JFK ASSASSINATION SYSTEM
IDENTIFICATION FORM

AGENCY INFORMATION

AGENCY : SSCIA
RECORD NUMBER : 157-10011-10020
RECORDS SERIES :

AGENCY FILE NUMBER :

DOCUMENT INFORMATION

ORIGINATOR : SSCIA
FROM :
TO :

TITLE :
SSCI TRANSCRIPT OF RICHARD BISSELL

DATE : 06/09/75
PAGES : 108

SUBJECTS :
SSCI TRANSCRIPT OF RICHARD M. BISSELL (VOLUME I)

DOCUMENT TYPE : PAPER, TEXTUAL DOCUMENT
CLASSIFICATION : T
RESTRICTIONS : REFERRED
CURRENT STATUS : P
DATE OF LAST REVIEW : 09/29/93

OPENING CRITERIA :

COMMENTS :
I Box 231, Folder 3 - Transcript/Bissell

[R] - ITEM IS RESTRICTED
in that respect, buttressed at all by this one page from a document we have, entitled Nine Pages from the Inspector General 21 May 1973, which I read very quickly.

It says: "Early in the Kennedy Administration, the 'White House' urged Richard Bissell to create an Executive Action capability, that is, a general standby capability to carry out assassinations. The Executive Action program came to be known as ZRRIFLE. It's principal asset was an agent OJWINN who had been recruited earlier by _____ for use in a special operation in the Congo for the assassination of Patrice Lumumba and to be run by ____. ____ made a survey of the scene, decided that he wanted no part in the assassination attempt and asked to be released."

Is the "blank" in that case Mr. O'Donnell?

Mr. Bissell. Yes, it is.

Senator Baker. Which Bissell granted. "Project named ZRRIFLE first appears in the files in May 1961 although the first recorded approval is dated 19 May 1962."

Skipping down to the last paragraph, "ZRRIFLE was not exercised in the Congo. It did, however, find application against Castro in a conspiracy to assassinate or incapacitate him that was already underway under other auspices."

Now this memo alleges The 'White House' laid a requirement on you for an assassination capability and that it was you in connection with the Castro situation. Is all
Mr. Bissell. I believe there was such conversation very shortly before I left the Agency but not when the ZRRIFLE project was first initiated.

Senator Schweiker. What was the nature of it? If you don't say it was that specific application, what application was it?

Mr. Bissell. It wasn't directed at any specific application. It was to develop a capability, meaning to identify potential agents probably in different kinds or parts of the world and command the control channels and techniques and the like.

Senator Schweiker. Well, you're contradicting what Mr. Harvey's not says on 11/16/61 when he discussed with you, according to his notes, "Application of ZRRIFLE to Cuba."

Mr. Bissell. Well, I said that I thought there was some conversation shortly before I left the Agency, and I think that is the one to which I refer.

Senator Schweiker. You are acknowledging --

Mr. Bissell. Oh, yes. I am acknowledging that I did eventually talk to Harvey about directing this towards Cuba, but that was not the nature of my conversation with Harvey when I first asked him to take on the task of developing a new ZRRIFLE capability.

Senator Schweiker. Was your asking [MR. O'DONNELL] to kill Lumumba part of the Executive Action program?

Mr. Bissell. I suppose it could be said to be fitted within
Senator Schweiker. Are you aware that a virus did end up in the Congo?

Mr. Bissell. Well, I repeat I have little recollection.

Senator Schweiker. Well, did testify that a virus did get there. How would virus like that get there, without your knowledge?

Mr. Bissell. Well, if I'm correct, the virus was in the hands of the Station before went down there.

Senator Schweiker. Well, wait. I haven't told you -- I thought you didn't know anything about whose hands it was in. How did you know it was in the Station's hands?

Mr. Bissell. Because I was told that is what testified.

Senator Schweiker. Who told you that?

Mr. Wides. I did, Senator.

Senator Schweiker. Okay, go ahead.

Mr. Bissell. And that could have happened with my not in any way remembering it. In other words, I didn't remember until I reread them this morning, any of the details about what was in the Embassy in the Dominican Republic. I think that is a little clear in my mind now.

I don't remember this. This could have happened without my own approval, that is, the forwarding of the virus. It could have happened with my approval but under circumstances
which I wouldn't have reason to remember today.

Senator Schweiker. Does it surprise you that in view of [initials]’s position of refusing to assassinate a leader that the virus did appear? Does that surprise you?

Mr. Bissell. Yes, it does on the whole, unless it was some quite different purpose.

Senator Schweiker. What might that be?

Mr. Bissell. Well, I can't guess, but my judgment is that before [initials] ever got there the assassination plan had been decided to be inappropriate and unnecessary and had been dropped.

Senator Goldwater. I will have to say, I get more confused as the afternoon goes on.

If you were not instructed by the White House to set up a committee which among other things could accomplish assassina-
tion, could you have done this on your own?

Mr. Bissell. Yes, I could, sir.

Senator Goldwater. Could you have done it on instructions of anyone other than at the White House?

Mr. Bissell. The plan of the capability I could have done on my own or ordered on my own.

Senator Goldwater. Well, did you originate the idea your-
self and start it yourself?

Mr. Bissell. I have already told you that I don't remember specific conversations with regard to the White House, but
apparently we had briefed him about it. I just really wonder
if we should question our own techniques here, because he was
prepared for the question because he had heard Mr. O'Donnel's
statement. I'm not sure he should have heard Mr. O'Donnel's
statement before he made the statement. I think we ought to
look into that.

Mr. Schwarz. That's a very hard question because take
Mr. McNamara -- I would appreciate some instructions on this,
Mr. McNamara and Mr. Bundy have both said that they want an
opportunity to know the matters with which they should be
concerned. Now on the one hand there are disadvantages to
doing that because you will look into what they are to be on
guard against. On the other hand there are advantages to doing
it because you generally do refresh their recollection about
matters which are relatively old.

Senator Schweiker. Wouldn't it be whether you've got a
hostile witness or a friendly witness?

Mr. Schwarz. Well, I don't think in advance we know what
they are.

Senator Schweiker. This fellow sounded pretty hostile
to me.

The Chairman. Senator Hart?

Senator Hart of Colorado. Frank, on your first question
about how to deal with the Press, first of all, I'm not nearly
as experienced as most of the other people and second, advice