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MEMORANDUM

TO: G. Robert Blakey
Chief Counsel

FROM: S. Jonathan Blackmer
Staff Counsel, JFK

DATE: June 28, 1978

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MEMORANDUM

SUMMARY OF DEPOSITION

013151

TO: G. Robert Blakey, Chief Counsel

FROM: S. Jonathan Blackmer, Staff Counsel, JFK *SJCB*

DATE: July 18, 1978

RE: Summary of Victor Espinosa Deposition Taken June 7, 1978 in Washington, D. C.

I. Background: Association with the Revolutionary Council of the University of Havana, 1954-1959.

Victor Dominador Espinosa Hernandez was born to a wealthy, landholding family in Cuba. In 1954, he entered the University of Havana, joining two of his childhood friends Jose Antonio Echeverria and Rolando Cubela in the student political movement. Cubela and Echeverria, somewhat older than Espinosa, were at the time already firmly established as the leaders of the Revolutionary Council of the University of Havana, primarily directing their efforts against the Batista regime. Numerous clashes with the police and general inattentiveness to studies prompted Espinosa's father to send Espinosa to Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge in 1955. (pp. 3-6, 43-47)

When Espinosa became eighteen years of age in approximately 1956, he left L.S.U. and returned to Cuba to manage the ranch-estate left to him by the death of his grandfather. Upon his return, his political fervor somewhat tempered, Espinosa was content to go about his business, and spend long weekends in Havana once a month pursuing less idealistic endeavors such as gambling and women. (p. 47) During one of these sojourns in Havana, Espinosa received a telephone call from Cubela advising him that Echeverria had just returned from a meeting in Mexico with Castro, and wanted to assemble the "old" group, as Castro wanted them to step up their activities against Batista.

As a result of the meeting, action groups were formed under the direction of Cubela and Echeverria. Each group consisting of approximately four men was given the task of assassinating a designated high ranking official of the Batista Government. Among the targets were Blanco Irco, head of military intelligence; Taberinalla, head of the army; Usalace, chief of police. (pp. 47, 48, 49, 50)

Espinosa's group, with Cubela and Pedro Carbo, was immediately successful, killing Blanco Irco within the week of their assignment. Although not suspected at first, Cubela nevertheless fled to Miami, while Espinosa, the youngest and least suspect, remained in Cuba. Cubela eventually returned in 1957, and fought Batista from the Sierra Maestra Mountains, independently of Castro. (pp. 51, 52)

Thus by late 1957, there were three groups fighting Batista: Castro's group in Oriente Province, William Morgan's group and Cubela's group. Castro wanted control over all the groups, and having Morgan under control, sent Che Guevara to consolidate the other "fronts". Guevara's mission was first to assassinate Rolando Menoyo, then Cubela. By October of 1958, Guevara had taken Menoyo and Cubela into custody, but released them after four days. (pp. 54, 55)

When Batista abdicated in January of 1959, Castro's group was the only one left intact as the others had been decimated by fighting, especially Cubela's after an assault on the Presidential Palace. As Espinosa described the scene, "no one knew what to do; we were fighting a war and the war was over; we didn't have any ambition of power. Our aim was to get the guy (Batista), when these people's (Castro's) aims were very well planned for far ahead." (p. 56)

Thus by late 1959, with Castro in power, Espinosa, seeing the student movement ending, left for the United States and exile, (p. 58) (especially after Espinosa had been arrested by Castro for attempting to smuggle the entire contents of an army arsenal to Panama and was released only after Cubela's intervention). (pp. 57-59)

II. Espinosa's Relationship with Mike McLaney

A. 1954-1959

Espinosa often frequented the gambling casinos in Havana while a student at the University of Havana. Through a social friend, FNU Callejas, who was the manager of the Hotel Nacional, Espinosa was introduced to Bill McLaney, brother of Mike, and then through Bill, to Mike. Their relationship, according to Espinosa, was purely social during the remainder of their years in Cuba, not involving any clandestine activities directed at either Batista or Castro. Espinosa is not aware of any activities of that nature by either of the McLaneys during this time. (pp. 9, 10)

B. 1959-1963

Under the sponsorship of McLaney, Espinosa left Cuba in 1959 for Miami. While he may have initially stayed at McLaney's home, he soon began living with his family in Miami.

