. 22, 1963, the Central Intelligence Agency received evidence suggesting that Cuban Premier Fidel Castro arranged the assassination in retaliation for attempts on his own life.

Yet sources privy to the secret discussions at the highest levels of the CIA tell us that the CIA deliberately withheld the evidence from the Warren Commission. One reason was a resolve to cover up the ugly secret that the CIA had enlisted Mafia mobsters to kill Castro. But there was also a legitimate concern that the Castro revelations might inflame the American people, who had just lost a beloved President, and precipitate some rash action.

ONLY A FEW key people knew about the CIA plot to assassinate Castro. One was President Kennedy's brother, Robert, who was also President Kennedy's personal watchdog over the CIA. It has now been established that Robert Kennedy was briefed on May 7, 1962, about the use of underworld killers to try to knock off Castro. Two days later, Kennedy cautioned the CIA not to go ahead with the assassination without consulting him. It must be assumed that he was kept advised of the subsequent assassination attempts, but there is no documentary evidence of this.



Jack Anderson with Les Whitten

The anti-Castro plot, was still on Kennedy's mind the following day. Records now available show that he informed then-FBI chief J. Edgar Hoover of the plot on May 10, 1962. Yet neither Kennedy nor Hoover later divulged the information to the Warren Commission.

The late CIA chief Allen Dulles, who approved the original plan, served on the Warren Commission but sat silently throughout its investigation without mentioning the Cuban angle. Within hours after President Kennedy's death, the U.S. Embassy cabled information from Mexico City suggesting that the Cubans may have been behind the assassination. Our sources say that the CIA developed similar information in Washington.

The first person to reach Robert Kennedy's side after the shooting was CIA Director John McCone, who remained alone with Robert at his

McLean, Va., home for nearly three hours. All others, including Robert's priest, were turned away.

McCone swore to us that Castro's name was never mentioned during the three hours. But CIA records show that the next day McCone mentioned Castro to the new President, Lyndon Johnson, and briefed him on the information from Mexico City.

Yet no one brought the Cuban connection to the attention of the Warren Commission. We were the first to get word of the anti-Castro plot to Chief Justice Earl Warren, the commission chairman, four years later.

We are now free to reveal our role in the drama. Two of our confidential sources, CIA agent William Harvey and mobster John Roselli, are dead. A third source, attorney and former FBI Chief Inspector Edward P. Morgan, has waived the confidentiality we had promised him.

Morgan told us in January 1967 about a plot against Castro. He raised the possibility that the plot could have backfired, that Castro may have learned of the plot and retaliated against Kennedy.

Morgan refused to identify his sources. We asked Morgan to repeat the story to our associate, the late Drew Pearson, who was a close personal friend of Earl Warren. Pearson went straight to the Chief Justice with

the story. On Jan. 31, 1967, Warren called in Secret Service chief James Rowley and asked him to investigate. Rowley passed the buck to the FBI. But nothing happened.

WE GOT Morgan's permission, therefore, to write a cautious story. We confirmed the general outlines from a CIA source. Then on March 3, 1967, we wrote that Robert Kennedy "may have approved an assassination plot which then possibly backfired against his late brother."

The next day, according to records now available, Robert Kennedy's secretary called for a copy of the May 7, 1962, memo, which summarized the briefing he had received on the assassination plot.

On March 7, 1967, we reported more details, which stirred President Johnson into demanding a full report from the CIA. Afterward he told intimates he was convinced there had been a Cuban conspiracy to kill President Kennedy. The evidence, however, is still circumstantial.

It was not until January 1971 that we were able to put together the full story of the plot to kill Castro. Then, in a series of three columns, we named the CIA-Mafia plotters and spelled out what they had done. It took another five years before the Senate Intelligence Committee confirmed the facts.