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Vol. 1 OF 3

NATIONAL SECURITY INFORMATION
Unauthorized Disclosure Subject
to Criminal Sanctions

The United States Senate

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ON 4/5/77

BY 96

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Hearing held before

Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental
Operations With Respect to Intelligence Activities

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Wednesday, May 5, 1976

Washington, D. C.

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Richard Cotter

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STAFF INTERVIEW

Wednesday, May 5, 1976

United States Senate,
Select Committee to Study Governmental
Operations with Respect to
Intelligence Activities,
Washington, D. C.

The Committee met, pursuant to notice, at 11:30 o'clock
a.m., in Room 608, the Carroll Arms Hotel.

Staff: Paul Wallach.

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P R O C E E D I N G S

TESTIMONY OF RICHARD COTTER

Mr. Wallach. Would you please state your name and address for the record.

Mr. Cotter. Richard Cotter, C-o-t-t-e-r, 5337 Ravensworth, R-a-v-e-n-s-w-r-t-h, Road, Springfield, Virginia.

Mr. Wallach. Mr. Cotter, you have been interviewed before the Committee before, is that correct?

Mr. Cotter. Yes, I have.

Mr. Wallach. At that time were you placed under oath, was a Senator present?

Mr. Cotter. There was no Senator present. I believe I was placed under oath, yes.

Mr. Wallach. In any event, the testimony you give here today will be available for you to review, and I would like to proceed with the understanding that at such time that you review it, that if we desire, that you will swear to the truth of the statements contained therein.

Mr. Cotter. Right.

Mr. Wallach. Additionally, as I mentioned to you before, Senator Schweiker cannot be here today because he is tied up in some Committee hearings. Our rules do provide that you are allowed to have a Senator here, and your statement was that you agreed to proceed in his absence, is that correct?

Mr. Cotter. That's correct.

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1 Mr. Wallach. Additionally, as we advise all witnesses,
2 you do have the right to counsel, and if at any time you want to
3 adjourn and secure counsel, we will do that.

4 Mr. Cotter. Okay. Thank you.

5 Mr. Wallach. Just very briefly, could you for the record
6 tell us when you first came into the Nationalities Intelligence
7 Division -- or Section. I'm sorry -- within the Domestic
8 Intelligence Division, and from that point on just briefly
9 trace your career with the Bureau.

10 Mr. Cotter. Okay, I may be a bit fuzzy, but I was assigned
11 to Nationalities Intelligence initially in mid-1953, and I
12 worked continuously thereafter in Nationalities Intelligence
13 until 1970 in various capacities. About 1959 I was named a
14 unit chief in that section, and about 1962 I became the number
15 one man, or assistant section chief under W. K. Wannall, and then
16 in 1965, following a reorganization of the Domestic Intelligence
17 Division, I became a section chief in Nationalities Intelligence,
18 and remained in that capacity until January 1970.

19 Mr. Wallach. Calling your attention now to the period
20 prior to the assassination of President John F. Kennedy -- as
21 I explained to you the major thrust of our questions today will
22 go to the assassination and the FBI's investigation of the
23 assassination of President Kennedy, but calling your attention
24 to the period before that time, I take it that you were, by
25 virtue of your position, familiar with FBI's -- I use the word

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1 Cuban operations, although they might be operations in the
2 technical sense. -- were you in the Nationalities Intelligence
3 Section prior to the time that Castro took over?

4 Mr. Cotter. Yes, I was, briefly.

5 Mr. Wallach. Were you familiar with the operations that
6 Clark Anderson was running out of Havana?

7 Mr. Cotter. I was generally familiar with what the
8 Legal Attache, Havana, was doing. I don't know particularly --
9 you're not referring to any particular operation.

10 Mr. Wallach. No, I'm not.

11 Mr. Cotter. No, I was generally aware of his work.

12 Mr. Wallach. I want to be clear. I don't at this point
13 want to get into the operations or sources or anything like that.
14 We don't need to get into that.

15 Mr. Cotter. Right.

16 Mr. Wallach. It's just generally my understanding that
17 at the time Clark was the Legat down there, that the Bureau
18 had some very good sources within the Batista Government, and
19 what I would like to ask you is from your experience afterwards,
20 when Castro came in, did the Bureau still have sources within
21 the Cuban Government from say the period 1961, 1962 and 1963.

22 Mr. Cotter. I have no knowledge that we had, within the
23 Cuban Government during that period. Maybe, you know, I don't
24 know offhand when the Legal Attache left.

25 Mr. Wallach. I think it was in '59 or '60.

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1 Mr. Cotter. Yes, shortly afterwards. I don't have any
2 information about the Bureau's operations in Cuba after Castro
3 took over. I seriously doubt that they did.

4 Mr. Wallach. I am not really asking whether or not they
5 did have a particular high level source, whether a particular
6 person was a source. What I'd really like to know is was
7 the Bureau gleaning positive intelligence information from
8 Cuba, for example, at the time of the Bay of Pigs.

9 Mr. Cotter. Yes, but from very fringe type sources as a
10 rule, refugees from Cuba, American businessmen and so forth who
11 had contacts in Cuba. A lot of it was unverified, unsubstantiated.
12 there wasn't too much real hard, accurate information available
13 to the Bureau.

14 Mr. Wallach. Do you know Vince Nasca?

15 Mr. Cotter. Yes, I do, quite well.

16 Mr. Wallach. Vince is still with the Bureau, and it is
17 my understanding that at that time he evolved on the desk that
18 was working on anti-Castro groups?

19 Mr. Cotter. Yes, that's true. In the past he's handled
20 both pro-Castro and anti-Castro. I think his principal specialty
21 has been anti-Castro in recent years.

22 Mr. Wallach. Who in your estimation would have been or
23 were the people at the Bureau most knowledgeable in the Cuban
24 area in late 1963?

25 Mr. Cotter. Certainly Nasca. Ray Wannall, the section

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1 chief who was in overall charge, the number one man, myself,
2 although to a much lesser degree than Nasca or Wannall, perhaps
3 the head of the Division, who was W. C. Sullivan. If there was
4 something really high level, something of importance going on,
5 Sullivan would have known. And one other possibility would be
6 the foreign liaison people who --

7 Mr. Wallach. Dan Brennan's?

8 Mr. Cotter. Dan Brennan's section. Now, at that time I
9 don't think Brennan was a section chief. I don't know for
10 certain, but it might have been his predecessors in that job,
11 people like Graham Day.

12 You don't happen to know offhand when Brennan served as
13 section chief?

14 Mr. Wallach. No, I don't, but he was there.

15 Mr. Cotter. Also there was a foreign liaison unit in
16 addition. Brennan was a section chief, but there was also
17 a unit that supervised the operations of all legal attaches and
18 Nate Ferris was the key man in that. He was a supervisor in
19 charge. Now, offhand I don't remember when he, Ferris, retired,
20 but I think he was still there in '63.

21 Mr. Wallach. He's fairly old now, isn't he?

22 Mr. Cotter. He's quite old.

23 Mr. Wallach. Let me change the subject for a second,

24 Mr. Cotter.

25 When is the first time you recall becoming aware of the

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1 fact that the United States Government, and particularly the
2 CIA, had attempted to assassinate Fidel Castro?

3 Mr. Cotter. After I left the Bureau, in other words, as
4 a result of press disclosures. In other words, I never received any
5 information from within the Bureau.

6 Mr. Wallach. So to the best of your recollection,
7 then, at no time while you were in the Bureau --

8 Mr. Cotter. At no time did I receive any information,
9 director or indirect about an attempted assassination of
10 Castro by any government agency.

11 Mr. Wallach. Let me just for the record show you
12 a memorandum from Mr. Hoover dated May 10, 1962, and I want to
13 be clear for the record there is no indication you received this.
14 In fact, I doubt that you did.

15 Mr. Cotter. Okay.

16 Mr. Wallach. The memorandum deals with many different
17 matters, but the last page, page 6, the latter part of page 6 and
18 page 7 describe a conversation between Mr. Hoover and Attorney
19 General Robert Kennedy in which they talk about an assassination
20 plot. The CIA had hired the Mafia to assassinate Fidel Castro.
21 Let me show you the last paragraph of that page.

22 Are you able to read it?

23 Mr. Cotter. I think so.

24 (The Witness reads the document.)

25 Mr. Cotter. There are a few words I can't read.

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1 Mr. Wallach. Well, it's more for your information, to see
2 that that information was available. We do have other memoranda
3 too, that indicates the Bureau was fully aware of what we
4 have termed the Mafia plots, the CIA Mafia plots to assassinate
5 Castro that took place in '61 and '62.

6 Mr. Cotter. Yeah, that certainly is pretty convincing.

7 Mr. Wallach. In any event, once again you are clear that
8 you were never told about these plots.

9 Mr. Cotter. No.

10 Mr. Wallach. Did you have any direct dealings with anyone
11 in CIA, or was that handled directly through Papich?

12 Mr. Cotter. 99 percent of it was handled through Papich,
13 but occasionally we would meet with our CIA counterparts to
14 discuss matters of interest. I do not offhand recall any meetings
15 that I had with any CIA people on Cuban affairs. I had a
16 number of meetings on Chinese matters, I know that.

17 Mr. Wallach. Did you ever meet Desmond Fitzgerald?

18 Mr. Cotter. On one occasion. I remember meeting him in
19 a big conference they had, but that had nothing to do with the
20 Cuban situation.