It is not known why Espinosa moved to New York in 1960, but his return to Miami later in 1960 was occasioned by his desire to join his former colleagues in training for the Bay of Pigs invasion. (pp. 9-12)

Espinosa left the "employ" of the CIA in August of 1961* (See Section III, p. 4); he returned to Miami. In June of 1963 Espinosa was detained by FBI and Customs agents in Miami for an attempted bombing raid on Cuba. According to Espinosa, McLaney sponsored Espinosa and a few of his associates in a plan to bomb the Shell Oil refineries in Havana. In this group were Sam Benton, Carlos Hernandez Sanchez, John Koch Gene, Acleo Pedrosa Amores, Miguel Alvarez and Richard Albert Lauchli. Benton procured an airplane, Espinosa the explosives from Lauchli, and McLaney supplied the financing. (pp. 16-22) An informant within the group alerted the FBI which was waiting with Customs officials as the group rendezvoused for the mission. When this mission failed, another one was immediately put into operation. The oil refineries were again the targets, but the plan was to leave from a deserted airstrip in the vicinity of Lake Ponchartrain, Louisiana, using either a B-25 or a B-26 bomber, fully operational. Again Espinosa planned the operation and secured the explosives through Lauchli. This time, McLaney was to provide the airplane, and only inform the group of its location once the bombs were ready for loading. (pp. 23-29, 91, 92)

As was the case for the June 15th mission, this one was also a failure. One member of the group was recalled to Miami due to a death in the family, the remaining members, feeling this would breach their security, disbanded, returning to Miami with Espinosa going to New York to report to Mike McLaney. On July 31, 1963, the FBI discovered the cache of explosives to be used on the mission at a farm house at Lake Ponchartrain owned by Mike McLaney's brother Bill, and confiscated the entire supply. (pp. 28, 29)

Espinosa remained in New York until approximately 1967, when he moved to France. He remained there until 1969,

then went into business in Spain and England. He stated he has had no contact with McLaney since 1965, his last anti-Castro involvement with McLaney being the aborted July 1963 raid on the oil refineries in Havana. (p. 29)

III. Espinosa's Contact With the CIA

During his anti-Batista activity in Cuba from 1954 through 1959, Espinosa was aware that certain persons in his "group" had some contact with the American Embassy in Havana, and that a number of individuals working in Castro's organization had similar contacts with the CIA. Espinosa had no contact with the CIA until he reached Miami in 1959 and joined the Bay of Pigs training force.

Espinosa was made aware of training being conducted to invade Cuba upon his arrival. He left word with friends to keep him informed and went to New York to work. A short while later he was contacted, and immediately returned to enlist. Espinosa was sent to Guatemala in June or July of 1960 to begin the training. (pp. 10, 11)

In Guatemala and later Panama and New Orleans, Espinosa was trained in conventional military warfare, guerrilla warfare, explosives and clandestine operations.

As a result of this training, Espinosa did participate in various raids into Cuba, some of which were aimed at the destruction of military targets, others with the purpose of gathering information and bringing individuals out. These activities began before the Bay of Pigs invasion and continued through the following summer of 1961. (pp. 14-16) *(It should be noted that Espinosa stated that he was able to obtain from a friend in the government his file which details each of these operations and the participants; however, in our review of files on Espinosa, we find records showing that Espinosa was terminated from involvement in March of 1961 and taken off the payroll.)

IV. Espinosa's Involvement With the AMLASH Operation

Espinosa's activities with the CIA ceased as of late summer 1961. (p. 62) In approximately June of 1965, while

on a pleasure excursion to Paris from his residence in New York, Espinosa contacted an old acquaintance, Jose Trasancos who was at the time working for the Cuban Consulate in Paris, having been in a position there since approximately 1962 or 1963.

