

Tying up loose end in Dallas

By Peter Dale Scott

As the record of the CIA's involvement in assassination unravels, the tracks so far uncovered curiously parallel those uncovered by independent investigations into the Dallas assassins, Ruby and Oswald. In both, there is the same intertwining of personnel — from intelligence, from organized crime, from the anti-Castro Cuban community. Speculation over possible links between these two tracks also focuses on a third area — the Watergate burglary and the anti-Castro intrigues of the burglars.

As one revelation follows another, the spotlight today centers on the figure of Robert Maheu, one-time chief lieutenant of the Howard Hughes empire, and now named as a CIA go-between with crime figures in plots to assassinate Fidel Castro.

Maheu, who recently declined on Fifth Amendment grounds to testify before a congressional committee investigating CIA activities, actually helped trigger the first major leak — back in 1971 — that the CIA may have been involved in attempts to assassinate Castro. On January 18, 1971, columnist Jack Anderson wrote that the CIA had used Maheu as a go-between to contact organized crime figure John Roselli in a series of plots — between 1961 and 1963 — to assassinate the Cuban leader. But Anderson went even further than that. In his column,

he raised what he called "an ugly question that high officials would rather keep buried: Could this plot against Castro have backfired against President Kennedy?"

The Watergate Committee kept this ugly question buried. It reprinted the Jack Anderson column not from the Washington Post, but from the Miami Herald — which had edited the question out altogether.

But behind the scenes, the Anderson column sparked a flurry of investigative memos inside the White House. One, from former New York policeman Jack Caulfield to John Dean, reported that "Maheu's covert activities . . . with CIA . . . might well shake loose Republican skeletons from the closet." Caulfield later conceded to the Watergate committee staff that this memo referred to "the subject matter of the Jack Anderson column."

The Anderson column appeared as the climax of a chain of sensational events — little noted at the time — beginning in late December, 1970, with the firing of Robert Maheu from the Hughes organization. Immediately thereafter, Maheu deposited documents about his former activities in the safe of Las Vegas publisher Hank Greenspun, a friend of both Maheu and — interestingly — Jack Anderson. It was some of these documents which were leaked to Anderson

and inspired his January 18 column.

In reconstructing these events, one finds the first hint of intertwining between the Maheu-CIA anti-Castro plots and the people centered around the later Watergate burglary.

With Maheu out, Robert Bennett — a Republican — quickly acquired the lucrative Hughes public

relations account, displacing Maheu's friend, Democratic National Chairman Larry O'Brien. Bennett assumed for Hughes what he called "that portion of Maheu's responsibility dealing with government affairs."

Bennett, meanwhile, had already taken over the Mullen private lobbying firm in Washington which had periodically worked for the CIA. The firm, according to author Philip Agee, maintained a branch in Mexico City as a CIA cover, and is identified in a CIA memo revealed in Watergate hearings as having done work for the CIA against Castro. Among its employees at the time was ex-CIA member E. Howard Hunt, the Watergate burglar who admitted in his memoirs that he had proposed in 1960 the assassination of Castro.

Even before the January 18 Anderson revelations, the White House — through John Dean — had been keeping close tabs on Maheu as well as developments

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in the Hughes empire. On January 25, 1971, according to a Dean memo reported in the Watergate hearings, Dean recommended Bennett to Haldeman as a source of information about Hughes, Maheu and Maheu's "long time friend" Larry O'Brien.

Soon afterwards, Bennett and Hunt began the intelligence operations against Democratic candidates for the White House that were ultimately to lead to the Watergate burglary.

On February 4, 1972, according to the Senate Watergate report, Hunt's partner G. Gordon Liddy was authorized by Attorney General John Mitchell, Dean and Jeb McGruder to investigate the possibility of burglarizing Hank Greenspun's safe. Just one day earlier, the *New York Times*, quoting Maheu on the

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existence of hundreds of Hughes' memos, had added that the biggest collection of them were in the Greenspun safe. Some of these memos may have dealt with Hughes' contributions to Nixon and his brother, but the Hughes organization had also been involved in CIA activities against many countries, including Cuba.

In his first taped statement ordering the Watergate coverup on June 23, 1972, President Nixon himself showed how upset he was by the CIA-Cuba connection. "Hunt," Nixon said, "knows too much . . . if it gets out . . . the Cuba thing . . . It would make the CIA look bad . . . It is likely to blow the whole Bay of Pigs thing which we think would be very unfortunate . . . both for the CIA and for the country."

