How U.S. Made Unholy Alliance With the Mafia

SECRETS OF THE CIA

When Fidel Castro threw the American gangsters out of Cuba, they vowed to return—over his dead body.

Their determination to get rid of Castro was shared by many high-placed American officials and this common quest eventually led to an unholy alliance between the CIA and the mob, a strange story of CIA agents and mobsters plotting together against Castro was pieced together from conversations with police, federal agents, agents and underworld sources.

Meyer Lansky, the crime syndicate's affable genius, and Santo Trafficante, the boss of the Florida and casino-outfitting Cuba immediately after Fidel's exit from their benefactor, dictator Fulgencio Batista. The overlords of gambling casinos remained on the move, nervously waiting for the axe to fall.

"I was in touch with all the casino operators and players in Havana," said Frank Sturgis, who was Castro's emissary during this period. "Fidel wanted me to close all the casinos for days. The owners got the hint, they knew he was preparing to shut them down permanently. He didn't kill them, but they were very, very mad. Those casinos were worth $100 million a year to the American crime syndicate. Every portentous mob boss in the United States had points (percentages) in the Cuban casinos. Each point was worth $100,000 to $500,000.

"Lansky and Trafficante were the two men in Cuban gambling. Lansky, the direct business dealings with Batsia; Trafficante had several casinos, including the Sans Souci."

Sousi partners

His Sans Souci partners included Carmen Rothman of Miami Beach and a notorious Mannarino, who was also a thief in Pittsburgh. Rothman and the Mannarinos ed to stop the Castro steamroller in May by smuggling a plane load of arms—stolen from a National Guard armory in Ohio—to anti-Castro forces in Cuba.

According to police and federal sources, Rothman was high up in the Cuban crime syndicate and shared the profits with Batista's brother-law, Gen. Robert Fernandez Mirande.

Rothman returned to Florida soon after the Castro coup and, with hisawan partners, bought the Biltmore hotel in Miami Beach, the sources said.

The CIA's most elegant suite, on the top floor overlooking the ocean, was vacated ready for Batista, but he chose the cooler climes of the Dominican Republic, Portugal and Madeira.

Sturgis was on friendly terms with several gambling racketeers, including Hyman Levine, a Lansky mobster who ran Havana's Comodore Casino. One evening, during a casual conversation, Levine observed that it "would be worth $5 million to the syndicate to get rid of Castro. Sturgis didn't rise to this bait and Levine changed the subject.

It popped up again a few weeks later when Castro was in New York during a whirlwind tour of North and South America.

Fidel and his entourage stayed at the Statler-Hilton, where Sturgis registered under his real name, Cuban military rank, Capt. Frank Fiorini.

Frank was in his room one evening when he received a phone call from a Cuban agent in duty in the lobby as part of a heavy security detail. No visitors were allowed on the Castro floor without special permission.

"There's a guy here to see you," the caller reported. "He says he's your uncle."

"Send him up," Frank replied.

The short, pot-bellied man who arrived a few minutes later looked more like a grandfater than an uncle. Frank recognized him as a member of the Havana gambling mob. Coming straight to the point, the hood offered Frank $500,000 to kill Castro.

"I'm not for hire," Frank said, ending the conversation.

When he returned to Havana a few days later, he reported the offer to his CIA contacts at the American Embassy.

Sturgis had no further contact with the gangsters who approached him. In New York, but someone in the intelligence hierarchy decided that the CIA and the syndicate should join forces against Castro. The go-between picked for this project reportedly was Norman Rothman.

"Rothman was in touch with several CIA agents, a former agent told The New York Times, that they had many concerns concerning assassination plots against Castro."

Rothman, in turn, discussed the matter with his peers. Among those who took part in these secret parleys, reliable sources said, were Santo Trafficante of Tampa; Sam Mannarino of Pittsburgh; Savaturo (Sally Burns); and Charles (Charlie the Blay) Touma, both of New York, andmAIA

CIA v Cuba
Sturgis, Frank
Rothman Norman
Roselli, John
CIA v Sturgis
Assassination

Money from CIA

The CIA was to supply money, weapons and transportation. Roselli flew to Miami in March, 1961 and held secret conferences with CIA agents and Trafficante on the Castro project.

Roselli volunteered to accompany CIA-financed missions to Cuba, the federal sources said. One of these expeditions reportedly landed an execution squad that attempted but failed to kill Castro. On another occasion, the crew of Roselli's launch fought a running gun fight with a Cuban patrol boat.

Columnist Jack Anderson reported that CIA agents gave Roselli some poison capsules which he passed along to a showgirl, Rodney Hughes, to be delivered to Castro's chef. The chef was to put the poison in Castro's food. The sources interviewed by the News confirmed that at least one attempt was made to poison Castro.

An American who was active in the anti-Castro underground in Cuba at the time said, "enough poison to kill 10 people" was dumped in a glass of mailed Havana Hilton in 1961.

"Castro ordered a chocolate milk every afternoon and the same glass was always brought to his room," he said.

"When the waiter came in with the poisoned milk, he was 'shaking so hard that I almost dropped the tray,'" said Castro, "What's wrong with you, kid?"

John (Don) Vega
Granillo
Cuba
Sturgis, Frank
Rothman Norman
Roselli, John
CIA v Cuba
CIA v Sturgis
Assassination

continues