21 Mr. Wallach. So then all of your contacts would have
22 been handled through Papich.

23 Mr. Cotter. Right.

24 Mr. Wallach. Similarly, in terms of what I have labeled
25 the CIA Mafia attempts against Castro, we also recently -- the

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1 Bureau has also recently provided us with documents indicating
2 that certain persons within the Nationalities Intelligence
3 Section, yourself not included, had knowledge of the fact that
4 in '63 or they acquired this knowledge within the Bureau in
5 late '63, early '64 that the CIA was also attempting to use
6 certain Cubans to assassinate Fidel Castro.

7 Did that ever come to your attention?

8 Mr. Cotter.. I have no recollection of it, no. You know,
9 it's even possible that I may have seen that memo that you just
10 showed me from Mr. Hoover, but it just didn't register that
11 I did see it.

12 Mr. Wallach. It's also my understanding that parts of the
13 memorandum from Mr. Hoover were distributed because they related
14 to different subject matters. For example, there was discussion
15 between the Attorney General and Mr. Hoover on the Latin American
16 Academy.

17 Mr. Cotter. Yeah.

18 Mr. Wallach. Which was excerpted and certain of it was
19 put into files. So you may have seen that.

20 Mr. Cotter. Right.

21 Mr. Wallach. But I take it it doesn't ring any bells
22 when you say anything about assassination plots.

23 Mr. Cotter. No.

24 Mr. Wallach. You would doubt that you did see that.

25 Mr. Cotter. Normally when Mr. Hoover writes a memo like

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1 that, they do distribute it around to any interested section, or
2 division or supervisor, unless there was some reason why they
3 considered it ultra-sensitive and withheld distribution.

4 Mr. Wallach. Well, that was stamped confidential. Would
5 that have any effect on distribution?

6 Mr. Cotter. I don't know what effect. I know the Bureau
7 did not normally classify its internal mail at that time, so
8 that would have been a mark that Mr. Hoover considered it
9 ultra-special or ultra-sensitive.

10 Mr. Wallach. When the assassination of President Kennedy
11 took place on November 22nd -- well, let's take a step backwards
12 first. In the period 1961, '62, '63, do you recall at any time
13 anyone from the Bureau going to any meetings at the Pentagon
14 or going to any meetings in general to get involved in the
15 Cuban operations that the U.S. was conducting against the Castro
16 regime?

17 Mr. Cotter. No, I don't. I do recall -- I can't
18 place the time, unfortunately, but I do recall one occasion
19 where General Lansdale, I believe it was --

20 Mr. Wallach. Lansdale.

21 Mr. Cotter. Lansdale. Visited the Bureau and conferred
22 with Mr. Belmont, who at that time was an assistant to the
23 Director.

24 Mr. Wallach. Do you remember, could that have been --

25 Mr. Cotter. I am sorry, but I just can't place that.

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1 might have been '62, it might have been '63. I don't even
2 recall specifically whether it was before the Kennedy assassination
3 at all. I presume so.

4 It was after Castro had been pretty well entrenched in
5 power for a year or two, and Lansdale came over to see Belmont,
6 and I know at that time I was a Supervisor in charge of what
7 they called the Western Hemisphere Unit, which handled Cuban
8 matters, and Vince Nasca was the supervisor that handled a
9 lot of Cuban, individual Cuban cases. Sterling Donahoe was the
10 section chief, at that time, and at Donahoe's instructions,
11 Nasca and myself accompanied him to Belmont's office to sit
12 in on this conference between Belmont and Lansdale, and to
13 lend whatever support or information Belmont needed.

14 Mr. Wallach. What took place at that meeting?

15 Mr. Cotter. There was just a general discussion of what
16 could be done about Castro, that sort of thing, what the
17 Bureau was doing, and what the prospects were for the future,
18 and I don't recall too much specific, but I do recall one
19 thing that occurred that sort of ties in here a little bit
20 in an indirect way. At some point along the line, toward
21 the end of the meeting -- and I think they were just sort of,
22 Belmont and Lansdale were kind of saying their amenities, almost
23 and Belmont made what I knew to be a joking comment about --
24 Lansdale evidently, I don't know exactly how he was introduced,
25 but the people attending the meeting, at least my perception of

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1 him was that he had been placed in charge of doing something
2 about Castro, something in their terms of secret operations and
3 so forth, and Belmont said something jokingly to him about
4 why doesn't he hire, I forget whether he used the term Mafia,
5 or some term about the underworld, and take care of Castro. But
6 he said it with a smile on his face, and I'm sure it was intended
7 strictly as humor. Well, the odd part about it was that Lansdale
8 immediately perked up and took it seriously, and you know, started
9 asking Belmont, well, you know, do you think this could be
10 arranged and this sort of thing. And Belmont was shocked by the
11 reaction he got, and he immediately, you know, tried to put
12 some distance, tried to make it clear to Lansdale that he was
13 just kidding, and he tried to get off the subject, and they
14 never, Lansdale could never, you know, get him back to serious
15 talk about it. But I definitely do remember that little
16 incident.

17 Mr. Wallach. This was at a time when Donahoe was still the
18 section chief, and --

19 Mr. Cotter. Donahoe was the Section Chief, right, because
20 Wannall was not at this meeting. It was just four of us from
21 the Bureau: Belmont, Donahoe, Nasca and myself.

22 Mr. Wallach. Do you remember if you and Nasca were asked
23 any questions?

24 I would like to go more particularly into details. I
25 realize we are talking about a meeting and conversations that are

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1 some 14 years ago.

2 Mr. Cotter. I really don't recall. I'm sure that Nasca
3 and myself had some things to say, and Donahoe, too.

4 Mr. Wallach. Would you have written a memorandum on the
5 meeting?

6 Mr. Cotter. It would have been normal procedure. It would
7 be highly unusual not to write a memorandum, although it is
8 possible. I mean, it may have been -- this is one of those
9 things that may have fallen between the desk, because maybe it
10 wasn't clear who was going to write the memorandum. It could
11 have been any one of the four of us. But usually, whenever a
12 meeting like this took place, a memorandum was written for
13 Mr. Hoover's information if for nothing else.

14 Mr. Wallach. You don't remember being instructed not to
15 write a memorandum of this meeting.

16 Mr. Cotter. No. I think I would remember that, if I
17 was told not to write it. Chances are there was a memo written
18 at least to tell Mr. Hoover what was going on, and especially
19 Belmont was very careful to observe the rules in that regard.

20 Mr. Wallach. Do you know if Lansdale had requested a
21 meeting, or Belmont had requested it?

22 Mr. Cotter. I couldn't say for sure. It was my impression
23 that Lansdale had requested it, and it was just strictly an
24 assumption on my part, but I gathered that he was touching
25 base with all the intelligence agencies.

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1 Mr. Wallach. Had you been briefed before the meeting about
2 what Lansdale was involved in, or was that general knowledge in
3 the Bureau to people in this area?

4 Mr. Cotter. Well, as I say, to the best of my recollection,
5 I cannot specifically recall words, but I'm sure Donahoe probably
6 told Nasca and I that he wanted us to accompany him to Belmont's
7 office, that this General Lansdale was going to be there, that he
8 had been appointed, I believe, by the White House to head up a
9 special projects type thing with regard to Cuba, but that was it.
10 It would have been very general, and that we were going along
11 just in case Belmont needed some information about what the
12 Bureau was doing.

13 Mr. Wallach. All right.

14 One of the points you said Lansdale wanted to find out was
15 what the Bureau was doing vis-a-vis Cuba.

16 What was the Bureau doing vis-a-vis Cuba at that time?

17 Mr. Cotter. Well, we were investigating very strenuously
18 with regard to any allegations of individuals or groups who were
19 or alleged to be engaged in pro-Castro activities. The emphasis
20 was always on trying to find Cuban intelligence agents operating
21 in the United States, and there were several cases where we
22 either identified agents or people were very highly suspected
23 of such.

24 Mr. Wallach. Without going into any names at all, we were
25 told that the Bureau did have a highly placed source within the

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1 Cuban consulate in New York City at that time.

2 D Do you recall that?

3 Mr. Cotter. Yes, there was one old-time there, an old-time
4 source. He had been a source, as I recall, long before Castro
5 took over under Batista. Somehow he managed to maintain his
6 position after Castro took over, at least for a while. He was
7 a career type.

8 Mr. Wallach. Do you know if he was around at the time of
9 the Kennedy assassination, or you really don't recollect?

10 Mr. Cotter. No, I don't recall that.

11 Mr. Wallach. But was the Bureau doing anything affirmative
12 vis-a-vis Cuba? I understand they were in counterintelligence
13 or in a counterespionage sense trying to detect agents and try
14 to neutralize them. But were they doing anything operationally
15 or assistingly as to those operations, or were they themselves
16 doing anything against Cuba?

17 Mr. Cotter. I don't have any knowledge of that, no, no.
18 I would say no, definitely not.

19 Mr. Wallach. Did Lansdale ask the Bureau to do anything
20 Did he want the Bureau's assistance?

21 Mr. Cotter. Not at this meeting he didn't, and I don't
22 have any other knowledge that he did ever ask anything specific.
23 He was just, I think, briefed.

24 Mr. Wallach. Being briefed as to what?

25 Mr. Cotter. He was searching for ideas on what he might

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1 consider, as, you know, feasible projects to adopt to get rid
2 of Castro, as it were. I don't know that he used those terms
3 either. That is my own terminology. But they wanted to do
4 something to curb, check, eliminate Castro.

