

HOWARD HUNT: APRIL 1960

In April 1960 HOWARD HUNT established the Cuban Democratic Revolutionary Front or Cuban Revolutionary Front or FRDin Mexico City. The formation of the Cuban Revolutionary Front was announced there on June 22, 1960. HUNT found the Mexican political climate unfavorable for the establishment of a permanent Cuban government-in-exile. The location of the Cuban Revolutionary Front was changed to the United States. The proclaimed purpose of the Cuban Revolutionary Front was to install a democratic government in Cuba through military force recruited mostly from the Cuban exile community in Miami. The Cuban Revolutionary Front leadership excluded Batista-connected exiles, but the organization of Rolando Masferrer existed on its periphery.

HUNT AGAIN RECOMMENDS CASTRO'S ASSASSINATION

In late April 1960 HUNT flew to Madrid to debrief a Cuban Military Attache, then flew to Cuba. What he saw in Cuba so appalled him that he vowed to "rid Cuba of Castro and his henchmen regardless of personal cost and effort." He wrote that he recommended to the CIA to "assassinate Castro before of coincident with a Cuban invasion (a job for Cuban patriots). Barnes and Bissell read my report, pondered the recommendations and said that it would weigh in the final planning. (As the months wore on I was to ask Barnes repeatedly about the 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 hearts desire of many exile groups." On February 6, 1976, Richard Bissell prepared a statement in which he denied having received a written recommendation of this nature: "I do not recall any communication, written or oral, with HUNT regarding assassination. However, I do not dispute Mr. HUNT'S testimony that I received such a communication. In particular, I do not recall telling HUNT or anyone else that planning for the assassination of Castro was 'in the hands of a special group.' I can only speculate that I would have been referring to the operation of Sheffield Edwards and Jim O'Connell to develop a means of assassinating Castro. I do not believe that any such remark would have referred to the Special Group of the National Security Council." [NARA SSCIA 157-10007-10021 prepared by Frederick D. Baron 2.10.76] HUNT told the SSCIA: "I would like to dilate a bit on that because it never occurred to me that the Agency did not have an assassination capability. This perhaps was as a result of my earlier contact with Colonel Pash or what I heard about him, and that is another reason why I indicated in my written report that this was a job for Cuban patriots. In other words, I was making a clear distinction. I was saying to Mr. Bissell, I don't feel this is something that one of our people ought to do because there are plenty of people who are available on the outside. And then if I can just go off a bit to what happened with that. I asked Mr. Bissell at a later time if any action was being taken on my recommendation, and particularly on my first recommendation, the assassination recommendation. And he told me, he said 'That's in the hands either of a group or the group.' And at this distance in time I simply can't tell what it was he said. But my understanding was at that point contemporaneously that the matter was being looked into and taken care of and indeed, following some of the testimony that I've since read as a result of the Church Committee hearings, it's my understanding that the matter was in hand long before I made my survey trip to Havana. Of course that brings me to the problem now of knowing whether Bissell meant the special group [a subunit of the NSC]." HUNT denied having personally plotted against Fidel Castro during the remainder of his testimony.

THE DEATH PLOTS AGAINST CASTRO

JAMES O'CONNELL AND TONY VARONA

William Harvey's established an assassination group within the CIA. Peter Wright stated in 1961 William Harvey told him: "We're developing a new capability [assassination] in the company to handle these kinds of problems." The HSCA interviewed James O'Connell about William Harvey's assassination group. James O'Connell, a former FBI Agent, started as a CIA Operational Support Branch Chief. He then served as the Chief of Station of a domestic field office and became Division Chief of Headquarters Operational Support between 1960 and 1962. In 1962 he was transferred to the Far East, and became Chief Regional Security Officer there. Upon returning to the United States, he assumed the title of Deputy Director for Physical, Technical and Overseas Security of the Office of Security. He retired in June 1973. James O'Connell contacted John Rosselli about Tony Varona. In 1993 the CIA revealed that "When Juan Orta was not successful in carrying out the mission against Fidel Castro, TRAFFICANTE suggested Tony Varona be used. John Rosselli contacted Tony Varona. Tony Varona was to use assets of his own to carry out the mission." HUNT told the SSCIA he served as a paymaster to Tony Varona, but was unaware of Tony Varona's role in an assassination plot against Fidel Castro. Artime told the SSCIA the same.

