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E. Cubana Airlines

In Book V (the performance of the intelligence agencies in the investigation of the John F. Kennedy Assassination) of the Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations, the CIA is criticized for its apparent failure to fully pursue leads surrounding the assassination of President Kennedy and then to fully report to the Warren Commission the results of the in-

vestigation they did undertake.

One such lead discussed was a reported five-hour delay (6:00 p.m. EST to 11:00 p.m. EST) of a Cubana flight from Mexico City to Havana the evening of President Kennedy's assassination, November 22, 1963. (The Investigation of the Assassination of President John F. Kennedy: Performance of the Intelligence Agencies, Book V, Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations, 4/23/76, p. 30, Senate Report No. 94-755.) The most intriguing aspect of the SSC account involved the alleged delay of a Cubana flight to await the arrival at 10:30 p.m. EST of a private twin-engined aircraft. (Ibid. p. 60.) The aircraft deposited an unidentified passenger who boarded the Cubana aircraft without customs clearance and traveled to Havana in the pilot's cabin. (Ibid., p. 61.) The source of that lead was an Italian diplomate, Mario Mauri, who allegedly was on the same flight.

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Analysis

In the 1977 Inspector General Report, the CIA attempted to refute several "inaccuracies" in the Senate Select Committee report regarding the "alleged" Cubana Airlines flight that is apparently the only follow-up by the Agency on the lead after the Senate report appeared.

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The Inspector General's report corrected the statement in the Senate report that the "Central Intelligence Agency had no information indicating that a following investigation was conducted to determine that a following investigation was conducted to determine the identity of the passenger and had no further information on the passenger, and no explanation for why a following investigation was not conducted." (The Investigation of the Assassination of President John F. Kennedy. Performance of the Intelligence Agencies, Book V, Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations, 4/23/76, p. 30, Senate Report No. 94-755.) The Inspector General Report stated that the Central Intelligence Agency conducted regular surveillance of Cubana flights, filing cable reports to Headquarters (Ibid., p. 11.) There was one unilateral CIA surveillance team (LIFIRE) that observed arrivals and departures of Cubana flights, reporting any unusual recurrences and providing copies of flight manifests (Ibid., p. 11). The Mexican government had its own surveillance team (LITEMPO) at the airport which provided the CIA with photographs of passports and copies of passenger lists of individuals travelling to Cuba.

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(Ibid., p. 11) In addition, telephone tap operations (LIENVOY) against the Cuban Embassy provided transcripts of conversations between the Cubana Airlines Office and the Mexican Airport Control Office. (Ibid., p. 11.)

The LIENVOY transcripts recorded a series of discussions concerning the status of the November 22, 1963 delayed Cubana flight--when it arrived and when it departed. The transcripts showed that the flight arrived at the airport at 1620 hours (All times used will be Mexico City time to avoid confusion) Mexico City time. (HSCA Staff Review of November 22, 1963 LIENVOY transcripts) Prior to the arrival of the aircraft, one person stated that the aircraft was due at 1630 hours and "it will go" at 1730, suggesting a quick turnaround that would have reduced unloading and loading time, as well as serving of aircraft to a relatively short period. (Ibid.) However, the only key report on the departure of the aircraft was a statement at 2040 hours that the aircraft had departed for Cuba five minutes earlier, i.e., 2035 hours. (Ibid.)

Based on the above (LIENVOY was the only record that existed in the CIA files on the arrival and departure

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times of the Cubana flight) (Neither LIFIRE nor the Mexican surveillance team reported the arrival or departure flights of the November 22, 1963 Cubana Airlines flight to Cuba) then I.G. concluded that there were major differences between what the Senate Select Committee reported about the alleged delayed Cubana flight and the known facts. (Ibid., p. 12) The Cuban flight was on the ground in Mexico City for a total of four hours and about ten minutes. (Ibid. p. 12) It was not delayed five hours as reported in Book V. (The Investigation of the Assassination of President John F. Kennedy, Performance of the Intelligence Agencies, Book V, Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations, 4/23/76, p. 30, Senate Intelligence Report No. 94-755) The Cubana flight departed at 2035 hours Mexico City time, 55 minutes ahead of the alleged arrival at 2130 of a private flight with a secret passenger. (Ibid., p. 30) The 2035 departure differed with the Senate Intelligence Committee Report that the Cubana flight departed at 2200 hours. (Ibid. p. 31) In addition, the I.G. staff concluded that in view of the surveillance coverage of the Mexican Airport by both the CIA and Mexican government, it was doubtful that

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the alleged activity involving the private twin-engined aircraft and passenger would have gone unnoticed or unreported had it occurred. (1977 CIA I.G. Report, TAB B, p. 12.)

Presumably, the discrepancies pointed out by the Inspector General are meant to explain the fact that the CIA did not take more aggressive investigative steps to ascertain whether there might have been some connection between the delayed flight and the assassination of John F. Kennedy. In that regard, the 1977 Inspector General report explains that the Agency had carried the lead as far as it was able by reviewing the surveillance file of the LIFRE and LIENVOY operations and asking the Mexican surveillance team (LITEMFO) about any strange occurrences at the airport on November 22, 1963. (CIA 1977 IG Report, p. 12, Tab B.) However, the CIA's lack of access to further information about the allegedly delayed Cubana flight and unidentified passenger does not explain either the failure of the CIA to take more seriously the suspicions of the source, and most importantly, to report whatever information it had to the Warren Commission. The Inspector General's attempts

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to denigrate the value of the information provided on the unidentified alleged Cubana Airlines and unidentified passenger do not diminish the apparent negligence of the agency in seriously pursuing the information as it was received. The CIA is not to be faulted for the strength of its intelligence gathering, but rather for the judgement which kept that intelligence from the Warren Commission. (The Warren Commission was mandated to pass on the strength of exactly that kind of information.)

Despite what is now known about the alleged delay of the Cubana Airlines flight and the unidentified passenger, the Warren Commission may have wanted to abridge suspicions which would remain, and satisfy itself that these circumstances did not indicate foreign involvement in the assassination. The CIA contributed to those suspicions by not airing the matter and explaining the circumstances which could shed light on otherwise sinister appearing events.

The Committee has documented instances where the CIA decided to forego passing information to the Warren

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Commission out of a desire to not lay bare extremely
sensitive sources and methods of intelligence. The
LIENVOY and LIFIRE operations fall within that category.

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