Trasancos spoke of having seen Cubela in Paris and "something was going on...Rolando (Cubela) is involved with the CIA and there is something happening." (p. 63) Trasancos wanted Espinosa to get the complete story from George Robreno, a former member of the Student Revolutionary Movement in Havana, and long-time friend of Cubela. Robreno at one time had been with the Castro government as the head of the revolutionary tribunals which carried out many death sentences. (p. 64) Originally, Espinosa intended to meet with Robreno in Madrid, but after encountering difficulties obtaining a visa, was forced at his own expense to send Robreno an airline ticket for Paris. (p. 65)

In Paris, Robreno told Espinosa that Cubela had been talking with certain CIA people about an uprising in Cuba against Castro that was to be led by Cubela and others of officials in the government and the army. Cubela had been in contact with an individual named Williamson who was the head of the CIA in Spain. Cubela was most concerned about Williamson's trustworthiness, expressing as a basis, Williamson's apparent alcoholism and the fact that he had had as a mistress a Cuban female who had taken certain important documents from Williamson's apartment to Castro. Cubela had wanted his old associate Espinosa to contact his "CIA colleagues", still believing Espinosa was with the CIA. Espinosa was to explain Cubela's position to them viz-a-viz Cubela's contact with Williamson. In addition to this conversation with Robreno, Espinosa met with (Alberto) Blanco, "El Loco", also involved in the plot with Cubela. Blanco, en route to Cuba from Russia via Czechoslovakia, mentioned the presence of Russian technicians in Cuba, stating that he wanted the CIA to know that if they were thinking of double-crossing Cubela, "They (Cubela and his associates in the plot) would take care of these Russian technicians". (pp. 67, 68)

It was Espinosa's understanding that Cubela had come to Madrid sometime earlier to meet with Arttime and Williamson. According to Robreno, Arttime was soliciting Cubela's aid in a different coup. Cubela could not trust Arttime, feeling he was working both sides with the CIA and Castro.

Espinosa returned to New York the week following his meeting with Robreno in Paris and went directly to

Cavasantos of Immigration and Naturalization to be put in contact with someone in the CIA. Cavasantos sent Espinosa to the FBI in New York, where they were joined by someone from the CIA, whom Espinosa felt was aware of the individuals mentioned in the AMLASH operation. (pp. 70-72, 76) Espinosa related Cubela's message and was told he would be contacted within a few days. (p. 73) After two weeks, Espinosa contacted a friend who worked for Senator Javits who arranged for a meeting in Washington with a State Department official involved with Cuban affairs.

Feeling that he had done all he could do, Espinosa returned to New York, where he worked for the next two years before moving to France and Spain. (pp. 77, 78)

Sometime later, Espinosa learned of Cubela's arrest and imprisonment in Cuba and was most surprised that Cubela was not executed. (p. 79)

V. Individuals of Interest Known to Espinosa

A. Norman Rothman: Espinosa met Rothman in Havana sometime in the late 1950's, possibly in the casino at the Hotel Nacional, and later in approximately 1960 or 1961 in Miami at the Biltmore Hotel.

Espinosa was a social acquaintance of "Cappy" Rothman, Norman's son, in Miami from approximately 1960-1963. (pp. 31, 32, 98-101)

B. Meyer Lansky: While Espinosa did not know Meyer Lansky, he did see him at the Rivera Casino in Havana. (p. 97)

C. Raphael Garcia Bongo: Trafficante's attorney. Espinosa knew Jorta Bongo, the brother of Raphael, and through him met Raphael. While not first-hand, it was common knowledge that Raphael was Trafficante's attorney in Cuba. Approximately five years ago, Espinosa learned that Raphael had been arrested in Spain for passing counterfeit money. Espinosa heard that the counterfeit money was linked to Trafficante. (pp. 103-105)

D. Sam Benton: Knew him through McLaney. Benton was supplier for the aircraft used on the two aborted oil refinery raids in 1963. (pp. 18, 19, 23, 93)

E. Raul Castro: Espinosa met Raul on two occasions in Havana soon after Castro's takeover. Espinosa was present in Cubela's hospital room when Raul Castro visited Cubela. (p. 55)

F. Jerry Patrick Hemming: Met him on a few occasions. Hemming was always trying to get involved in exile activities. The general opinion among Espinosa's associates was that Hemming was not to be trusted.

G. Rolando Cubela: (AMLASH) Long and involved friendship.

