

CIA-Mafia Link Confirmed

By Robert L. Jackson
Los Angeles Times

A former chief of clandestine services for the Central Intelligence Agency said yesterday he personally approved CIA cooperation with Mafia figures who wanted to assassinate Cuban Premier Fidel Castro in 1960.

Richard M. Bissell, the ex-CIA official, said in an interview that he also believed the late Allen W. Dulles, then director of the CIA, received regular reports on the Mafia connection.

Bissell's statements marked the first time a former member of the CIA hierarchy had acknowledged responsibility for the unusual cooperation in the early 1960s between the underworld and U.S. intelligence planners.

Lawrence R. Houston, former CIA general counsel, told reporters last week that he first learned about the CIA-Mafia links in April, 1962, from the late Col. Sheffield Edwards, then the agency's director of security.

Houston said he never authorized these arrangements and insisted that he and Edwards immediately briefed Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy about the contacts. Houston said he doubted Edwards had acted alone in arranging the contacts.

Bissell said arrangements with the Mafia were handled by Edwards' office through Robert A. Maheau.

Maheau, a former top aide to industrialist Howard Hughes, gave his first closed-door testimony to Senate CIA investigators yesterday after being granted immunity from prosecution earlier this month. Maheau has said he will meet with reporters today if he completes his testimony.

Bissell said Edwards had arranged the highly secret cooperation with underworld figures Sam Giancana and Johnny Rosselli, but that Bissell—outranking Edwards—also approved it.

Bissell said the Mafia work was not under his personal direction, however.

"In everything related to this matter, I believe Edwards reported directly to Dulles—with my knowledge and concurrence," Bissell said.

Bissell said these arrangements began in the waning months of the Eisenhower administration as plans were also being made for Cuban expatriates to invade their homeland. These plans ended in the disastrous Bay of Pigs invasion in April, 1961, in the early days of the Kennedy administration.

Rosselli has reportedly told Senate investigators that he helped plan or direct about six attempts on Castro's life in the early 1960s.

Bissell, when asked how cooperation with the Mafia arose, said: "I think the history is very uncertain as to whose original idea it was."

Giancana or other Mafia members might have suggested it themselves, he said, because "they did have very large interests in Cuba that were totally eclipsed or destroyed by Castro."

"I believe the record shows that they worked without pay (for the CIA) for the most part," he said.

Other government sources have said the Mafia wanted to remove Castro from power to reopen lucrative gambling operations in Havana that Castro had closed down.

Bissell, a top planner of the Bay of Pigs invasion, left the CIA in February, 1961, during a Kennedy administration shakeup of the agency. He said he did not know how long the Mafia work continued, although others have said Rosselli's anti-Castro plans continued until 1963.

It was learned that Bissell has told Senate investigators he knew assassination plans would be made when he approved the Mafia cooperation, but doubted the Mafia could ever execute such plans.

He said he had "no clear recollection or hard evidence" that the White House or Attorney General Kennedy knew about any assassination plans.

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CIA 4.01 ASSASSINATION

orig mafia

CIA 1.03 Bissell
Richard

CIA 6.03 Houston,
Lawrence

CIA 1.04 Edwards
Sheffield

MAHEAU,
Robert