5 Mr. Wallach. Was this after or before the Bay of Pigs,
6 do you remember? I would think it would be after.

7 Mr. Cotter. Afterwards you think?

8 Mr. Wallach. Yes.

9 Just from my own knowledge of when Lansdale was appointed.

10 Mr. Cotter. Yeah. Well, it could have been, it could
11 have been, you know, after that proved to be a failure, why
12 maybe they adopted this procedure.

13 Mr. Wallach. In any event, what was Lansdale briefed upon?
14 Was he briefed upon Cuban intelligence activities within the
15 United States, or what did the Bureau --

16 Mr. Cotter. He was told, in other words, roughly what the
17 Bureau had developed in terms of how many Cuban sympathizers,
18 how many pro-Castro type people there were, what groups there
19 were. There were several active groups within the United States
20 where the focus was all concentrated, and I believe he would have
21 been briefed about those people who had been tentatively identified
22 as intelligence agents, and what -- the general nature of the
23 Bureau's coverage. The Bureau was getting a lot of what we
24 call positive intelligence. They were making every effort to
25 interview people who had just been in Cuba, or who had visited

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1 Cuba, or who had relatives and friends. We were getting information
2 out of Cuba in one form or another.

3 Mr. Wallach. And these are from persons for the most
4 part, refugees in Miami?

5 Mr. Cotter. Most of them are one shot type things, you
6 know, temporary type informants or sources. Some were more
7 steady than others. I mean, there were a few people who the
8 Bureau got a lot of information from over a long period of time.

9 Mr. Wallach. Did these people have friends and relatives
10 back in Cuba?

11 Mr. Cotter. Either that or business contacts.

12 As I recall, there were one or two people -- I know there
13 was one woman in New York that gave us a lot of information,
14 most of which was very flaky and at least in my opinion was of
15 very doubtful value. I know that a lot of the sources that
16 were reporting to the Bureau kept portraying the hardships that
17 were going on in Cuba, and they painted a picture in general that
18 Castro couldn't last, that they were running out of oil, they
19 were running out of rubber, they were just -- his regime just
20 would not survive, and that turned out to be false, of course.

21 Mr. Wallach. Was there any more specific type of
22 intelligence information that was provided in terms of what
23 Castro was actually doing, or what the military was doing and
24 things like that, or was it just general?

25 Mr. Cotter. Whatever was available, we took and funnelled

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1 out to the other interested agencies, CIA, State Department
2 basically, sometimes the military, if it seemed to have a
3 military interest.

4 Mr. Wallach. Were you ever informed or are you aware of
5 whether or not Lansdale ever met with anyone else?

6 Mr. Cotter. No, I don't know that. You mean in the Bureau?

7 Mr. Wallach. Yes.

8 Mr. Cotter. No, I don't know that he ever met with anyone else
9 in the Bureau.

10 Mr. Wallach. Do you recall an occasion on which Sterling
11 Donahoe went out to the Pentagon to meet with Lansdale?

12 Mr. Cotter. No.

13 Now that you mention Sterling Donahoe going out to the
14 Pentagon, though, I do recall one occasion where Donahoe went
15 out to the Pentagon, I'm sure it was the Pentagon, and took me
16 along with him to meet with some people from other agencies, and
17 I believe there was a CIA man there -- I don't recall his name.

18 Mr. Wallach. Does William Harvey ring a bell, big
19 neck, bulging eyes?

20 Mr. Cotter. The man I recall was quite short, squat,
21 not particularly big, and he talked up a storm all the time.
22 He talked in very stilted intelligence type language. I recall
23 that was the big thing that impressed me about the meeting. It
24 was all -- I mean, you had to almost interpret what he said.
25 know.

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1 Mr. Wallach. Was this meeting, if you recall, before or
2 after the occasion when Lansdale came to meet with Belmont?

3 Mr. Cotter. I don't recall that either. Probably before.
4 But it had no connection with Lansdale, and I don't recall it
5 having any overtones or any connections, whatever, with any
6 secret or clandestine-type operations or assassination attempts
7 or anything.

8 Mr. Wallach. We are talking about the meeting at the
9 Pentagon.

10 Mr. Cotter. Yeah.

11 Mr. Wallach. Now, were you briefed as to what the purpose
12 of that meeting was, or what was your understanding as to the
13 purpose of that meeting, if you can possibly recall?

14 Mr. Cotter. You know, over the years you attend so many
15 of these meetings, and they kind of get to be a big blur.

16 Mr. Wallach. Mr. Donahoe has testified that the subject of
17 assassinating Castro was brought up at that meeting.

18 Mr. Cotter. At a meeting.

19 Mr. Wallach. At a meeting at the Pentagon.

20 Mr. Cotter. At which I was present?

21 Mr. Wallach. He recalled someone else at the Bureau went
22 with him, but he could not recall who else it was.

23 Mr. Cotter. I did accompany him to this one meeting,
24 maybe it was the same.

25 Mr. Wallach. You testified you only went to one.

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1 Mr. Cotter. Well, maybe it is then. Was Harvey the man
2 he identified?

3 Mr. Wallach. He did not recall, but he recalled that
4 Lansdale was at least present for a time.

5 Mr. Cotter. Well, I am sorry to be so damned indefinite.
6 I don't recall the subject of assassination ever being mentioned
7 at that meeting.

8 Mr. Wallach. What was discussed at that meeting?

9 Mr. Cotter. I can't recall anything other than just
10 generalities about what the different agencies, what their
11 assets were.

12 Mr. Wallach. In Cuba?

13 Mr. Cotter. Regarding Cuba.

14 Mr. Wallach. What agencies were there? You said
15 CIA was there.

16 Mr. Cotter. I couldn't even identify those clearly. The
17 military -- you might say who in the military.

18 Mr. Wallach. No, I'm not.

19 Mr. Cotter. No. There was nobody there from State, as
20 I remember. I think there were just four or five people.

21 Mr. Wallach. You don't remember the names of anyone.

22 Mr. Cotter. No, and I don't think even if you told me
23 their names, that I could recall it.

24 Mr. Wallach. Would you have prepared, in all likelihood,
25 a memorandum on the meeting?

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1 Mr. Cotter. I would think so, just based on the way we
2 operated, yes. I don't recall it specifically.

3 I remember Donahoe and I on the way back talking about
4 this CIA fellow's style of speech. It was so far out in terms of
5 you know, he had his own --

6 Mr. Wallach. Mr. Donahoe specifically recalled -- and I'm
7 paraphrasing his testimony, and of course, I don't have it here
8 before me, to the effect that the subject of using the Mafia
9 to assassinate -- he didn't say the word assassinate was used --
10 but to get rid of Castro was brought up, and he sort of said
11 how inappropriate this would be, et cetera, et cetera.

12 You don't recall that?

13 Mr. Cotter. No, I don't recall it, but it certainly was
14 logical. I know the Bureau, that would be the Bureau's reaction
15 and if it was brought up, I am sure it wasn't brought up by
16 anybody from the Bureau, or it's possible it was brought up. I
17 mean, there were so many things mentioned, you know, some halfwa
18 in jest and some -- well, not in jest, but sort of -- at any
19 kind of a brainstorming session I'm sure a lot of things were
20 mentioned that -- a hell of a lot of thought has to be given
21 to.

22 Mr. Wallach. It's Donahoe's recollection that this meeting
23 took place after he had been or become Belmont's number one man,
24 the meeting at the Pentagon, and that he thought that he took
25 someone from the section with him.

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1 Mr. Cotter. I would have been a logical one to take, if not
2 the logical one, either me or Nasca.

3 Mr. Wallach. Getting back to the other meeting that Lansdale
4 had with Belmont and the others at the FBI offices, do you recall
5 whether Belmont mentioned any names within the Mafia or
6 organized crime? Did he mention Giancana, Rosselli, or why
7 don't you hire one of those fellows?

8 Mr. Cotter. No. I would be pretty sure of that because
9 the only mention made of assassination or Mafia or anything
10 like that was this one little occasion I told you that took place
11 toward the end of the meeting, and Belmont, he had sort of -- he
12 was sort of a whimsical character, and I'm sure he intended
13 this just as a joke, and I know that as soon as Lansdale
14 evinced interest, Belmont just scrambled to make it clear
15 that he was only kidding. He didn't, you know, he had no -- and
16 therefore Belmont would never -- I'm sure he didn't bring out
17 any specifics whatsoever.

18 Mr. Wallach. Aside from those two meetings we discussed --

19 Mr. Cotter. Yes.

20 Mr. Wallach. Were you at any time involved in, prior to
21 the assassination, in any meetings with any persons discussing
22 other than the Bureau's counterespionage activities vis-a-vis
23 Cuba, in other words, you are aware that, even if the knowledge
24 came later, that the government was running what they called
25 Operation MONGOOSE, the CIA was in paramilitary operations against

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1 Cuba. Were you ever involved in any of those type meetings that
2 you recall?

3 Mr. Cotter. I was never in any meetings. The Bureau would
4 get information from time to time about the CIA. Before the Bay
5 of Pigs took place, for example, we did occasionally get informa-
6 tion about the CIA preparations or about the anti-Castro movement,
7 what they were doing, or the fact that they were training in
8 Mexico, I believe, right?

