

Hunt's Assassination Plot

By Maxine Cheshire

A new book on the career of convicted Watergate conspirator E. Howard Hunt claims that he was assigned by the CIA in 1964 to coordinate a second Bay of Pigs invasion attempt that included a plot to assassinate Fidel Castro.

The book, "Compulsive Spy," by former New York Times correspondent Tad Szulc, is expected to touch off a controversy among intelligence experts when it is published next month by Viking press.

Szulc concedes that many former associates of Hunt's in the CIA dispute his involvement in such a mission.

According to Szulc, an expert on Caribbean politics and the original Bay of Pigs, the proposed invasion was directed under the code name "Second Naval Guerrilla."

Camps were established in Nicaragua and Costa Rica to train some 700 exiled Cubans.

"The plot was aborted," Szulc writes, "When civil war broke out in the Dominican Republic in May 1965 and the Johnson administration did not consider it timely to mount another Caribbean operation after U.S. forces had invaded Santo Domingo."

Hunt's role, according to Szulc, was to coordinate the assassination of Castro. Hunt has admitted in his own memoirs that he was recommending Castro's elimination as early as 1960.

Szulc's CIA sources suggest that Hunt worked with Rolando Cubela, a former major in Castro's army who was arrested in 1966 by the Cuban secret police and sentenced to life imprisonment for his role.

If Szulc's informants are correct, Hunt was not the only Watergate figure to be involved in the second invasion plans. According to Szulc, both James W. McCord Jr. and Bernard Barker also played minor roles.

Szulc talked with former CIA colleagues of Hunt's here and abroad to piece together previously unpublished details of his career as a spy and political operative.

According to "reliable information" which came to Szulc, federal investigators have reason to believe that Hunt may have had more than one copy of the files that were taken from his safe in 1972 and later burned by acting FBI Director L. Patrick Gray III.

His informants, Szulc writes, "suggest that Hunt turned one set of documents over to a friend for safe keeping." The person is identified only as "someone who lives in Washington's Virginia suburbs, possibly in Arlington or Alexandria."

The book, based on a profile which originally appeared in The New York Times Sunday Magazine, contains some intriguing new data on Hunt.

Apparently, hundred dollar bills were always a part of his modus operandi. Long before Watergate, he would show up for a regular Monday night poker game in Washington with a roll of crisp new bank notes of that denomination in his pocket.

Also, he always seems to have had a penchant for ludicrous disguises. He turned up in Paris in 1968 on what he told CIA colleagues was a "super-secret mission," wearing a stringy beard which one agent said "reached almost to his belly button."