

Mr. Bob Woodward
Washington Post
1150 15 St., NW
Washington, D.C. 20071

9/26/88

Dear Bob,

The enclosed UPI story from the Indianapolis Star says that George Bush's friend Felix Rodriguez harbored a convicted terrorist and that Bush declined to deny it when asked. Not exactly what Bush has been saying about terrorism.

When I phoned Friday and you were busy I also wanted to let you know that, in a sense, Wright's comments on the CIA's provocation of the Nandaimo disturbances was unfair. Your name then appeared on a Nicaragua story. The immediate provocation was in part by Ambassador Melton. Because of the strange circumstances it appeared only in our local papers whose managing editor was then in Managua. It appears that those at the embassy were not aware that he was not one of the non-Congressional Congressional delegation. It was sent not by the Congress but by the White House and from the embassy people he quoted they were about weekly - and so far as I know, unreported. The embassy press office said they all see the same people, opposition businessmen, the cardinal and La Prensa.

This managing editor, Mike Powell, wrote a long story after the expulsions in part because he is in the picture the Nicaraguan's used on Nightline. Sorry, not quite this way. He wrote the long story first and then, after Nightline, a long oped piece in which, among other things, he said his only purpose in making the trip was to write a story about Beverly Byron. He edits the only dailies in the county in which she lives. He also said he knew nothing and had no experience in foreign affairs.

This is the weekend delegation (left Friday, returned Sunday) that was present for and participated in the Nandaimo demonstration. There were four pro-Contra Members, with some of their staffs, and two from State. The latter made it clear that it was a White House rather than a Congressional function. This delegation and I presume all the many others went by military plane. The other expenses of this delegation were met by the National Forum Foundation.

The day they got to Managua Melton told them, "we're here to overthrow their government." If you are aware of the significance of an official statement, which is of enormous significance under international law and an official admission that is the exact opposite of the administration's statements of purpose, don't get excited because the Post won't carry it. I'm writing only to inform you. As soon as I saw this astounding story I phoned your foreign desk, spoke to someone there and then was referred to Goshko, who didn't even want a copy of it when I offered it to him. After this story of the next day reported Melton's lies to the Congress I sent a copy to Ben Bradlee, who didn't like whatever I said in a letter. I've forgotten what I said. (I know the significance of an official statement of policy not only from my days in intelligence and in State during and after World War II but from countless CIA statements and some of the FBI in my FOIA litigation.)

The part of the story of that delegation that makes it unfair to dump it all on the CIA is how and why some of this delegation was at and were photographed seeming to participate in that demonstration. When their attendance was proposed everyone in any kind of official position said, in one way or another, that was impossible. Cong. Byron, who'd been there many times, was quite explicit in predicting everything that happened beginning with their presence, and before they left she was expressed apprehension over the visible change in Nicaraguan official attitude toward them. Melton overrode her, the State people with the delegation and his own staff and said their going was just "fine."

Not only did he tell them they could go, he provided three marked and ^{readily} readily identified embassy vehicles to take them and to be seen at the demonstration, as they were. The two women "embers did not go to Nandaime.

Powell claims that the gesturing the Nicaraguans interpret as participation in the demonstration was merely their signalling to each other.

Powell does not report that the government started the violence, which was alleged here before his story appeared four days later.

With about 50 such delegations in 1987 alone a ^{lot} hell of a lot of money is involved and apparently a hell of a lot of use of military aviation, with those costs coming from military appropriations. I'm surprised not to have seen any of this reported anywhere before Powell's piece. Once upon a time that alone would have been considered news.

Powell's first piece began on the front pages of both papers and continued on two inside pages. It makes for bulky copying but if you should want a copy I'll make and send it.

On another matter that may or may not interest the Post, there is an awful lot of stuff being prepared for the 25th anniversary of the JFK assassination. I've heard of some and some of those preparing specials for TV have been in touch with me. Some of it is awful crap, disinformation and exploitation. As George Gardner can tell you, I've never been a conspiracy theorist and disagree with all who are.

Two I've helped (in the belief that FOIA makes me surrogate for the people and I thus make all I got under it available to anyone) are big on the nonsense that the mafia did it. At least one additional book will allege this. One, and this is not personal knowledge, is going for the fabrications of David Lifton's book titled "Best Evidence." He alleges a massive government conspiracy to kill JFK.

So, if Shales or anyone else is interested, I'm usually home all day after early morning physical therapy.

Sincerely,

Harold

Harold Weisberg

Iran-Contra figure hid man wanted in plane bombing

By BRIAN BARGER
UNITED PRESS INTERNATIONAL

Washington — A key figure in the Iran-Contra scandal with close ties to Vice President George Bush has acknowledged harboring a fugitive charged in the 1976 bombing of a Cuban passenger plane in which 73 people died.