9 Mr. Wallach. Uh-huh.

10 Mr. Cotter. And occasionally the Bureau would get some
11 tidbit of information that we think might be of interest to
12 CIA, some rumor of a penetration by Castro, of an activity or
13 something like that.

14 Mr. Wallach. I think they might have been training in
15 Guatemala.

16 Mr. Cotter. Guatemala, you're right, yes.

17 Mr. Wallach. But at that time, to the best of your
18 knowledge --

19 Mr. Cotter. But I didn't attend any strategy meetings,
20 either in or outside of the Bureau, with regard to paramilitary
21 operations or anything related.

22 Mr. Wallach. In 1963 do you know whether or not the Bureau
23 had any sources, and by that I mean informants, assets, whatever
24 term you want to use, within the Cuban diplomatic establishment
25 in Mexico City, the Cuban consulate?

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1 Do you remember?

2 Mr. Cotter. I don't recall any. It is possible that if
3 such a source existed, he would have been operated by the Legal
4 Attache in Mexico City. And it's possible he did have one. I
5 doubt it. I never saw any information that showed any inside
6 information coming out of Mexico.

7 Mr. Wallach. Did the Bureau at that time run operations
8 against the Cubans out of Mexico City?

9 Mr. Cotter. Run operations, you mean have the Legal
10 Attache directing operations against Cubans?

11 Mr. Wallach. Right.

12 Mr. Cotter. I don't know of any.

13 Mr. Wallach. In other words, something the SAC would do
14 up in New York, for examples.

15 Mr. Cotter. Something the Legal Attache would organize
16 to get information from the Cubans.

17 Mr. Wallach. Right.

18 Mr. Cotter. No, I'm not aware of anything like that.

19 Mr. Wallach. You were aware that they were getting information
20 from CIA though.

21 Mr. Cotter. In general, yes. Yeah, the CIA, I know, had.
22 I believe they had -- I may have this wrong -- CIA had certain
23 types of coverage on the Cuban embassy. They may have had
24 photographic coverage, a lookout or something like that, and they
25 possibly had telephone coverage.

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1 Mr. Wallach. We've gotten into that because that came up
2 in the Oswald case, but do you know whether the Bureau had any
3 coverage itself?

4 Mr. Cotter. Not to my knowledge. I would say no, based on
5 what I -- I don't know of any.

6 Mr. Wallach. At the time of the assassination, if you can
7 recollect for us what you recall happening and your involvement
8 at the Bureau --

9 Mr. Cotter. Yeah. Well, at the time of the assassination,
10 Oswald was identified, of course, immediately, and it turned
11 out that Oswald was the subject of a dual-captioned case. In
12 other words, he was of interest to both the Soviet section, which
13 had the prime investigation of Oswald, Oswald having defected
14 to the Soviet Union, or he was a repatriot, and the Soviet
15 section which was then known as the Espionage Section had a
16 case going on him.

17 Mr. Wallach. That was Branigan's section?

18 Mr. Cotter. Branigan's section.

19 And I believe the case at that time was assigned to Bert
20 Turner.

21 Mr. Wallach. He was headquarters supervisor.

22 Mr. Cotter. Yeah. But at the same time, Castro had been
23 involved in -- with the Fair Play for Cuba --

24 Mr. Wallach. You mean Oswald had been involved.

25 Mr. Cotter. Excuse me, Oswald had been involved with the

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1 Fair Play for Cuba Committee in New Orleans, and therefore the
2 case, a corollary interest held by our section, Nationalities
3 Intelligence, and by our particular supervisor, was Lambert
4 Anderson, who was supervising the Cuban aspects of it.

5 And so some of the mail that would come in under Oswald's
6 name would be routed to Nationalities Intelligence whenever there
7 was a possible Cuban interest.

8 Mr. Wallach. Mr. Anderson, Lambert Anderson, fairly
9 familiar with Cuban operations, and I use that term loosely, in
10 general, was he familiar with Cuba, or was he just someone
11 doing the job?

12 Mr. Cotter. He was fairly new at the time, and young. He
13 had only come into the Bureau within the past year, I think, a
14 year or two I think maybe. I wouldn't consider him an expert
15 on Cuba, but he did have this case.

16 Mr. Wallach. Well, let me ask two questions; then I'll
17 go back to my question as to what happened on the day of the
18 Assassination.

19 Did the Bureau have any high level sources within the Fair
20 Play for Cuba Committee, the FPCC?

21 Mr. Cotter. I guess the answer to that would be no. Actually
22 the Fair Play for Cuba Committee for a time was assigned to
23 when it first got started.

24 Mr. Wallach. Have you heard the name Vincent Lee?

25 Mr. Cotter. Vincent Lee.

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1 Mr. Wallach. I believe he was the president of it at the
2 time of the assassination, or maybe Theodore Lee. Maybe I'm
3 confused.

4 Mr. Cotter. Well, the big gun in the Fair Play for Cuba
5 Committee, I know when I had it, was a guy by the name of Tabor,
6 Robert Tabor, and there was a fellow named Gibson. Are you
7 familiar with Gibson's name?

8 Mr. Wallach. Yeah, Gibson left and went over to Europe
9 somewhere.

10 Mr. Cotter. Yeah. Well, Gibson was ⁰⁸ a source, or was/
11 attempted to be operated as a source by the CIA. I know
12 CIA contacted Gibson, and he was sort of a half-baked source
13 for CIA I think.

14 Mr. Wallach. Do you know whether the Bureau had any high
15 level -- I think your answer was no, they did not have any
16 high level sources.

17 Mr. Cotter. No, we didn't have any high level sources.

18 Mr. Wallach. Do you know if the CIA did at the time
19 of the assassination?

20 Mr. Cotter. ²⁴ Other than Gibson, I don't know of any person
21 nor Gibson. I think by this time Gibson was pretty suspect
22 in the radical circles.

23 Mr. Wallach. I think that the name of the person I am
24 thinking of is V. T. Lee.

25 Mr. Cotter. I do remember the two principal authors.

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1 Tabor was one, and there was another one. It was possible it
2 was Lee.

3 Mr. Wallach. Vincent T. Lee was in the New York Office.

4 Mr. Cotter. He was one of the chief officers of the Fair
5 Play for Cuba Committee.

6 Mr. Wallach. I think he was president.

7 Mr. Cotter. Well, it's possible, but he wasn't a source.

8 Mr. Wallach. Did you ever hear that he was a CIA man?

9 Mr. Cotter. Uh-huh. It would surprise me if he was.

10 Mr. Wallach. We have some documentation on what I would
11 call a mild COINTELPRO against the Fair Play for Cuba Committee.

12 Mr. Cotter. That's true.

13 As a matter of fact, I remember handling some of the mail
14 on that. The Bureau did try to promote some dissension within
15 the Fair Play for Cuba Committee because both the CP, the
16 Communist Party, and the Socialist Workers Party were strenuously
17 striving to get control of this, and the Bureau was trying to
18 promote this rivalry, and the New York Office, with Bureau
19 headquarters approval, and perhaps even at our direction -- I
20 wouldn't swear who instigated the idea -- but we did have an
21 anonymous letter prepared directed -- I forget which faction,
22 directed it against the other, but it was an effort to exploit
23 this ill-feeling, and I think it centered around in particular
24 some woman named Green, Bertha Green or something like that, who
25 we tried to make something of the fact that she was trying to

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1 use the Fair Play for Cuba Committee, not for its own best
2 interests, but for the interests of the SWP.

3 Mr. Wallach. Do you recall any other COINTELPRO type
4 efforts against the FPCC except that one?

5 Mr. Cotter. No, that's the only one.

6 Mr. Wallach. Are you aware that the CIA was running extensive
7 COINTELPRO type operations against the Fair Play for Cuba
8 Committee?

9 Mr. Cotter. No. It doesn't surprise me, but I didn't
10 know of any.

11 Mr. Wallach. Turning back, now, to --

12 Mr. Cotter. The Fair Play for Cuba Committee, I might add,
13 did come upon -- I mean, there was a lot of ill-feeling among
14 the top leaders, and it did become ineffective because of
15 leadership rivalries, and I know the Bureau, whether rightly
16 or wrongly, we always felt we had something to do with this
17 by this little COINTELPRO effort.

18 Mr. Wallach. Let me ask you this. Going to the visit that
19 Oswald made to Mexico City.

20 Mr. Cotter. Right.

21 Mr. Wallach. Where he was in contact with the Soviet and
22 Cuban diplomatic establishments.

23 Mr. Cotter. Right.

24 Mr. Wallach. When there was a correspondence from the
25 CIA, I guess, from the Legat which indicated that Oswald was

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1 in contact with these establishments, and that he in fact, in
2 the Soviet establishment had been in contact with someone named
3 Kostikov, does that mean anything to you?

4 Mr. Cotter. No, I don't remember any names. The only thing
5 I recall about that is there were a couple of pieces of mail,
6 I recall only one specifically, which came across my desk when
7 I was number one man. It was one of these things that was
8 captioned Oswald ISR and maybe IRS-Cuba, and it mentioned the
9 fact that Oswald had been in Mexico City and had been in touch
10 with the Soviet and Cuban embassies, and it was being routed
11 to Nationalities Intelligence because of the Cuban contact, and
12 I just remember seeing that piece of mail. It was only a few
13 days before the assassination. That's why it registered with
14 me.

