

WXPPost JUL 8 1973

Hunt's Book Says He Urged CIA to Kill Castro in 1960

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Watergate conspirator E. Howard Hunt Jr., in a book being prepared for publication, later this year, says that he proposed in 1960 that the CIA assassinate Cuban Premier Fidel Castro as part of a plan to put anti-Castro exiles in control of the Cuban government.

Hunt, a former CIA agent, says that the recommendation went to his superiors, Richard Bissell, chief of the CIA's Clandestine Services, and Bissell's first assistant, Tracy Barnes, and was apparently rejected.

"As the months wore on," Hunt writes, "I was to ask Barnes repeatedly about action on my principal recommendation only to be told it was 'in the hands of a special group.' So far as I have been able to determine no coherent plan was ever developed within CIA to assassinate Castro, though it was the heart's desire of many exile groups."

A copy of galley proofs of Hunt's book was obtained by The Washington Post. The book deals with the CIA planning with Cuban exiles for an invasion of Cuba—planning which resulted in the April, 1961, Bay of Pigs amphibious landing in which Castro's troops routed the invaders.

In his book, Hunt lauds the CIA and Cuban exiles' role in the affair, but angrily blames then President John F. Kennedy and the Joint Chief of Staff for failing to provide the necessary air support which he believes could have brought victory to the invaders.

Hunt, who has written several spy thrillers under pseudonyms, fills this latest tale with incidents and anecdotes that seem akin to the Watergate affair: a briefcase filled with \$115,000 in cash; a bungle—a CIA agent loses a briefcase crammed with classified documents and cables; "safe houses;" clandestine meetings; false names.

Although Hunt says at one point in the book, "I have no politics," his writing provides an insight into his strong anticommunism and



E. HOWARD HUNT

... ultimate spy thriller

his distrust and suspicion of U.S. and Cuban liberals, as well as his fear that some of his fellow CIA agents were "soft on communism."

In the book, Hunt says that:

- He had worked for Barnes as chief of political action in the 1955 CIA project that overthrew Col. Jacobo Arenz in Guatemala. The "Cuban project," for which Hunt also served as political action chief, was modeled after the successful effort in Guatemala, Hunt says.

- He and Barnes met with then White House aide Arthur Schlesinger Jr., and then U.N. ambassador Adlai E. Stevenson in the White House in early 1961. Hunt says the Cuban operation was discussed with Schlesinger at that time. He says Stevenson entered while they were meeting and asked Barnes: "Everything going well, Tracy?" This indicated to Hunt that Stevenson was aware of the Cuban plans in advance, Hunt says.

- Bernard Barker and Frank Sturgis, later charged as co-conspirators with Hunt and four others in the Watergate affair, played roles in anti-Castro activity before the Bay of Pigs operation.

- Richard M. Nixon, in 1960 as vice president, was the Cuban invasion project's action officer within the White House and that, according to Nixon's military aide, Brig. Gen. Robert Cushman, "Nixon wanted nothing to go wrong."

Nixon was defeated by Kennedy in the 1960 presidential race, a fact Hunt laments, saying: "Unfortunately, when I was later to need (him) . . . Nixon . . . had been supplanted by a new administration."

Hunt, in his account, portrays Barker as a loyal sidekick, calling him "eager, efficient and completely dedicated . . . and overall his help was invaluable." Hunt identifies Barker only as "Bernie" in the text, but identifies him by his true name in a footnote.

Prior to working on the Cuban project, Hunt said, Barker had infiltrated the Havana police for the CIA and later helped many refugees escape from Castro's Cuba.

Sturgis, identified by his alias "Frank Fiorini," served as copilot on a plane that dropped anti-Castro leaflets on Havana in late 1959, Hunt says.

Hunt portrays bickering among various political factions among the refugees and concern among some of the Cuban exiles that they were being "used" by the U.S. The operation, Hunt says, was planned entirely by the CIA and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Training was assisted by the Green Berets. As Hunt says:

"To paraphrase a homily: this was too important to be left to Cuban generals."

Hunt tells of receiving a brief case containing \$115,000 in cash from "the same finance officer with whom I had worked during the Guatemalan operation" and passing it on to a treasurer for the exile group.

Fearful that "the next time . . . I could be hijacked with little trouble," Hunt arranged to have all future payments "arranged through a series of foreign banks."

Hunt's fellow CIA agent, identified only as Sam, wasn't as lucky in avoiding disaster, Hunt says. In a passage that sounds like it could come from one of Hunt's fiction spy thrillers, Hunt tells of meeting with a CIA security officer who "uneasily . . . told me that Sam had lost a briefcase

filled with classified documents and cables . . ."

"In addition to the possible compromise of CIA codes, the security officer said, other missing papers gave the identities of agents in Cuba and the names of CIA personnel around the hemisphere," Hunt writes.

The matter was resolved, Hunt writes, "by firing Sam and making a general assumption — after the lapse of a month— that sneak thieves, rather than Castro agents, had stolen the briefcase and destroyed its contents when nothing of value was found."

A few days later, Hunt says, Sam called and berated Hunt "for not having stood up for him." Hunt, in turn, berated him. When Sam complains that the CIA "treated me pretty rough," Hunt responds, in his best James Bondian style. "Not as rough as Castro treats our boys when he catches them."

Throughout his dealings with the Cuban exiles, Hunt says he tried to play it straight with them. The only times he lied to them, he says, were "on direct orders." Even then, he says, ". . . each time I've lied I've felt shabby about it."

Hunt says in the foreword that his book was written in 1967 and was intended "as a private legacy to my children, perhaps eventually to be lodged in a university library."

However, Hunt says, the Watergate affair changed all that and he has decided to go public with the work. He states:

"In 1972 . . . my name was blazoned across the country in connection with the Watergate affair, and government sources revealed to the press the fact that I had been a CIA official. Moreover, these same sources provided the press with distorted accounts of my involvement in the Bay of Pigs operation.

"This unilateral action by the government relieved me of the obligation to maintain further secrecy concerning CIA connection and the true role that I and others played in the Cuba Project . . ."

*In all editions of Who's Who In America, 1962-63 to 1972-73 (not listed, 1958-59, 1960-61) Hunt gives his position as "polit. officer Far East Command, 1954-56", with the addition "Tokyo, Japan" in the 1972-73 edition.