

DATE: 11-14-2017

JFK Assassination System
Identification Form

Date: 5/11/201

Agency Information

AGENCY : FBI
RECORD NUMBER : 124-10288-10275

RECORD SERIES : HQ

AGENCY FILE NUMBER : 105-72630-SUB A-NR

Document Information

ORIGINATOR : FBI
FROM : WASHINGTON CAPITAL NEWS SERVICE
TO :

TITLE :

DATE : 00/00/0000
PAGES : 84

SUBJECTS :

PDL, JFK, NRA A/O AOKRI

DOCUMENT TYPE : PAPER, TEXTUAL DOCUMENT

CLASSIFICATION : Secret

RESTRICTIONS : 1B; 1C

CURRENT STATUS : Redact

DATE OF LAST REVIEW : 03/19/1997

OPENING CRITERIA : INDEFINITE

COMMENTS : INC 15 NEWS SERVICES DTD 7/8/59 THRU 4/25/75, 45 NEWS ARTIC DTD 7/14/59 THRU 4/25/75

DATE: 11-14-2017
C-45 (Rev. 1-30-74)

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'Frogmen' Blew Up a French

SECRET Ship in Havana

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By PAUL MESKIL 4
Last of a series

At 3:10 p.m. on March 4, 1960, a French munitions ship blew up in Havana harbor, killing at least 75 people and injuring more than 200.

The vessel, Le Couvre, exploded during the unloading of 76 tons of ammunition and grenades intended for Fidel Castro's military and police forces. Castro suspected sabotage, but couldn't prove it. The United States denied any involvement in the incident.

A former CIA agent told The News recently that Le Couvre was sabotaged by "CIA frogmen." He said an underwater demolition team slipped into the water at night and attached a bomb to the ship's hull, under the waterline. The bomb, a detonator and a timing device were in a waterproof container, he said.

The ex-agent added that the frogmen were Cubans working for the CIA. "It was definitely a CIA-connected thing," he said.

Another source said the bomb was supposed to go off around 3 a.m., when the waterfront was deserted, but something went wrong with the timer and the blast came 12 hours later, when the area was crowded with dock workers and harbor traffic.

Still another source, formerly connected with the CIA and other intelligence agencies in the Caribbean area, blamed the big blast on Gen. Rafael Trujillo, then dictator of the Dominican Republic.

Trujillo and his sinister intelligence chief, Johnny Abbes, had many conferences with CIA officials and secret agents. On one occasion in 1960, Trujillo offered CIA agents Frank Sturgis and Pedro Diaz Lanz, former chief of Castro's Air Force, \$1 million to lead an invasion of Cuba from the Dominican Republic. Diaz Lanz declined, telling his CIA bosses that he didn't want to work for another dictator.

Plotting to kill Trujillo

While in the Dominican Republic to confer with Trujillo in 1961, Sturgis also contacted Dominican military officers who were plotting to kill Trujillo. The CIA agreed to supply the plotters with guns and ammunition. 1975

"The guns arrived in boxes sent to a supermarket in Ciudad Trujillo (the Dominican capital, now called Santo Domingo)," said Frank Nelson, an American who worked with Trujillo in a plot to overthrow Castro. "The Dominican officers didn't need the guns. They already had enough stuff for a war. They needed the moral support of the U.S. government, and this was represented by the arms shipments."

The rebel officers assassinated Trujillo on May 30, 1961. Whether they used the CIA guns has not been disclosed. But similar weapons figured in subsequent attempts to exterminate Francois (Papa Doc) Duvalier, the voodoo Hitler of Haiti.

On the night of Aug. 26, 1963, a converted B-25 bomber left Florida with an arms shipment for Gen. Leon Cantava, a former Haitian Army commander who was planning to invade his homeland from the Dominican Republic, which shares the island of Hispaniola with Haiti. The CIA plane swooped over a flare-lit field near the Dominican military airport of Dajabon.

Wooden crates rained down on parachutes. They contained mortars, bazookas, M-1 rifles, .50-caliber machineguns, M-3 tommyguns, .45-caliber pistols, grenades and ammunition.

The weapons were distributed among 210 Haitian exiles who comprised Cantava's invasion army. They crossed the Massacre River, borderline between the Dominican Republic and Haiti, on the night of Sept. 22. Late the following day, after a bloody battle with Haitian troops, Cantava led the remnants of his rebel band back across the river to their Dominican sanctuary.

A week later, a small group of Haitian refugees entered a U.S. Army Special forces camp in North Carolina for training in guerrilla warfare. Most of the Haitians were in their early 20s and had attended college in the United States after service in the U.S. Army or Air Force. All of them lived in New York City.

They had been hand-picked by the CIA for what became one of the bravest and most pitiful invasions in the history of Caribbean carnage.

The invasion force consisted of only 13 men, eight of whom had been trained by the Green Berets. They belonged to an anti-Duvalier group called Jeune Haiti (Young Haiti). Nearly all of the

F. A. ...
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unlucky 13 were the sons of Haitian military officers or officials who had been killed by Duvalier's thugs.

The leader, Gusle Villedrouin, was a former U.S. airman whose father, Haitian Army Col. Roger Villadrouin, was clubbed to death by Papa Doc's Tonton Macoutes.

They chartered a boat in Florida and landed in Haiti on Aug. 5, 1964, carrying a variety of weapons supplied by CIA agents. Although the invasion was doomed to failure before it began, the 13 young New Yorkers managed to hold off hundreds of Duvalier soldiers, militiamen and Tonton Macoutes.

They were killed one by one, and those who were left kept fighting. The last three invaders ran out of ammunition on Oct. 26, then threw stones at the heads of all 13 were cut off and sent to the presidential palace in Port-au-Prince.

6-19-98
CLASSIFIED BY: 51668 SC/JSK
REASON: 1.5 (C)
DECLASSIFY ON: X-1

- The Washington Post _____
- Washington Star-News (JFR)
- Daily News (New York) 4
- The New York Times _____
- The Wall Street Journal _____
- The National Observer _____
- The Los Angeles Times _____

APR 25 1975
Date 105-72630-A
NOT RECORDED

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DATE: 11-14-2017



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Duvalier: The rebels got CIA guns

In the Caribbean, the CIA got involved
 in dozens of schemes, including blowing up
 a French ship and killing Trujillo

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 - 109-485 (TRUJILLO)
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 - 105-72630 (LANZ)
 - 105-82088 (NELSON)
 - 105-104645 (DUVALIER) (S)
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