15 Mr. Wallach. Did the DGI at that time have an assassination
16 capability in the United States?

17 Mr. Cotter. You're talking about Cuban intelligence?

18 Mr. Wallach. Yeah.

19 Mr. Cotter. It would be strictly speculative. I mean, we
20 didn't have any hard information.

21 Mr. Wallach. I think we were told at a briefing that there
22 was one operation -- I don't know the date. It may have been
23 in the early '60s, at least no earlier than '62, later, where
24 the DGI was running out of New York assassination attempts against
25 some of the Anti-Castro leaders.

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1 Do you have any recollection of that?

2 Mr. Cotter. No, I don't recall any, you know, specific
3 cases that the Bureau got involved in where we were exploring
4 that particular type thing. I mean, we were generally aware,
5 you know, just in terms of potential, but I don't recall any par-
6 ticular cases or information regarding Cuba, and efforts to
7 assassinate in the United States.

8 Mr. Wallach. All right, turning to the time of the
9 assassination, do you recall what was your involvement in any
10 investigation, what do you remember observing, whether there
11 were meetings or anything like that going on?

12 Mr. Cotter. Meetings, you're talking about within the
13 Bureau?

14 Mr. Wallach. To decide what investigative techniques --
15 I'm sorry, to decide on what investigative strategy would be used
16 in the investigation of the assassination of President Kennedy?

17 Mr. Cotter. I did not attend any policy meetings within
18 the Bureau on that type of thing.

19 Mr. Wallach. Were you ever asked --

20 Mr. Cotter. The only thing I may have done, and I'm
21 sure everybody in the Domestic Intelligence in one part or
22 another got involved in this case helping out, doing name
23 checks or something, or helping with memos, and I am sure that
24 along the way I probably -- I do remember helping Stokes and
25 Lenihan handle certain projects, mostly file reviews, but I

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1 certainly, I know I wasn't present at any meetings that would
2 have been held; that would have been focused in the Espionage
3 Section.

4 Mr. Wallach. Were there ever any meetings that you recall
5 where there were discussions as to whether or not the Cubans had
6 been involved in the assassination of President Kennedy?

7 Mr. Cotter. No. I don't recall at all. I would say no.

8 Mr. Wallach. Do you know if that possibility was investi-
9 gated?

10 Mr. Cotter. Well, I can't even say that for sure, no, I
11 can't.

12 Mr. Wallach. We have here an article that was picked up
13 by the New Orleans Times-Picayune on September 9, 1963, which
14 I think has recently been in the press again. I will read a
15 portion of it to you. It says "Prime Minister Fidel Castro
16 turned up today at a reception at the Brazilian Embassy in
17 Havana and submitted to an impromptu interview by Associated
18 Press Correspondent Daniel Arthur."

19 Now, we have been told by CIA experts that Castro giving
20 an interview at that time was somewhat unusual.

21 Would you agree with that?

22 Mr. Cotter. Yes.

23 Mr. Wallach. And it was also unusual that he would go to
24 a reception at the Brazilian embassy.

25 Mr. Cotter. What's the date here?

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1 Mr. Wallach. September 9, 1963.

2 Mr. Cotter. Uh-huh.

3 Mr. Wallach. And the first paragraph of the article says,
4 "Prime Minister Castro said Saturday night U.S. leaders would
5 be in danger if they helped in any attempt to do away with
6 leaders of Cuba." Then it goes on from there.

7 Do you recall ever seeing that article or hearing that
8 statement from Castro?

9 Mr. Cotter. No, I don't. In retrospect that certainly
10 looks like a pointed signal, doesn't it.

11 Mr. Wallach. It does, and for reasons of the Brazilian
12 Embassy, does take on significance because some of the Brazilian
13 contacts were being made.

14 Was anything brought to your attention that any attempts
15 were being made on Castro at that time?

16 Mr. Cotter. No.

17 Mr. Wallach. You see, what I'm trying to do is make a
18 distinction between the blustery statements that Castro was
19 making generally about how everybody was trying to get rid
20 of him, and a specific threat against the President, and he
21 continues on in saying "We are prepared to fight them and answer
22 in kind. United States leaders should think that if they are
23 aiding terrorist plans to eliminate Cuban leaders, they themselves
24 will not be safe."

25 Now, copies of this -- in fact, a copy of this article, is

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1 from the New Orleans Times-Picayune, but the same statements
2 were sent up by Clark Anderson I think on the 27th or 28th of
3 November, and he thought there was something to them.

4 Do you recall any of this ever being brought to your
5 attention?

6 Mr. Cotter: No, I don't.

7 Mr. Wallach. Do you recall at any time ever seeing any
8 memorandums or instructions that Cuban sources be contacted to
9 see if there was any Cuban involvement in the assassination of
10 President Kennedy?

11 Mr. Cotter. Well, that's what I was running through my
12 mind when you read that article. If it had come to our attention,
13 if it had any -- you know, if this article had been routed to
14 us, that would have been a typical reaction by headquarters, to
15 instruct the key field offices handling Cuban matters to alert
16 their sources and be aware, you know, be particularly aware of
17 anything that might indicate an assassination attempt, but there
18 was no such communication, to my knowledge, ever sent out from
19 headquarters.

20 Mr. Wallach. If they were sent out, in all likelihood you
21 probably would have known about it?

22 Mr. Cotter. Yes, I think I would have. It's -- that would
23 have been a normal way of handling this kind of thing.

24 Mr. Wallach. Do you know who reached a decision as to the
25 investigation that would be conducted because from the document.

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1 we reviewed, it appeared that no one ever -- talking figuratively --
2 ever pressed the button at the Bureau saying we've got to
3 investigate the possibility of whether Cuba, or there was
4 Cuban involvement in the assassination of President Kennedy.

5 Do you know who made the decision really not to push that
6 button?

7 Mr. Cotter. No, I don't.

8 Mr. Wallach. Would you agree that the button really wasn't
9 pushed?

10 Mr. Cotter. Well, yeah. In retrospect, I -- there was
11 very little emphasis on that from what I saw on the
12 investigating possible Cuban involvement.

13 Mr. Wallach. What was the emphasis on?

14 Mr. Cotter. Well, you'd have to talk to the fellows that
15 were running the case, but, I mean, the emphasis was highly
16 diverted. They were investigating painstakingly every damned
17 angle they could think of, but this particular phase, I don't
18 recall any great stress being placed on it, or any stress at
19 all, actually.

20 Mr. Wallach. Do you know why?

21 I mean, here we have a situation where the documents reflect
22 that senior Bureau officials were aware of CIA attempts against
23 Castro, and a specific Castro threat back, and there was some
24 other additional information.

25 Mr. Cotter. Well, it looks like two and two today, but

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1 apparently it didn't look like two and two then. They just
2 didn't put it together, or I am not aware of it if they did.

3 Mr. Wallach. You're not aware one way or another if they
4 did put it together and made a decision not to follow it up?

5 Mr. Cotter. Yes, that's true, or maybe they did follow it
6 up.

7 But whatever, it did not come to my attention.

8 Mr. Wallach. I showed you before a copy of a cablegram
9 dated 11/25/63 to the Director from Legat, Mexico City. It is
10 No. 182 and 183. The paragraph on the fourth page, the bottom
11 paragraph, says, "Ambassador here feels Soviets much too
12 sophisticated to participated in direction of assassination of
13 President by subject, but thinks Cubans stupid enough to have
14 participated in such direction, even to extent of hiring subject.
15 If this be the case, it would appear likely that contract would
16 have been made with subject in U.S. and purpose of his trip
17 to Mexico was to set up a getaway route. Bureau may desire to
18 give consideration to polling all Cuban sources in U.S. in
19 effort to confirm or refute this theory." And then as I showed
20 you this document before, there is a line drawn to that portion
21 of the document which says, "give consideration to polling
22 all Cuban sources," and then I think you said it was your
23 handwriting: "Not desirable. Would serve to promote rumors."

24 I wonder if you recall anything about that.

25 Mr. Cotter. I don't recall it now, but that is definitely

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1 my handwriting, yes.

2 I don't recall making that comment or reading this particular
3 communication, but it is my handwriting.

4 Mr. Wallach. Do you recall ever being told that on the
5 day of the assassination a Cubana airliner with no passengers
6 aboard waited five hours in Mexico City and flew to Havana?

7 Mr. Cotter. Come again. I missed that.

8 Mr. Wallach. Were you ever made aware of any unusual
9 Cuban airlines activity following the assassination of President
10 Kennedy from Mexico City to Havana?

11 Mr. Cotter. No.

12 Mr. Wallach. Were you ever aware that one known Cuban
13 traveled from Tampa at the time the President was there, and
14 then ended up in Mexico City, and was the only passenger on a
15 Cubana Airlines flight from Mexico City to Cuba some two or
16 three days after the assassination?

17 Mr. Cotter. No, I don't have any recall on that either.

18 Mr. Wallach. Were you ever informed of any conversations
19 or any intelligence information that the CIA picked up from its
20 intercepts in Mexico City that seemed unusual about the Cuban
21 embassy or Cuban consulate there?

22 Mr. Cotter. If I had, it has slipped my memory. I don't
23 recall it now.

24 There was a vast amount of mail coming in from a lot of
25 different sources, and you know, it is possible something was

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1 included, but I don't recall it today.

2 Mr. Wallach. Do you recall that there was a point in time
3 when there was a Nicaraguan who was alleging that Oswald had
4 received \$6500 in cash at the Cuban embassy?