JOHN ROSSELLI

John Rosselli, born in Italy on July 4, 1905, entered the United States illegally at age six. John Rosselli joined the Capone Mob in Chicago, where he worked for Sam Giancana. When James O'Connell met with Rosselli he first "called Mr. Cregar per our agreement with the FBI." [CIA D-000678]

James O'Connell was asked by the HSCA: "Directing your attention to 1960, did there come a time when you, in your official CIA capacity, became involved in an operation to assassinate Castro?" James O'Connell answered, "Yes, he had." The CIA assassination effort to which James O'Connell referred was supervised by William Harvey. The HSCA asked James O'Connell if he were involved in Phase Two of this assassination plan, which took place about the time of the Bay of Pigs invasion. James O'Connell answered: "Very generally as I remember it, and again I'm calling upon my memory here. And I'm not sure, I remember Giancana meeting one of the members of the Cuban Junta, an individual by the name of Varona. Now whether that was before the Bay of Pigs or after the Bay of Pigs, I'm at a total loss to tell you. That, I think, was part of the Second Phase." [HSCA V5 p251]

ANALYSIS

James O'Connell was referring to the Cuban Revolutionary Front when he said "Cuban Junta." The HSCA Report stated: "At the time of his introduction into the CIA-organized crime plots, Tony Varona was active in the Cuban Revolutionary Front and the Cuban Revolutionary Council. Adding to the support for the Cuban exile leader were the promotional efforts of Dino and Eddie Cellini...In his HSCA testimony Tony Varona described a meeting with an anti-Castro Cuban and Meyer Lansky in Meyer Lansky's home in Miami in the Summer of 1960." Tony Varona: "Mr. Lansky offered us to conducted (sic) a campaign in the U.S. favoring the Cuban movement and against Castro. At the beginning I accepted his offer. When I met with HUNT afterwards, he told me to discontinue the contacts with this man. And that was it; it ended. I did not ask Mr. HUNT how he knew of my contact with Mr. Lansky."

James O'Connell added that either TRAFFICANTE or Sam Giancana introduced him to Tony Varona, who was given a poison pill to use against Castro. [HSCA Ev. & Imp. CIA Spon. Ass. Con. Against Castro p171]

ROBERT MAHEU

Robert Aime Maheu was part of William Harvey's assassination effort aimed at Fidel Castro. Robert Maheu [SF #111 540; born October 30, 1917, Waterville, Maine] had been employed as a FBI S.A. from 1940 to 1947. Upon resigning from the Bureau, Maheu formed a private enterprise doing business as "Dairy Dream Products." The venture culminated in bankruptcy in 1952. In 1952 he became Security Director of the Small Business Administration. In February 1954, he was forced to resign from the Small Business Administration because of political reasons, determined to be the result of his backing the wrong political party in the election. He then set up his own investigative organization known as Robert A. Maheu Associates. Prior to 1954 the CIA component NE/NS had an interest in Maheu.

MAHEU 1954

In 1954 Maheu received a Cover Security Approval from Central Cover Staff. Maheu was recruited by the Office of Security of the CIA to perform certain operational support activities: "He was initially recruited by the Office of Security in 1954 and granted a Provisional Operational Approval on August 30, 1954. He performed many sensitive Office of Security assignments and also accepted assignments from elements of the Deputy Director for Plans.

5. Some of these assignments included the following :

A. (Deleted)

B. Johnny Rosselli. The use of a member of the Mafia in an attempt to assassinate Fidel Castro, initiated in August 1960. (See attached Tab 2---taken from 'Family Jewels' memorandum dated May 16, 1973) C. Cover. Various Clandestine Service officers met with Mr. Maheu over the years from March 1954 to 1970 to determine the feasibility of using his firm for (deleted) purposes. (deleted) (See attached Tab 3 - Director of Security Memorandum to Director / Counter-Intelligence January 20, 1971.)

6. No contact had been made with Mr. Maheu since the termination of the above (deleted) arrangement." [CIA Eyes Only Memo 10.4.73] In 1954 Robert Maheu received \$500 a month from the OS.

9. September 23, 1958. Maheu and O'Connell, Security, met with (Deleted) in New York City (Hampshire House). Agreed, if cooperative, would brief him regarding Agency interest and objective of Project to get maximum effort from him. He responded enthusiastically and offered his complete service and facilities to set up a secure cover mechanism. He suggested that (Deleted) be told of general Government interest (not CIA) at the outset due to her sharp perceptiveness which may cause her to speculate at later date.