

Cubans Connected to JFK Murder—but Which Cubans?

BY DICK RUSSELL

The Warren Report, with its simplistic conclusions about Lee Harvey Oswald's "inability to enter into meaningful relationships," is about to become obsolete. Before this month is up, the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence will release its own 172-page study of the Kennedy assassination—its last and possibly most damaging chronicle of CIA-FBI wrongdoing, and the first step toward a congressional investigation sometime after the November election. This much is now certain: The motive, one way or the other, goes back to Cuba—either with Fidel Castro, or against him.

In the past few weeks, new information has come out. First a new book called "Betrayal," written by an ex-CIA contract employee named Robert Morrow, who claims the assassination was engineered by a group of right-wing financiers and anti-Castro exiles in retaliation for what they considered Kennedy's sellout at the Bay of Pigs and Cuban Missile Crisis. Then came arguments from the opposite angle—copyrighted articles in the New Republic and Washington Post that made it look as if Castro had better start preparing his defense. From the looks of these, the confusion is only beginning.

If Post writer George Crile's hypotheses are correct, the duplicity surrounding Cuba in the early 1960s was more staggering than ever imagined. Consider "AM LASH," the Cuban the CIA selected to use a poison pen to kill Castro in the fall of 1963. Crile identifies him as Rolando Cubela and makes a strong case for his having been a double agent for Fidel. A more unlikely Castro agent, but one Crile also suspects, was Florida Mob boss Santo Trafficante, Jr. A key figure in the CIA's liaison with the Mob in failed attempts to assassinate Fidel, Trafficante is shown receiving favored treatment from Castro in a Havana jail, working closely with Castro in a lottery racket, and in 1963 announcing to a prominent Miami Cuban that Kennedy was "going to be hit."

The theory goes, if Castro was getting advance inside information on attempts against his life, might he have decided to retaliate? Tad Saul, in the New Republic, reports that Bobby Kennedy actually formed a top-secret intergovernmental committee shortly before his brother was killed to look into the possibility that Castro might organize attempts on the lives of high U.S. government officials. One of the Crile stories closes with a quote from Robert Morgan of North Carolina, a senator on the Select Committee: "There is no doubt in my mind that John F. Kennedy was assassinated by Fidel Castro or someone under his influence in retaliation for our efforts to assassinate him."

But the one man in a good position to know Castro's attitude toward the Kennedys believes the Castro motive simply doesn't make sense. He is William Attwood, former U.S. ambassador

"If Cubans were involved in the Kennedy assassination," says Allwood, "they were anti-Castro cubans."



The second Oswald? This photograph taken from a propaganda film made by anti-Castroites training in Florida is, author Robert Morrow was told by former CIA contacts, a man who later posed as Lee Harvey Oswald.

to Guinea and Kenya, current publisher of Newsday. In the fall of 1963, as a special adviser to America's UN delegation, he undertook secret negotiations to normalize relations with Cuba.

Asked last week what he thought of the Castro's revenge idea, Attwood scoffed: "Well, I think that's ridiculous. It was quite obvious to me that Castro, at that time, wanted to normalize relations with us. He had no interest whatsoever in breaking this off, he wasn't playing any game. I was on the phone at one point to Havana, setting up a possible meeting down in Veracruz to discuss an agenda. In fact, I was supposed to see the president right after Dallas to discuss the kind of questions I'd be asking. Then, if Castro was agreeable, I was to go down very quietly. Not many people were aware of this undertaking."

According to Attwood, by the fall of 1963 U.S. policy toward Cuba was operating on several different tracks. Things had become so diffused that, after Attwood received an olive-branch feeler from Cuba's UN delegate and got approval from the Kennedys to pursue it, Secretary of State Dean Rusk wasn't even informed.

"The State Department had its own policy toward Cuba, which was sort of a frozen, do-nothing policy," Attwood recalled. "The CIA, what was left of the gung-ho types, might well still have been plotting something. But I think the Kennedys saw this as a chance to defuse Cuba as a political issue in 1964. They didn't want to be attacked for having loused up the Bay of Pigs. They could say, 'All right, maybe the Bay of Pigs was a

mistake, but now we have an agreement that Castro will not subvert Latin America and its give compensation for our companies that he'd expropriated; in return for which we lift the blockade and unblock the Cuban assets in America. These were some of the proposals. And things were moving along."

The Kennedy assassination brought a halt to all that. For one thing, Oswald was an apparent Castro sympathizer. For another, says Attwood, "We were entering a political year, and I don't think Johnson really knew what was involved. It sounded too complicated and too risky." Nonetheless, Attwood remembers, Castro did give his okay for negotiations to begin and, according to a French journalist who was with Fidel on the day of Kennedy's death, he was "shocked and dismayed at the news of the assassination."

"I've been to Cuba since and stayed in touch with Cubans here at the UN," Attwood concluded, "so I have every reason to believe if there was any Cuban involvement, it would have been on the part of the anti-Castro Cubans, who might have had reason to be fearful that some kind of normalization was in the works and would have wanted to prevent it. That's the only conclusion I can draw from my own experience."