5 I'll show you a memo here -- I don't think there's any
6 indication that it went to you.

7 Mr. Cotter. I do not recall this, no.

8 Mr. Wallach. Do you recall any discussions --

9 Mr. Cotter. Incidentally, on reviewing this cablegram
10 from Mexico that you just showed me where I made this written
11 comment about not desirable to poll all Cuban sources in the
12 U.S., I have just been thinking about it. I think I would make
13 the same decision today. In other words, based on my knowledge
14 of what was available to the Bureau in terms of sources in the
15 U.S. and so forth, I don't think it would have been wise to
16 just go out on a shotgun type approach and approach 100 dif-
17 ferent people, or 50 or whatever it might be, to ask them for
18 information which they would not have been in a position to have.
19 In other words, you know, the Bureau just didn't -- if we had
20 one or two real highly placed sources who might have been
21 privy to this type of sensitive information, I think it would
22 have been a good idea, but the Bureau didn't have those kinds
23 of sources in the U.S.

24 Mr. Wallach. Well, to the extent of your knowledge, it
25 didn't.

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1 Mr. Cotter. That's true.

2 Mr. Wallach. But at least in the assassination attempts
3 we documented, they had people close enough to Castro to kill
4 him.

5 Mr. Cotter. The Bureau did, you say?

6 Mr. Wallach. No, but the Bureau was aware that there
7 were persons in the United States, be it Mafia figures or
8 whomever, that had high enough level ties.

9 Mr. Cotter. Well, this suggests all Cuban sources. That
10 means all FBI sources.

11 Mr. Wallach. Well, do you know if any Cuban sources
12 were polled?

13 Mr. Cotter. No.

14 Mr. Wallach. Do you know why?

15 Mr. Cotter. When you say -- you mean FBI assets, informants,
16 sources of information, whatever we might have had?

17 Mr. Wallach. Right.

18 Mr. Cotter. No, I don't know that anybody was ever
19 polled on the theory that the Cuban embassy in Mexico might
20 have directed or been involved in the assassination.

21 Mr. Wallach. Well, not specifically whether there was
22 any Cuban involvement in the assassination.

23 Mr. Cotter. I don't recall. It's possible that was done,
24 but I don't recall it being done.

25 I think it is likely that was done, as a matter of fact,

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1 but I don't recall the details.

2 Mr. Wallach. I showed you this cablegram before which I
3 read to you that portion of it which says the ambassador here
4 feels Soviets much too sophisticated to participate in direction
5 of assassination of President, by subject, but thinks Cubans
6 stupid enough to have participated in such direction, even to
7 extent of hiring subject.

8 Mr. Cotter. Yeah.

9 Mr. Wallach. All right, now, just taking that for a
10 second, do you recall any discussions within the Bureau as to
11 who was directing the investigation in Mexico City? Was it
12 the Bureau's responsibility or was it CIA's responsibility,
13 or State Department's, or whose?

14 Mr. Cotter. I don't think I should really comment on that
15 because this would have been something worked out in Branigan's
16 section, or at the Division level. It would not have had
17 anything to do -- I would not have been involved in any
18 such discussions or decisions.

19 So I don't know. I presume the Bureau did have an agreement
20 with CIA as to what portions we would handle and what portions
21 we wouldn't. But I don't know how that agreement transpired.

22 Mr. Wallach. Would any investigation in Mexico City of
23 any possible Cuban involvement have been run out of your
24 section?

25 Mr. Cotter. If the Bureau was involved in exploring a

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1 Cuban involvement in the assassination, it would have almost
2 certainly been run out of our section, yes.

3 Mr. Wallach. Do you know of any such investigation?

4 Mr. Cotter. No, no I don't.

5 Mr. Wallach. Did you have any contact at all, or did you
6 respond to any requests at all from the Warren Commission? Do
7 you recall working on any of their requests? I'm not asking
8 you specifically which one.

9 Mr. Cotter. Yeah.

10 I think I probably did, but I don't recall particularly.
11 I know I had some matters about the Warren Commission came up
12 long after the assassination. I remember just within the
13 last year, a year or two prior to the time I retired from the
14 FBI, the matter came up involving the Warren Commission which
15 I handled, it was sort of a review of bureau files mostly.

16 Mr. Wallach. What was that matter?

17 Mr. Cotter. This was a -- let me recall now, particular
18 what -- it had to do with a rumor that Oswald had been a bona
19 informant, and the reason I got involved was because someone
20 wanted to declassify that portion of the Warren Commission report.
21 It had been classified top secret, and the question had
22 arisen by somebody -- offhand I really don't recall who --
23 as to whether it could be declassified and released, and I
24 was at that time the Bureau's classification officer, so they
25 sent it to me to handle. So I do remember reviewing the files

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1 to see what documents were involved, and so forth, and as
2 I recall, we decided to declassify it. It was a rumor that had
3 originated with some newspaperman in Texas, and it had been
4 relayed through the Attorney General of Texas, as I recall, a
5 fellow by the name of Wagner.

6 Mr. Wallach. Wagner Carr.

7 Mr. Cotter. Wagner Carr, yeah.

8 Mr. Wallach. That was, I think, in early '64.

9 Mr. Cotter. Yeah, but at the time I reviewed it, this
10 was like '74.

11 Mr. Wallach. Did you at any time, prior to the public
12 disclosure, have any knowledge that Oswald had left a note
13 at the Dallas field office of the FBI before the assassination?

14 Mr. Cotter. No. The first I learned about that was in
15 the newspapers.

16 Mr. Wallach. Where was Stokes? Is it John Stokes?

17 Mr. Cotter. John Stokes.

18 Mr. Wallach. What was his position back in '63?

19 Mr. Cotter. He was a supervisor in the espionage section,
20 one of the better ones, more experienced ones.

21 Mr. Wallach. Which area did he handle?

22 Mr. Cotter. I don't know specifically. I know he handled
23 Soviet cases.

24 Mr. Wallach. Soviet cases?

25 Mr. Cotter. No, one phase. No, they broke them down, and

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1 know, one fellow would handle repatriots, and somebody else
2 would handle immigrants, and somebody else would handle embassy
3 or U.N. mission and so forth. Stokes may not have been assigned
4 this type of case originally, but he may have been put on it
5 because he was considered a top notch agent.

6 (Pause)

7 Mr. Wallach. Do you recall generally any discussions within
8 the Bureau about the Warren Commission and how it was
9 perceived?

10 I might state for the record that Mr. Hoover's handwritten
11 comments make it fairly clear that he viewed the Warren
12 Commission as an adversary, and he didn't like the idea of
13 anyone --

14 Mr. Cotter. Well, you see, that's a question. I don't
15 have any official information. I can't give you any hard
16 information. This type of thing would have been talked about
17 amongst supervisors and officials of our division. I am sure
18 that I engaged, you know, that I either took part in or listened
19 to conversations on the subject. I was generally aware of the
20 fact that Mr. Hoover regarded them with a great deal of
21 wariness and skepticism, and it was my general impression,
22 based on what I saw and heard, that he wanted to treat them at
23 arm's length and very officially, you know, and not get too
24 chummy, as it were.

25 But I don't know of any particular disputes. The Bureau.

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1 relations with several agencies were in the same category,
2 you know, in other words, our relations with the CIA were sort
3 of in that category. They were -- at least at Mr. Hoover's
4 level. He treated them with reservations, let's say. He was
5 very leery that the Bureau's interest would be damaged and so
6 forth.

7 Mr. Wallach. Do you recall at some point after the assass-
8 nation Mr. Hoover or the Bureau stated that Oswald was the
9 assassin and that he acted alone?

10 Mr. Cotter. How the Bureau did that, or when they did
11 that?

12 Mr. Wallach. Do you recall that happening?

13 Mr. Cotter. I don't recall any particulars, no.

14 Mr. Wallach. Have you ever heard the phrase "don't embarrass
15 the Bureau"?

16 Mr. Cotter. Oh, yes, yes. It's halfway a joke.

17 Mr. Wallach. Well, in a lot of these memoranda, Mr. Hoover
18 refers to the actions of the agents involving the Oswald
19 matter as having embarrassed the Bureau, saying that if they
20 had been more diligent, etc., they would have been able to
21 prevent that.

22 Mr. Cotter. It was an underlying theme in your Bureau
23 career that anything that embarrassed the Bureau you were apt
24 to get really highly disciplined on because of Mr. Hoover's
25 attitude.

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1 Mr. Wallach. Let me ask you a question, and I don't want
2 you to speculate, but if you are aware of any similar circum-
3 stances, or have been told about certain statements made by
4 Mr. Hoover that later had to be supported by official research,
5 etc., and the Bureau, for example -- that one time, for example
6 he came up to the Hill and said the cost of crime was \$11
7 million or \$22 million, and that had to be documented. But in
8 any event, what I'm trying to get at is the FBI had a security
9 case on Lee Harvey Oswald prior to the assassination.

10 Mr. Cotter. Right.

11 Mr. Wallach. And had interviewed him on at least two
12 occasions.

13 Mr. Cotter. Yeah.

14 Mr. Wallach. And had other information on him.

15 Now, was there any discussion that you are aware of as
16 to whether or not the Bureau would be blamed for the assassina-
17 tion of President Kennedy, or B, if the investigation turned
18 up other information on Oswald that the Bureau itself had not
19 uncovered about any contacts that he may have had with the
20 Soviets or with the Cubans, that this would put the Bureau
21 a fairly bad light?

