

Merry-Go-Round

CIA Linked in Plots To Kill Cuba's Castro



— Jack Anderson

THE FULL STORY of the six attempts on the life of Cuba's Fidel Castro, which we have learned from sources whose credentials are beyond question, reads like the script of a James Bond movie.

To set up the assassination, the Central Intelligence Agency enlisted Robert Maheu, a former FBI agent with shadowy contacts, who had handled other undercover assignments for the CIA out of his Washington public relations office. He later moved to Las Vegas to head up billionaire Howard Hughes's Nevada operations.

Maheu recruited John Roselli, a ruggedly handsome gambler, to arrange the assassination. The dapper Roselli was formerly married to movie actress June Lang.

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THE CIA assigned two of its most trusted operatives, William Harvey and James "Big Jim" O'Connell, to the hush-hush murder mission. Using phony names, they accompanied Roselli on trips to Miami to line up the assassination teams.

For the first try, the CIA furnished Roselli with special poison capsules to slip into Castro's food. The poison was supposed to take three days to act. By the time Castro died, his system would throw off all traces of the poison, so he would appear to be the victim of a natural if mysterious ailment.

Roselli arranged with a Cuban related to one of Castro's chefs, to plant the deadly pellets in the dictator's food. On March 13, 1961, Roselli delivered the capsules to his contact in Miami Beach.

A couple weeks later, just about the right time for the plot to have been carried out, a report out of Havana said Castro was ill. But he recovered before the Bay of Pigs invasion on April 17, 1961.

The Cuban who had sneaked the poison to Havana was never seen again. The CIA, unsure whether the plotters had failed, or the poison simply hadn't been strong enough, decided to try again with a more powerful dose. Roselli arranged for triple-strength capsules to be slipped into Castro's food several weeks after the Bay of Pigs. But once again, the plot failed and the conspirators disappeared.

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FOUR MORE attempts were made on Castro's life, using Cuban assassination teams equipped with high-powered rifles, explosives and two-way radios. Roselli personally delivered the teams in twin powerboats to the Cuban shores.

The assassination teams never got a shot at Castro, although the last group reached a rooftop within range. No doubt most of the infiltrators were picked up.

Roselli, Harvey, O'Connell and company had taken precautions, however, to make sure not even the Cuban recruits knew the CIA was behind the plot. The weapons and other equipment were of foreign make, mostly Belgian, to prevent any link to the U.S.

All the equipment, including the two powerboats, were purchased out of Roselli's own pocket. The CIA paid only the expenses of its two agents Harvey and O'Connell.

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