

## Plotters Against Trujillo Doubt CIA Involvement in the Assassination of Dictator

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# Plotters Against Tru

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SANTO DOMINGO, Dominican Republic, June 20—Near the edge of the sparkling sea here, at the spot on the Avenida George Washington where Rafael Leonidas Trujillo Molina was shot down 14 years ago, there is a simple bronze plaque that says "Glory to the liberating act of May 30."

Ever since that night in 1961, when seven heavily armed men stopped the dictator's Chevrolet and riddled it with bullets, the assassination—like most political events in the Caribbean—has been shadowed by intrigue. Last week's reports from Washington that the Central Intelligence Agency provided "material support" to the gunmen merely deepened the speculation.

For those who see the hand of the United States at every turning in the Dominican Republic's history—a point of view frequently warranted by events—the reports corroborated what has been rumored and written about here for 14 years. Even in the days immediately after General Trujillo's death, an American pilot and food importer known as Wimpy had to flee the country after he was identified in print as the C.I.A. conduit for arms for the assassins.

On the official level, however, the reports of C.I.A. involvement are regarded as an attempt to dilute a patriotic act done by Dominicans for their country's benefit. Some, imbued with the deep cynicism with which most nongovernment people look at politics here, even detect an ex post facto attempt by the American agency to claim credit for someone else's success.

### Need for Help Denied

"This [report about the C.I.A.] is a cowboy picture without any basis in reality," said Brig. Gen. Antonio Imbert Barreras, the only one of the seven gunmen who survived the post-Trujillo reign of torture and murder. "The men who participated in that historic act did not need help. We had our own arms, we had our own cars, we had our own reasons. My friend, I challenge anybody to find the aid of any foreign organization in what we did."

"We were living in a situation in this country where nobody trusted anybody," the general went on. "In our group we were convinced that Trujillo



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Generalissimo Trujillo

was supported by the United States. It would have been madness for us to talk with Americans about our plans. I guarantee to you that the seven men who went to the Avenida George Washington that night had talked to no strangers—no Russians, no Chinese, no Americans, no nobody."

In addition to the "action group" of which General Imbert was a part, there was a loosely constituted "political group" that was supposed to seize power after the dictator's death but failed dismally in the attempt. Of that group, there is also only one survivor—Luis Amiama Tió, a rich businessman who lives in luxurious seclusion here.

Mr. Amiama Tió, who like General Imbert has the honorary title and perquisites of brigadier general but rarely uses them, has denied repeatedly that there was C.I.A. involvement in the plot. However, he declined to be interviewed about the specifics of the case.

"It's an old story now," he said through a nephew. "What use would it be to go over it again?"

Others who could be found who had a peripheral relation to the plot—either because they were friends or relatives of the participants or because the plotters went to them for refuge after the assassination—also said they knew of no American involvement.

### 'Devil' With Limitations

"I was only a student at the time, but as far as I could see there was no outside in-

fluence," said Freddy de Jesús Tavárez Liz, who was one of 68 men and women indicted for conspiracy after the shooting. "My part was small, but it seemed to me a completely Dominican movement."

"There were some who could have been in contact with an individual agent," said Juan Alberto Rincón Jaquez, a law professor whose brother-in-law was a plotter. "It is possible, but I don't know for a fact that it happened. As in all these things, there is a temptation to make the C.I.A. a more powerful devil than it is."

Public acts of the State Department indicated that United States policy in the last 18 months of General Trujillo's regime was directed toward his removal, though not necessarily by assassination. The dictator was constantly embroiled in plots against other Latin American countries and had become a hindrance to the United States effort to isolate the new Castro Government in Cuba.

It is also known from the accounts of diplomats that the American Embassy, and presumably the C.I.A., maintained contacts with the underground that sought to depose the dictator. In April, 1960, for example, a leader of the Dominican underground who had been in hiding was secretly taken out of the country on a United States Navy ship and later testified before the House Foreign Affairs Committee in favor of General Trujillo's removal.

For most of the corrupt and repressive 31-year reign of General Trujillo, who liked to be known as "The Benefactor," the United States lent its support through military aid and training, visits by such dignitaries as Vice President Nixon in 1955, preferential quotas for Dominican sugar and other marks of favor. The general was widely praised, as Latin America's leading anti-Communist and was considered a point of stability in the Caribbean.

Around 1956, however, American attitudes began to change. Much of the shift was due to the ascent of Col. Johnny Abbes García, a violently anti-American anti-clerical thug who became the head of the secret police. The colonel, the most bloodthirsty of a notoriously bloodthirsty crew surrounding the dictator, became the principal confidant of General Trujillo, who was then in his mid-60's and whose behavior was increasingly erratic.

In July, 1957, there was suspicion that General Trujillo and Colonel Abbes were the plotters of the assassination of President Carlos Castillo Armas of Guatemala, who had been in-

stalled after a C.I.A.-sponsored coup three years before.

In 1960, the dictator financed an assassination attempt by high explosive against his old enemy, President Rómulo Betancourt of Venezuela, in which the President was wounded and an aide killed.

As a result, in August, 1960, member nations of the Organization of American States, including the United States, broke off diplomatic relations with the Trujillo regime and imposed economic sanctions. From then until 1962, when the remnants of the regime were expelled with United States help, the United States was represented here by a consul-general or chargé d'affaires.