22 Do you recall any discussions?

23 Mr. Cotter. No, I don't recall anything along that line.
24 No. I don't recall anything by either the people in the
25 Intelligence Division or otherwise, where any great amount.

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1 thought was given, or discussion regarding the Bureau's
2 culpability in the thing. I mean, I know there was a big
3 discussion and an inspection which took place, and some people
4 got censured, and burned.

5 Mr. Wallach. That was Gale's inspection?

6 Mr. Cotter. Yeah, because of the fact that in retrospect
7 they were deemed not to have acted properly or thoroughly
8 enough, and there was a lot of discussion about whether they
9 were really guilty of anything remiss. I know that throughout
10 the Bureau there was some sympathy for the agents who had
11 been, at least many of the agents who were burned because it
12 was felt that -- and I shared this feeling -- that some of
13 them were, or had done what was logical and everything, but
14 they were being punished because of the bad publicity rather
15 than because of any innate deficiency on their part.

16 For example, there was, I think one of the big things
17 centered around the fact that whether Oswald was on the so-called
18 security index, a big issue was made about that.

19 Mr. Wallach. Excuse me for just a second.

20 (Pause)

21 Mr. Cotter. I think one of the central things that
22 Gale was looking into when he was ordered to review this
23 thing, to fix responsibility and whatnot, was whether Oswald
24 was on the Security Index or why he had not been recommended
25 for the Security Index. And again, you are familiar with all

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1 that was. It was a list of people who would be considered
2 dangerous in times of an emergency.

3 Mr. Wallach. I understand, but it is also my understanding
4 also that under the dissemination procedures at that time, that
5 that would not have resulted in dissemination to the Secret
6 Service.

7 Let me -- I have not myself recently looked at these
8 documents, Mr. Cotter, so let me take a look at them with you,
9 and I want you to understand that most of the things we have
10 talked about here today are still classified in one form or
11 another, and I hope you will treat them as such.

12 Mr. Cotter. I certainly will.

13 Mr. Wallach. This involves an individual named Gilberto
14 Lopez Rodriguez, and I will ask you to take a look at that
15 document.

16 (The Witness reads the document.)

17 Mr. Cotter. Okay.

18 Mr. Wallach. Now I will ask you to see this memorandum.

19 (The Witness reads the document.)

20 Mr. Cotter. Uh-huh.

21 Mr. Wallach. Do you recall at any time that name coming
22 to your attention, or the fact that he had been the only
23 passenger on the plane?

24 Mr. Cotter. I do not recall it, no.

25 Mr. Wallach. Where is John Stokes now, do you know?

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1 Mr. Cotter. I don't know that either, no.

2 I think he retired in the late 50s and the last I heard
3 of him he had not -- this is several years after he had
4 retired him. He was fully retired. In other words, he never
5 went back to work.

6 Mr. Wallach. Right.

7 Mr. Cotter. It certainly is interesting, isn't it.

8 Mr. Wallach. Do you recall -- we do have some other
9 documents that I'm not going to show them to you, where in
10 essence the Bureau found out some very strange things about him
11 and then said, well, there's nothing we can do about it because
12 he is in Cuba.

13 Mr. Cotter. About Lopez?

14 Mr. Wallach. Yes. And the intelligence information
15 they received from CIA was that he was playing dominoes in
16 Cuba, which seems fairly strange under the Castro regime, you
17 will admit.

18 Mr. Cotter. Well, didn't the Bureau conduct inquiries
19 in the U.S. about his background and who he was?

20 Mr. Wallach. Yes, and they found out that he had come
21 over from Cuba, I think recently before, a couple of years
22 before, a year or so before the assassination, was involved
23 certain FPCC activities in the Tampa chapter, was allegedly
24 awaiting -- and again I'm going on my memory of these documents
25 of about a month or so ago -- waiting for a phone call from

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1 Cuba from one of his relatives, and he was going to go back to
2 Cuba, and this phone call was coming at about the time the
3 President himself was visiting the Tampa region, and then going
4 down to Miami to address the Cuban refugees down there, and he
5 went over to Dallas, and subsequently he did receive a phone
6 call, and even though he was penniless, he managed to end up in
7 Mexico City, and was the only passenger on a Cubana airlines
8 flight, an unscheduled flight from Mexico City to Cuba.

9 Mr. Cotter. Well, that has all the earmarks of being
10 highly -- what -- do you happen to know who in the Bureau
11 conducted these inquiries?

12 Mr. Wallach. Stokes, I think, was the special supervisor.
13 I guess. Yeah.

14 Mr. Cotter. I forget, was that captioned IS, Cuba? or
15 ISR?

16 Mr. Wallach. IS, Cuba.

17 Mr. Cotter. Yeah. A copy went to Wannall I noticed.

18 Mr. Wallach. I realize again this is hindsight, but for
19 example, the records don't show that Marina Oswald was ever
20 shown a picture of Lopez, which the Bureau has, or even asked
21 if she'd ever seen the guy before.

22 Mr. Cotter. Well, from what you've shown me, it looks
23 like it deserved a lot of investigation.

24 Mr. Wallach. Did you ever talk to Sullivan or anyone
25 else from the Domestic Intelligence Division about why they had

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1 decided on the investigative strategy they decided on?

2 Mr. Cotter. No. As I say, I wasn't involved in that
3 phase of it.

4 Mr. Wallach. I'll read you the portion of the report.
5 This is from one of the people that was interviewed.

6 There was talk about Lopez having been at his residence
7 sometime waiting for a telephone call from Cuba which was very
8 important. It was understood it was all dependent upon his
9 getting the "go ahead order" for him to leave the United
10 States. He indicated he had been refused travel back to his
11 native Cuba before, and it also goes on into the fact that he
12 was totally penniless, in fact, he owed people money. So it
13 is neither here nor there if you don't remember his name.

14 Mr. Cotter. No.

15 Mr. Wallach. One other, do you recall anytime after the
16 Warren Commission ended its inquiry that there were any reviews
17 of the FBI's investigation of the assassination, general review?

18 Mr. Cotter. No, I don't have any information along that
19 line.

20 Mr. Wallach. You are aware that the case was kept
21 open.

22 Mr. Cotter. I am sure it was. It is probably still
23 open today, isn't it?

24 Mr. Wallach. Where were you or what was your position
25 in February of 1967?

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1 Mr. Cotter. '67, I was section chief of Nationalities
2 Intelligence, which had Cuban matters.

3 Mr. Wallach. I'm going to give you a brief factual
4 history of an event that transpired in 1967, and then show you
5 one or two documents that related to it.

6 In February 1967 it was called to the Bureau's attention
7 that -- well, I'll give you the exact factual history --
8 Drew Pearson talked with a lawyer named Edward Pierpoint
9 Morgan, whose name you may have heard of.

10 Mr. Cotter. I've heard of him.

11 Mr. Wallach. He was a former agent at one time, I believe
12 in the late '40s.

13 Mr. Cotter. Right.

14 Mr. Wallach. And Pearson went to the Chief Justice Warren
15 and told him that Morgan had a client, and I am quoting now
16 from a letter from Rowley, who was head of the Secret Service,
17 to Mr. Hoover, dated February 13, 1967, who was in the underworld
18 and according to him, that Bobby Kennedy had organized a group
19 that went to Cuba to kill Castro, that all were killed or
20 imprisoned except one person who escaped, and subsequently
21 Castro decided to utilize the same procedure to kill President
22 Kennedy, and that he hired Oswald to do the job.

23 In any event, what happened after that was that the Chief
24 Justice advised Pearson to have Morgan go see the Bureau,
25 Morgan said he couldn't because he wasn't on good terms with

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1 the Director. In fact, I believe, he was on the no-contact
2 list. He went to see Rowley. Rowley never met with Morgan,
3 for reasons that I still can't myself understand, and then
4 by letter dated February 13, 1967, sent this letter to the
5 Bureau.

6 Some two days later, a letter went back to Rowley from
7 the Bureau stating thank you for your letter, and then "In
8 connection with the allegation that a Castro conspiracy was
9 involved in the assassination of President Kennedy, our
10 investigation uncovered no evidence indicating Fidel Castro
11 or officials of the Cuban Government were involved with
12 Lee Harvey Oswald in the assassination of President Kennedy."

13 And it goes on and says, "The Bureau is not conducting
14 any investigation regarding this matter."

15 Let me show you this letter dated February 15, '67.

16 Mr. Cotter. Okay.

17 (The Witness reads the document.)

18 Mr. Cotter. All right.

19 Mr. Wallach. Was this allegation ever discussed with
20 you?

21 Mr. Cotter. No.

22 Mr. Wallach. In '672

23 Mr. Cotter. No.

24 Mr. Wallach. Were you ever asked whether or not the Bureau
25 had conducted an extensive investigation? I realize that then

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1 it into Oswald, and see that there were no Oswald Cuban
2 connections, but were you ever asked whether or not the Bureau
3 had conducted an investigation with respect to the possibility
4 of Cuban involvement in the assassination at that time? Do
5 you remember it? Do you remember the subject coming up?

6 Mr. Cotter. No, I don't, uh-uh.

7 Mr. Wallach. Do you know why that letter would have been
8 handled out of the Criminal or General Investigative Division
9 and not out of the Intelligence Division?

10 Mr. Cotter. That I don't know either. As a matter of
11 fact, this is what kind of bothers me. You haven't asked the
12 question but I'm sure you are aware of the fact that the
13 investigation of the whole Oswald case was a dual case. Part
14 of it was conducted by Intelligence Division and part by
15 the, at that time it was known I guess as the Investigative
16 Division.