The Cuban tracks that now figure so prominently in the Maheu-Bennett-Hunt nexus also appear in the tracks leading from the Dallas assassination.

Contrary to the Warren Commission, neither Lee Harvey Oswald nor Jack Ruby were erratic loners. Oswald had strong links to the world of intelligence, and Ruby had strong links to the world of organized crime. Both men had a demonstrated interest in Cuba.

In New Orleans, Oswald distributed pro-Castro literature stamped with the local address of the anti-Castro revolutionary council which had been set up

for the CIA by E. Howard Hunt. An extensive CIA file on Oswald was maintained under a false name — Lee Henry Oswald — and the CIA actually distributed a false description and photographs of Lee Henry Oswald shortly before the Dallas assassination.

Ruby was named in pre-Dallas assassination FBI files as the pay-off connection between Dallas police and a large narcotics set-up linking Mexico, Texas and the east coast. In August and September, 1959, Ruby twice visited Cuba as the guest of a friend whom he admittedly idolized, Lewis J. McWillie, a Havana casino operator identified in FBI files as "gambler and murderer." McWillie worked in Havana for Norman Rothman, a major Chicago crime suspect who two months earlier had been arrested with some of the top narcotics operators of North America. One New York newspaper, the *Daily News*, has reported that the CIA initially contacted Rothman for its Castro assassination plot, and Rothman in turn contacted Maheu's friend John Roselli.

A May 1975 *New York Times* article by Nicholas Horrock stated that FBI memos in the Justice Department confirmed that the CIA was in touch with Roselli and the recently slain Sam Giancana in a plot to assassinate Castro. Horrock also quoted former Justice Department official William Hundley as denying that the CIA had moved in 1966 to protect Giancana, then in jail for refusing to talk to a federal grand jury investigating alleged organized crime payoffs to him by Chicago politicians. Hundley himself assumed responsibility for the release of Giancana.

Horrock, according to congressional inquiry into CIA Watergate involvement, was the journalist contacted by Robert Bennett in 1973 to write a story in *Newsweek* blaming Hunt's conspiratorial activities on Charles Colson instead of the CIA. The article, Judge Gerhard Gesell stated for the record in the Erlichman-Colson trial in Los Angeles, "is attributable to the CIA."

Hundley himself, after he quit the Justice Department, was the founder of Intertel, the private intelligence agency working for Hughes that fired Maheu, hired Bennett and assumed management over Hughes' operations in Las Vegas. Bennett, Hunt and Intertel worked closely together in several highly sensitive projects, such as the discrediting of Dita Beard's sensational ITT memorandum. According to Senator Howard Baker's minority report on CIA involvement in Watergate, the CIA had an interest in at least one of these Bennett-Hunt-Intertel projects. "CIA records would indicate," the report reads, "that agency consideration was given to utilizing Mullen's (Bennett's) Hughes relationship to garner information on Robert Maheu."

Hunt himself shared that interest. In his Watergate testimony, Hunt said that a primary target for the Watergate break-in was information belonging to Maheu's friend Larry O'Brien. And Frank Sturgis, another of the Watergate burglars, has since told a magazine reporter that they were looking for a document relating to anti-Castro activities.

Sturgis, an anti-Castro operator in Cuba as well as Watergate burglar — also appears in the tracks leading from the Dallas assassins.

In the aftermath of the Kennedy assassination, Sturgis — alias Frank Fiorini — appears as one of the first sources for the false story that Oswald was a Castro agent. The story was promptly corroborated by two Cubans who had worked in 1963 on a plot to assassinate Castro, a plot which Tad Szulc, in his biography of Hunt, claims Hunt masterminded. Sturgis himself was one of six Americans publicly warned by the Kennedy Administration in September, 1963, against anti-Castro activities.

The Anderson column, which we now know was sparked by those explosive events in the Hughes empire, helped in turn to spark a chain of events in the White House that led eventually to Watergate. Nixon's own reference to the "Cuba thing" in his first taped statement ordering the Watergate cover-up further corroborates this. Indeed, the unravellings so far, revealing the intertwining of Watergate burglars and CIA plots, suggest that it may well have been the anti-Castro CIA intrigues of the Watergate burglars that most worried Nixon.

The next step in the unravellings should be to raise again that "ugly question" first posed six years ago by Anderson: that the tracks somehow leading from the anti-Castro Cuban nexus point also to Dallas.

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