General Trujillo's response was hostile. He and Colonel Abbes engineered a detente with the Castro Government, attempted to establish relations with the Soviet Union, legalized the Dominican Communist party, threatened activist Roman Catholic Bishops, and used Tass as the source of news for his radio stations. The dictator's propaganda machine churned out material about nationalizing "bourgeois gringo" businesses.

Juan Bosch, a former president of the republic who now heads a Marxist party here, wrote in an article in 1969 that there was an American plot against General Trujillo in the last months of the Eisenhower Administration. He said that a retired United States Army colonel named Reed rented an apartment overlooking the Presidential box at the race-track here and had a rifle with a telescopic sight.

Mr. Bosch said in an interview that the plan had failed, "for some reason." He said he had learned of it from a Dominican who worked for the supposed colonel but could not give the man's name. Efforts to trace a "Colonel Reed" here were unavailing.

### U. S. Embarrassment Seen

Mr. Bosch said, however, that he doubted that the C.I.A. was directly involved in the plot including General Imbert that eventually succeeded. "That group didn't need any help in getting arms or anything," he said, "but they may have heard of the Reed plan and then things just kept going."

The former President also pointed out that it would have been extremely embarrassing if an American sponsored plot were discovered, particularly in view of the sanctions against Trujillo for the Betancourt attempt and the furor over the



Bay of Pigs landing in April, 1961.

"It would have been a disaster for Kennedy if Trujillo had found proof of a United States plan to kill him," Mr. Bosch said. "And it would have been easy to find such proof. The Secret Police were very efficient."

At the end of 1960, there was no shortage of plotters. General Trujillo's police had discovered plots against the dictator's life in 1955 and 1959, and it is believed that there were others in formation. There was also an organized underground of probably 1,000 people—unconnected with the Imbert group—that had sponsored two disastrous invasions from Cuba.

The men in General Imbert's group began meeting at the end of 1960. The general said that there was only one liaison—Antonio de La Maza—between the political group and the action group and that the groups operated independently of one another. He said he did not even meet Mr. Amiama Tió until long after the assassination.

The action group was composed of men of influential families, and all bore a personal grudge against General Trujillo. General Imbert's brother was serving a 30-year jail term imposed by the dictator. Mr. de la Maza's brother had been murdered by General Trujillo's police. Another participant,

Luis Salvador Estrella Sahdala, had a father in jail. The fiancée of Amado García Guerrero, a young army lieutenant, had been forced to become one of General Trujillo's many mistresses.

The men used three cars for the ambush, each the property of one of the plotters. There were reports at the time that the cars had been especially modified to be able to go 125 miles an hour. General Imbert said this was not true. Since they were all big American cars, their top speed was probably close to 125 anyway.

The car that actually opened fire on the dictator's Chevrolet, which contained only the general and an armed driver, was driven by General Imbert. Mr. de la Maza, Mr. Estrella and Lieutenant García were with him.

General Imbert had a .45-caliber Colt Commander pistol, Mr. Estrella a 9-millimeter pistol, Mr. de la Maza a sawed-off Remington 12-gauge shotgun, and Lieutenant García an M-1 carbine. General Imbert said he and Mr. Estrella had government permits for their pistols, that Mr. de la Maza, a former army captain, had a permit for the shotgun for use in hunting, and that the lieutenant had used his service weapon.

Other weapons recovered by the police from the other cars included a San Cristóbal carbine made in General Trujillo's armory, another M-1 carbine,

another Remington shotgun, another Colt .45 pistol and a Luger. General Imbert said that all of the weapons were the property of the plotters or had been obtained by those who were army officers.

General Imbert said that in the Dominican Republic then, as now, there were strict controls of firearms but that it was very easy to buy them from contraband dealers. "We did not need Americans to bring us weapons," he said.

As far as could be learned, the investigators of the assassination made no public statement about the provenance of the guns. The principal investigators were Colonel Abbes, Col. Arturo Espaillat, the head of General Trujillo's intelligence service, and Gen. Rafael Leonidas Trujillo Jr., known as Ramfis, the dictator's son. All are now believed dead.

#### The Story of 'Wimpy'

Colonel Abbes disappeared in Haiti in the late nineteen-sixties. It is believed that he and his family were killed by the Duvalier regime there. Colonel Espaillat died in exile in the United States, and Ramfis was killed in an automobile crash in Europe.

The man persistently identified as the American source of the weapons is Lorenzo D. Berry, pilot and entrepreneur. He arrived in the Dominican Republic as a pilot for Dominicana Airlines and began a sideline of selling frozen imported

meat. The business prospered and in 1958 he opened a combination grocery store and bar here known as Wimpy's, after his nickname.

Mr. Berry and his Dominican wife, Florida, now live in South Miami and operate an import-export business. He comes here on business about once a month.

In an interview this week at his home, Mr. Berry denied any participation in the plot. "I couldn't possibly get involved in it," he said. "It was too risky." He said, however, that he knew some of the plotters as customers at his store. "I knew them either by face or name," he said.

General Imbert is also puzzled by the reports of C.I.A. involvement. He lives in a suburb here in an elegant house surrounded by gardens and tropical trees in bloom. Children from a nearby slum come to fill their water buckets at his garden hose.

Several attempts have been made to kill him since the assassination. A squad of soldiers is always on patrol at two guardposts at the entrance and exit of his driveway.

"I don't understand where all these fantastic histories come from," General Imbert said. "Perhaps if we had used an atomic bomb or a submarine or a helicopter one could understand it. But all we had were our pistols and our brains."