

HIGHLY SENSITIVE ACTIVITIES

Project ZRRIFLE

Early in the Kennedy administration, "the White House" urged Richard Bissell to create an Executive Action capability; i.e., a general stand-by capability to carry out assassinations. The Executive Action program came to be known as ZRRIFLE. Its principal asset was an agent, QJWIN, who had been recruited earlier by [redacted] for use in a special operation in the Congo (the assassination of Patrice Lumumba) to be run by Justin O'Donnell. O'Donnell made a survey of the scene, decided he wanted no part in an assassination attempt, and asked to be released, which Bissell granted.

The project name, ZRRIFLE, first appears in the files in May 1961, although the first recorded approval is dated 19 February 1962. The new DD/P (Helms) on that date authorized William Harvey, by memorandum, to handle the project on a special basis. Accounting for expenditures was to be by general category and on Harvey's certification.

ZRRIFLE was not exercised in the Congo, because Lumumba was removed from the scene by other parties. It did, however, find application against Fidel Castro in a conspiracy to assassinate or to incapacitate him that was already under way under other auspices.

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EYES ONLY

After Bill Harvey left Task Force W and was winding up his headquarters responsibilities in ~~preparation~~ preparation for assignment to Rome, he wrote a memorandum to the Chief, FI Staff, dated 27 June 1963, stating that the original justification for employing QJWIN no longer existed and raising the question of QJWIN's termination. The records show that QJWIN was terminated by the Luxembourg Station on 21 April 1964. There is no indication in the file that the Executive Action ~~Capability~~ Capability of ZRRIFLE/QJWIN was ever used.

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EYES ONLY

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EYES ONLY

Fidel Castro

During the period beginning about March 1960 and extending through June 1965, the Agency engaged in a series of schemes to bring about the death or incapacitation of Fidel Castro. These are those of which this office is aware. ✓

Miscellaneous Schemes Prior to August 1960

A scheme was discussed involving contamination of the air of the radio studio where Castro broadcast his speeches with an aerosol spray of a chemical that produces reactions similar to those of ESD. Nothing came of the idea, because the chemical could not be relied upon to be effective. ✓

A full box of Castro's favorite brand of cigars was impregnated with botulinum. The scheme was abandoned, because there was no way of assuring that only Castro would smoke them. ✓

A third scheme was related to a trip Castro planned to make out of Cuba. Thallium salts, a chemical used by women as a depilatory, were to be dusted into his shoes, thus causing his symbolic beard to fall out. Castro did not make the planned trip. ✓

Gambling Syndicate - Phase 1

The Director of Security gives a reasonably full account of this episode in his contribution. In brief, the Agency ~~was to~~ used US criminal elements that controlled the gambling casinos in Cuba in an attempt to assassinate Castro. He was to be poisoned by tablets of botulinum placed in his food or drink. ✓

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EYES ONLY

The Agency contacted the criminal elements through Robert Maheu, then a cleared contact of the Office of Security and later (for a time) a prominent figure in the entourage of Howard Hughes. The Mafia members known to have been involved in the operation were John Roselli (involved with Willie Bioff in an attempted shakedown of the movie industry), Sam Giancana (reportedly Capone's successor in Chicago), and Santos Trafficante (the kingpin of Cuban gambling). Those inside Cuba who were to administer the poison reportedly got cold feet. This phase ended with the failure of the Bay of Pigs operation. Drew Pearson knew many of the details.

Gambling Syndicate - Phase 2

The gambling syndicate operation remained dormant until November 1961 when Bissell instructed William Harvey to take charge of it. Harvey was busy on other things at the time and was unable to give it any attention until February 1962. After Harvey took over the Castro operation, he ran it as one aspect of ZRRIFLE; however, he personally handled the Castro operation and did not use any of the assets being developed in ZRRIFLE.

Harvey and James O'Connell, the Office of Security case officer for Phase 1, met Roselli in New York City in April 1962. O'Connell remained in the operation for a brief period while the transfer to Harvey was being accomplished.

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EYES ONLY

Phase 2 again involved the administration of botulinum, but the Cuban gambling element was eliminated because the casinos had been closed by then. Roselli worked instead through Tony Varona, a Cuban exile leader who had become disenchanted by his prior dealings with the Agency. In return for his cooperation, Varona requested about \$5,000 worth of arms, ammunition, and related equipment, which were given to him. He claimed that he had dispatched a team to Cuba with the pills in June 1962. Nothing happened. ~~IN SEPTEMBER 1962 VARONA REPORTED THAT HE HAD SENT A TEAM TO CUBA WITH THE PILLS IN JUNE 1962. NOTHING HAPPENED.~~ Varona reported in September 1962 that he was ready to send in another team of three men to penetrate Castro's bodyguard. They never actually left. Harvey gave Roselli \$2,700 in December 1962 for passing to Varona for the expenses of the three militia men. Harvey and Roselli agreed in January 1963 that the operation was hopeless and called it off.

Schemes in Early 1963

At about the time of the Donovan-Castro negotiations for the release of the Bay of Pigs prisoners a plan was devised to have Donovan present a contaminated skin diving suit to Castro as a gift. This scheme progressed to the point of actually buying a diving suit and readying it for delivery. The technique involved dusting the inside of the suit with a fungus that would produce a disabling and chronic skin disease (Madura foot) and contaminating the breathing apparatus with tubercle bacilli. The plan was

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abandoned because it was overtaken by events: Donovan had already given Castro a skin diving suit on his own initiative.

Desmond FitzGerald originated a scheme for doing ~~him~~ away with Castro by means of an explosives-rigged sea shell. The idea was to take an unusually spectacular sea shell that would be certain to catch Castro's eye, load it ^{with} an explosive triggered to blow when the shell was lifted, and submerge it in an area where Castro often went skin diving. The scheme was abandoned, primarily because the midget submarine that would have had to be used in emplacement of the shell had too short an operating range for such an operation.

Project AMTASH - Rolando Cubela

Rolando Cubela was a major in the Cuban army, the highest Cuban military rank. He was once close to Castro but had become disaffected. He was first met in Mexico City in March 1961. He attended the Helsinki Youth Festival in August 1962 and was met there and subsequently in Stockholm, Copenhagen, and Paris. He was recruited and was given secret writing and demolitions training. On a trip to Paris in October 1963 he asked for high-level assurance of US support. Des FitzGerald met with him there, ostensibly acting as a personal emissary of Robert Kennedy. At the request of SAS, Dr. Gunn rigged a ball point pen to serve as a hypodermic syringe. Cubela was to load it with Black Leaf 40.

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Nestor Sanchez gave the pen to Cubela in Paris on 22 November 1963. Ironically, at the very moment President Kennedy was shot in Dallas a CIA officer was meeting with a Cuban agent in Paris and giving him aⁿ assassination device for use against Castro. ? C

Cubela did not think much of the pen device and asked instead to be supplied with a powered rifle with telescopic sight. He later amended this request to include a silencer. The Agency contrived to put Cubela in touch with Manuel Artime, and Artime gave Cubela a silenced pistol and a silenced rifle. The Agency also put down two caches in Cuba for Cubela, one with rifles and one without. ?

The Agency decided to terminate all contacts with Cubela and the members of his group in June 1965, primarily because they were loose-mouthed, and it had by then become apparent that Cubela had no notion of carrying out any of his grandiose schemes for getting Castro. Cubela was arrested in Cuba in March 1966, was tried, convicted, and sentenced to 25 years imprisonment. It is likely that Cubela told Castro the full story. ?

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