17 Mr. Wallach. Mr. Rosen's division.

18 Mr. Cotter. Mr. Rosen's division, the Criminal Division
19 in effect, and fellows like Shroder and Raupauch, and a few
20 names Rogge were the chief supervisors, Dick Rogge, who is
21 not special agent in charge someplace.

22 Mr. Wallach. I think it is out on the west coast some.

23 Mr. Cotter. I think it is Buffalo. I just read some
24 yesterday.

25 Mr. Wallach. I think you're right. I think it is Buffalo.

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1 Mr. Cotter. Anyway, just, I couldn't comment intelligently
2 on what phases were handled by them and what phases, but it
3 was my general impression that they handled the bulk of the
4 investigation. We were conducting those aspects of it that
5 had security angles, contacts with the Soviets and Cubans,
6 etc.

7 Mr. Wallach. What, to your best recollection, was the
8 investigation that was conducted by the Domestic Intelligence
9 Division?

10 Mr. Cotter. I really couldn't comment intelligently on
11 that to the extent of that, or what the criteria was or
12 where the boundaries were between us and Division 6.

13 Mr. Wallach. If you say that the investigation had been
14 divided up --

15 Mr. Cotter. Yeah.

16 Mr. Wallach. Between the two, and from my review of the
17 documents, it seems that if anything the Domestic Intelligence
18 Division just sort of merely retraced the information that it
19 had already on Oswald in the security file, to see if there
20 was --

21 Mr. Cotter. Well, maybe I'm wrong on this, but I think
22 the mail, when it came in initially, went to Division 6. In
23 other words, they were the prime ones in charge, and then the
24 would route to us anything with security ramifications.

25 Is that true?

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1 Mr. Wallach. Mr. Sullivan has testified --

2 Mr. Cotter. I mean, there must be memos written on this
3 as to what the lines of jurisdiction are between these two
4 Divisions.

5 Mr. Wallach. We've asked for them.

6 Mr. Cotter. That must have been one of the chief areas of
7 discussion involving Sullivan and the Director and all of the
8 people involved.

9 Mr. Wallach. I think the Bureau has told us they don't
10 have any such memos.

11 Mr. Cotter. Really?

12 Mr. Wallach. In any event, I've taken you up to the point
13 now where we have a letter going back saying the Bureau
14 will not do anything further on the Morgan allegation.

15 Mr. Cotter. Right.

16 Mr. Wallach. Even though the Oswald case is open.

17 Mr. Cotter. Right.

18 Mr. Wallach. Subsequently, at President Johnston's
19 directive -- he found out about Morgan's allegations -- he
20 directed through DeLoach that the Bureau interview Edward
21 Pierpoint Morgan. That interview was conducted by agents
22 of the Washington Field Office on March 20, 1967. Again, it
23 is conducted through the Investigative Division, not through
24 the Intelligence Division.

25 Among other things, Mr. Morgan detailed certain of the

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1 plots and then went on to say -- he talked about his clients
2 who at that time the Bureau knew to be Mafia figures involved
3 in the CIA assassination plots. These participated in the
4 project, whom he represents, and that was the project against
5 Castro, developed through feedback information that would identify
6 Fidel Castro's counterassassins in this country who could very
7 well be considered suspects in such a conspiracy, and
8 continuing, he said his clients were aware of the identity
9 of some individuals who came to the United States for this
10 purpose, i.e., assassinating President Kennedy, and he under-
11 stood that two such individuals were now in the State of
12 New Jersey.

13 Do you recall that information ever being brought to
14 your attention?

15 Mr. Cotter. No, I don't, no.

16 Mr. Wallach. Do you know why it would not have been
17 brought to your attention?

18 Mr. Cotter. Well, it's a little hard to explain. In
19 1967 I had nothing whatsoever to do with the Oswald investiga-
20 tion. In fact, at no point did I have any direct involvement.

21 Mr. Wallach. But you did have a lot to do with Cuban
22 matters.

23 Mr. Cotter. I was the section chief of the Unit that
24 was handling Cuban investigations, right?

25 Mr. Wallach. So can you think of any reason why this

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1 least wouldn't have been brought to your attention, the fact
2 that a specific allegation was being made, and the other
3 senior Bureau officials knew that Morgans clients were
4 involved in these assassination attempts, and they also had
5 been getting feedback intelligence information from Cuba for --

6 Mr. Cotter. Well, if whoever read that memo, somebody
7 at some point along the line, somebody must have decided -- this
8 that you were just reading from the Washington Field, a letter
9 or some kind of communication?

10 Mr. Wallach. Yeah, it was a blind memorandum that was
11 furnished to the White House in response to the Morgan
12 interview.

13 Mr. Cotter. Well, when that came in from Washington Field
14 somebody had to be responsible for signing off for the file.
15 In other words, whoever signed off for the file took the
16 responsibility that that information had been fully acted on.

17 Mr. Wallach. Have you ever seen in your years with the
18 Bureau a cover sheet that says eyes only on it?

19 Mr. Cotter. I know this term, but I don't recall the
20 Bureau ever using it on internal documents, no.

21 Mr. Wallach. And also stamped secret?

22 Mr. Cotter. No.

23 Mr. Wallach. I might say that was only the incoming
24 letter from Mr. Rowley, which gave information that was not
25 available to him from a non-intelligence source.

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Mr. Cotter. Yes.

2

Mr. Wallach. In March of 1967 there is a Drew Pearson column which I don't believe appeared in the Washington papers, which talks about a CIA plot to assassinate President Kennedy - I'm sorry, it talks about a CIA plot to assassinate Fidel Castro.

7

Do you recall that article being brought to your attention at all?

9

Mr. Cotter. No, I don't. Could I see it?

10

Mr. Wallach. Sure.

11

(The witness reads the document.)

12

Mr. Cotter. No, I don't recall it.

13

Mr. Wallach. I am going to give you these two memoranda, the handwriting and the names is my handwriting. The names of the people, those names were originally crossed out on the documents, and the Bureau supplied me with the names, and I want you to just take a look at them and see if they ring a bell with you. They are a memorandum from Wannall to Sullivan dated March 6, '67, and a letter from the Director, FBI, to the Attorney General dated March 6, 1967.

21

(The witness reads the documents.)

22

Mr. Cotter. This letter just summarizes what is in the memo. I take it?

23

24

Mr. Wallach. I believe that's the case.

25

Mr. Cotter. Yeah. Yes, okay.

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1 Mr. Wallach. We've been told that that review took place
2 over a weekend, and that virtually -- a lot of people from the
3 section were called in, an awful lot of people were called in
4 to review the files and do the work.

5 Do you recall participating in that at all?

6 Mr. Cotter. Gee whiz, no, I don't, although if it was
7 a sectionwide project as you described -- now, wait a minute.
8 This is Wannall; in 1967 Wannall was -- I am trying to think
9 of what his role was at that time, his title, what he had
10 under him.

11 Well, okay, I think this changed the whole ballgame here
12 as far as my comments to the previous questions. Cuban matters
13 were not assigned to me after I became section chief in 1963.
14 They went to Wannall's section. In other words, they split
15 up in 1963 or late '64, whenever it was, shortly following the
16 Dominican crisis, '65 I'm sure it was, about mid-'65, they
17 split what had been the Nationalities Intelligence section into
18 two sections, and one of them became known as the Latin
19 American section, and Wannall, who had been section chief in
20 Nationalities Intelligence took over as the Latin American
21 Section Chief and myself, who had been number one man of
22 Nationalities Intelligence, remained as section chief of
23 Nationalities Intelligence.

24 Now, Cuban matters went to the new section, the Latin
25 American section, along with anything in the Western Hemisphere.

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1 and the Nationalities Intelligence Section in effect remained
2 the same section, minus the Latin American stuff, including
3 Cuba. So therefore, like you asked those questions, this
4 whole thing about '67 I would not have seen because I wasn't
5 involved in any way with Cuba at that time.

6 Mr. Wallach. Who became Wannall's number one man?

7 Mr. Cotter. George Mohr was his number one man for quite
8 a while, George C. Mohr, and when Wannall got promoted up,
9 Mohr took over as section chief.

10 Mr. Wallach. Was Mohr with you before?

11 Mr. Cotter. Mohr had been a unit chief of the Latin
12 American unit, in the Nationalities Intelligence Section, and
13 he came to this division of the section in two. In other words, in
14 '61 at the time of the assassination, I think Lambert was
15 going back now, Lambert Anderson was a supervisor working
16 under George Mohr in that unit, the Latin American unit,
17 and the Latin American unit became sort of the nucleus for
18 the new section. They expanded it greatly, you know, they
19 created new units with emphasis on Dominican stuff. And
20 expanded their whole effort in the Latin American area to
21 take this division.

22 So that explains in part at least why I wouldn't see
23 any of this kind of stuff in '67.

24 Mr. Wallach. Well, I thank you for coming.

25 I have no further questions.

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If there's any statements that you'd like to make on the record, feel free to do so.

Mr. Cotter. No, except that it may have seemed that a lot of my answers were quite fuzzy and whatnot. I have cooperated to the best of my ability.

Mr. Wallach. I think that's true. Thank you very much.

(Whereupon, at 1:00 o'clock p.m., the hearing in the above-entitled matter was concluded.)

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