The rumor is that the forthcoming Senate report will confirm Attwood's suspicions, especially concerning the exile groups that conducted anti-Castro operations in 1963 from Lake Pontchartrain, Louisiana and the Florida Keys. That summer, much against the

CIA's wishes, the Kennedys had cut off their funding. The Coast Guard had been ordered to watch for any new raids directed at Cuban shores; numerous exiles and Minutemen soldier-of-fortune types were arrested. And bitterness against the Kennedys was rife.

If there was anti-Castro involvement, of course, that means a conspiracy on American soil. It also suggests a good reason for a CIA-FBI cover-up, particularly if those agencies had ever made prior use of the conspirators. Most of all, in this bizarre realm of turncoats and double-turncoats, it raises the question of just who might have used—and maybe set up—Lee Harvey Oswald.

In an election year, the Senate is reluctant to take such questions any further. Once the assassination report comes out, the new 15-man intelligence oversight committee says it will wait another six months before deciding how to proceed. Even when it does, the senator who knows the most about the case won't be represented. That is Pennsylvania Republican Richard Schweiker, co-chairman of the assassination subcommittee that spent nine months digging into the maze. Because of the Senate's complicated rules of seniority and a late bid for the at-large first-come, first-served seats, he tried but failed to win a place.

"Unfortunately, the Strom Thurmonds and folks like that were the ones who got their hats in the ring months ago," says a Schweiker staff assistant. "But I don't think there was any plot to keep Schweiker off the new com-

mittee. He intends to stay actively interested."

Schweiker, who feels his hands were tied by the subcommittee's need for secrecy, plans to keep an investigator in the field and go public with additional information after the initial report is released. Meantime, before the rest of the Senate has a chance to act, the House may take the ball away from them. For months, retiring Virginia Democrat Tom Downing has been battling for a full congressional inquiry into Kennedy's murder. He got as far as an all-day session of the House Rules Committee on March 31, where a vote to wait and see what's in the Senate report tied 7 to 7 and a move for indefinite postponement carried 9 to 6. Since then, Downing has met privately at least once with House leaders Carl Albert and Tip O'Neill. And O'Neill, the overwhelming favorite to replace the retiring Albert as the new Speaker, is reportedly ready to see action on Downing's resolution.

"Our main talking point," says Downing staff assistant Rick Feeney, "is that we have individuals who would be willing to go under oath right away. Not in six months but in two or three weeks."

Downing's age is 47-year-old Baltimore electronics consultant Robert Morrow, who was once arrested in a CIA counterfeiting scheme and who claims in his semi-fictional autobiography "Betrayal" that he's closer than anyone to cracking the case.

"For more than a decade," Morrow writes in his introduction, "handcuffed by the secrecy agreement required of everyone directly or indirectly on the payroll of the Central Intelligence Agency, I lived with what I knew. . . . This book is based upon my experiences, on events related to me at the time and subsequently by close associates, and on evidence available in public testimony. . . . some dialogue has been improvised and certain events reconstructed."

There is little doubt, according to Washington sources, that Morrow did indeed work Cuban affairs for the CIA during the early 1960s. That, at least, makes him the first ex-CIA employee to speak out publicly on this subject. He says he will tell far more, far less cryptically, to a congressional hearing—and Downing is inclined to believe him.

The problem with "Betrayal" (published by Henry Regnery) is sorting out the improvisations and reconstructions from what Morrow really knew. Where he uses real names, the parties concerned are dead. Where he cannot remember specifics of dates and scenes, he invents them. And his scenario for the assassination itself, as he readily admits, is nothing more than an imaginative hypothesis.

But if only some of Morrow's firsthand knowledge is accurate, he has dropped a bombshell. His initial recruitment by the CIA, he says, grew out of his confidential relationship with a Cuban exile

leader named Mario Garcia Kohly. Until the fall of 1963, Morrow claims to have maintained fairly regular contact with former CIA Deputy Director Charles Cabell and case officer "Ed Kendrick," who bears a strong resemblance to E. Howard Hunt's onetime boss of covert operations Tracy Barnes. Cabell and "Kendricks," according to Morrow, were the overseers of his main CIA project during those years—a scheme to manufacture and then flood the Cuban economy with \$50 million in coun-

terfeit pesos

Here, in chronological order, are Morrow's most startling revelations:

●As an engineering specialist in jamming and coding techniques, Morrow recounts his selection for a top-secret mission during the Bay of Pigs invasion. Given the code name Robert Porter, he says he was flown into Cuba's Camaguey Mountains to try to discover the source of some unusual pulse transmissions that the CIA suspected might be a signal system

for ballistic missiles. His alleged pilot was David Ferrie, who died mysteriously in 1967 when New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison was about to indict him for conspiracy in the Kennedy assassination.

●The CIA, says Morrow, actually stepped up the Bay of Pigs invasion date without Kennedy's okay. Infuriated, Kennedy then demanded all data gathered about possible ballistic missiles turned over to his brother at the Justice Department. Not

only did the CIA conclude that the Soviet Union was operating a control center in the Camaguey Mountains, Morrow continues, it also obtained photos smuggled out by the anti-Castro underground of missile launching sites under construction. But the Kennedys chose to do nothing at that time.