Felix Rodriguez, whose contacts with George Bush initially drew the vice president into the Iran-Contra affair, said in a series of recent interviews that he harbored the bombing suspect, Luis Posada Carriles, shortly after his August 1985 escape from a Venezuelan prison.

Offering the first details of his involvement with Posada, Rodriguez said he agreed to hide the fugitive at the request of a wealthy Miami benefactor who he said financed Posada's prison escape. He would not identify the financier.

Senate investigators are pursuing allegations that Posada's prison escape was financed in part by Jorge Mas, with possible help from then-White House aide Oliver North. Mas, who heads the Cuban-American National Foundation, an anti-Castro lobby group, denied any role in the escape.

Rodriguez, a former CIA operative, offered refuge to Posada while managing a secret White House operation based in El Salvador to ferry weapons to the Nicaraguan rebels. The weapons airlift was directed by North during a U.S. ban on rebel military aid.

Despite Bush's friendship with Rodriguez, White House officials acknowledged that Bush took no action after numerous media reports in late 1986 identified Posada as a logistics aide

for Rodriguez in the weapons airlift.

Bush was CIA director in 1976 when the bombing occurred, and took a personal interest in this and a string of related anti-Castro bombings that shook the hemisphere that year, according to law enforcement officials.

Donald Gregg, Bush's national security adviser, said, "I don't think the vice president knew that Posada was working with Felix (Rodriguez), so why would he call for an investigation?"

When Posada's role came to light in late 1986, Gregg said Bush "didn't pay much attention" to the press reports and made no inquiries after reporters questioned him about the fugitive's links to Rodriguez.

"If he (Bush) had asked about it, he would have asked me," said Gregg, who was Rodriguez's CIA supervisor during the Vietnam War. "I don't know about when the allegations on Posada came out, and I did not focus on it."

Bush declined to answer a series of written questions about the affair submitted to his press office last week.

Rodriguez's disclosure could raise a potentially embarrassing issue for Bush during his presidential campaign. As head of the president's Task Force on Combatting Terrorism, Bush has trumpeted a tough stand on pursuing and punishing international terrorists.

Rodriguez, a strong supporter of the vice president, said he was never asked about the fugitive by Bush or his aides. "If they had asked, I would have told them," Rodriguez said, "but nobody asked."

With assistance from Gregg.
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Rodriguez was placed in El Salvador as a counterinsurgency adviser to the Salvador military in 1984. Less than a year later, North recruited him to manage the secret Contra airlift that was financed in part with profits diverted from secret arms sales to Iran.

But Rodriguez said he never told Bush or his aides about hiring the terrorist suspect in the sensitive covert operation, and did not advise Bush aides of his work for North until shortly before the Iran-Contra scandal broke.

Posada's link to the operation first came to light after a cargo plane carrying American Eugene Hasenfus was downed Oct. 5, 1986, in Nicaragua. Hasenfus

identified a photograph of Posada as Rodriguez's aide, who used the pseudonym Ramon Medina.

As the scandal unfolded, attention turned to Bush's office, where an aide fielded the first call from Rodriguez to advise that one of North's planes was shot down.

Bush aides acknowledge that Rodriguez was in regular contact with the vice president's office, and met with Bush on three occasions while managing North's airlift operation. But Bush and his aides maintain they were kept in the dark about North's Contra resupply efforts during the 1984-1986 congressional ban on U.S. aid.

Posada, a former CIA demolitions expert, was imprisoned for nine years during a lengthy and complicated trial process stemming from charges of planning the Oct. 6, 1976, bombing of a Cuban passenger plane in which 73 people, including the Cuban

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national fencing team, were killed.

On August 18, 1985, Posada escaped from Venezuela's San Juan de Los Morros prison, and fled to El Salvador. Rodriguez denied any direct involvement in Posada's prison escape, but said he helped arrange Posada's arrival at El Salvador's Ilopango air force base, where he gave him a job.

"I got a call from an old friend in Miami who has helped me financially, who wanted me to hide him," Rodriguez said. "I felt I had no choice. The man who called was a very old and dear friend, and he has helped pay my expenses since I have been in Central America. I felt I could not turn him down."

Rodriguez refused to identify the caller, but when pressed he acknowledged it was the same person who financed Posada's prison escape.

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Bush ally harbored plane-bomb suspect

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benefactor who he said financed Posada's prison escape. He would not identify the financier.

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Turn to IRAN-CONTRA / 15A

Bush ally harbored terrorist

IRAN-CONTRA / from 1A

The weapons airlift was directed by North during a U.S. ban on military aid to the contras.

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telling itself Coordination of United Revolutionary Organizations.

CORU has been implicated in a string of bombings and assassinations in the United States and Latin America, including the Sept. 21, 1976, car bombing that killed Chilean exile leader Orlando Letelier in Washington.

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Rodriguez also refused to answer questions about his benefactor posed by Sen. John Kerry, D-Mass., last month during a Senate Foreign Relations terrorism subcommittee hearing.