●On a mission to Europe, Morrow says the CIA arranged for him to make a clandestine \$240,000 arms purchase for Mario Kohly's Cuban underground. The deal was consummated through a Dallas

man named "Jake," who Morrow says was Jack Ruby, and a front called Permindex. That front was handled out of New Orleans by CIA consultant Clay Shaw, who later accused and ultimately acquitted in Garrison's trial. Morrow says he was taken to the weapons warehouse in Athens by David Ferrie.

●During that same trip, Morrow says the CIA had him pick up an envelope in Paris from an American just returned from an extend-

Continued on page 27

June 21, 1976

JFK Murder

Continued from page 25

ed tour of the Soviet Union. The envelope, he was told, was "the information" wanted from "Harvey," and had been secreted out of Minsk. A year later, Morrow asserts he was told by Cabell and "Kendricks" that "Harvey" was a CIA agent who had gone to Russia posing as a defector to participate in an internal security operation: make contact with the niece of a KGB colonel and arrange to get her out of Russia as a precondition for her uncle's defection to the West.

●After the Cuban Missile Crisis, Morrow claims he was informed by "Kendricks" of CIA reports that the missiles had not been removed but taken to hidden sites

deep in the Cuban interior. Elements of the CIA believed that Kennedy and Khrushchev had reached a quid-pro-quo agreement about missiles in Cuba and Turkey. This, Morrow speculates, was Kennedy's betrayal—and his death warrant.

●By mid-October 1962, the CIA was worried about losing control of one of its anti-Castro groups operating out of New Orleans. Cabell, who was no longer deputy director but still kept vigil over numerous covert activities, reportedly wanted Morrow to find out how closely some of its own contract employees—including Cuban leader Mario Kohly—were connected to a paramilitary training camp established at Lake Pontchartrain by Clay Shaw.

●Morrow says he was informed at that same meeting that one of the leaders connected with Shaw's group—"Jake," or Jack Ruby—was running Chinese cocaine out of Cuba under CIA auspices, in exchange for running guns into Mario Kohly's underground. "Harvey," who had returned from Russia with the KGB colonel's niece when he came to feel he was under suspicion, had been assigned by the CIA to report from the Dallas-New Orleans area on Ruby's activities. "Harvey," or Oswald, had also been hired for similar purposes by the FBI.

●Early in 1963, Morrow writes, he was asked by "Kendricks" to obtain several 7.35-caliber Mannlicher-Carcano rifles for delivery to Shaw's group in New Orleans, supposedly for an assassination attempt against the leftist leader of the Dominican Republic, Juan Bosch. Three of these rifles were picked up by David Ferrie by private airplane; Morrow kept a

fourth, and today it rests in a gun cabinet in his Baltimore home. The others, Morrow believes, were used against John Kennedy.

●The last straw for the New Orleans conspirators, according to Morrow, was probably the arrest in early October 1963 of Mario Kohly, himself, and two others involved in the CIA's counterfeit peso scheme. The Kennedys, Morrow says, had ordered the Secret Service to make the arrests and so bust up the CIA's last best hope at undermining Castro's Cuba.

That's about as far as Morrow claims any firsthand information. He goes on to speculate about how Oswald was used, the existence of an Oswald look-alike in the Lake Pontchartrain camp, and the roles of Ruby, Shaw, Ferrie, and others. Even what he says he was told staggers the imagination and, in most instances, there is simply no way to back it up. He points to a vast conspiracy similar to the dis-

credited Garrison case, and an equally vast cover-up by the Kennedys themselves around the Cuban missile situation.

Still, no matter how incredible it seems, the Morrow book cannot be dismissed out of hand. Consider, for example, that the CIA's newly released assassination files mention, for the first time, that Oswald's rifle might have been a 7.35 caliber Mannlicher — Carcano. There is also this declassified document dated December 4, 1963: "Source on (deleted) said he saw (deleted). (Deleted) reported SOVCONGEN told him 30 November that Oswald sent to USSR and married Soviet girl under CIA instructions." By the time those files were released, Morrow's book had long since gone into gal-leys.

The counterfeit peso story and Morrow's arrest are also documented in newspaper files and court records. Washington attorney Bernard Fensterwald, Jr., re-

calls investigating the incident in 1966 and concluding that the arrests were "a frame by the U.S. government," just as Morrow maintains.

Morrow has told Congress that he's now prepared to turn over the bulk of Mario Kohly's private files, once the investigation begins. Kohly, who once had 115 exile groups under his United Organizations to Liberate Cuba, was the CIA's most favored leader during that period. And his files, bequeathed to Morrow upon Kohly's death in 1975 at age 76, could prove a fountain of important new information.

These days it is instructive to recall the quaint conclusion of the Warren Commission's own Gerald Ford: "The strong evidence [is] that Lee Oswald's mind turned to murder whenever he wanted to impress Marina. . . . " It's taken 12 years to move from couch to conspiracy—and the new report may be only the beginning. □