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Interview by Senate Committee Investigators

Director of Training

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19 September 1975

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Chief, Division D
7B-44 Hqs.

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Assistant to the Director
6D-15 Hqs.

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19 September 1975

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Interview by Senate Committee Investigators

1. On Thursday, 18 September 1975, I was interviewed for the second time by investigators from the Senate Committee. The interview lasted from approximately 11:20 a.m. until 1:15 p.m. My testimony was recorded and will be transcribed. When the transcription is ready I will be required to read it and swear to the truthfulness of the statements I made. Under ordinary circumstances, a Senator would have been present to swear me in at this interview. However, because of the televised public hearings, no Senators were available. An unidentified woman operated the equipment which consisted of a Sony cassette recorder and dictaphone cassette recorder. The primary questioning was by Mr. Postal and Mr. Gordon Rhea, the same investigators with whom I spoke on the earlier occasion. At one point or another during the proceedings three other men joined us for various periods of time. Mr. Rhott Dawson appeared shortly after the interview began and remained for about an hour. Mr. Fred Behren (I can't vouch for the spelling) arrived after about half an hour and remained for approximately twenty minutes, having received a phone call which took him away. Mr. Bob Kelly arrived shortly after Mr. Behren and stayed for about 10 minutes longer than Mr. Behren. The interview was conducted in a room in the Carroll Arms a former hotel across the street from the Senate Office Building.

2. The meeting began with a reminder that I could have an attorney present and that I could refuse to answer any question which might tend to incriminate me. I was asked to describe in general terms my work with CIA. I told them that I joined in 1949; that I was and am now a member of the Office of Training; that in 1960 or thereabouts I had a short tour of duty with the Economic Action Group in the DDP, and that I went directly from that assignment to W1/4 in September of 1961.

3. I was asked to recall my major activities while with the Cuban operation and I did so. I reported that my first assignment was the handling of a Cuban agent, one we were using to build a nucleus of an organization for eventual operations into Cuba. I identified this man as Mr. Rojas (Mr. Rhea, having heard my description of this activity at our earlier session, did not pursue this matter any further).

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4. The investigators were interested in when I was assigned the code name Fiscalini; the circumstances under which the name was assigned, and who had assigned it. I told them I had seen a Xerox copy of the memorandum (I saw this during a meeting with Bill Sturbits last Friday in Bill's office) which requested that identification in the name of Fiscalini be assigned to me. I explained the circumstances, which Mr. Postal and Mr. Rhea had heard at our earlier meeting, and said that I thought the date was the end of March, 1962. The circumstances involved a contact by a New York lawyer, thru the Department of Justice, concerning a client who had access to Cuba and wanted to visit Castro to put in a special plea on behalf of the Bay of Pigs prisoners. I identified the individual concerned (I still can't remember his name) as the manager of the Toresa Hotel in New York. I did not identify the lawyer and was not asked for his name. I identified a man I met at a second meeting in New York as "Bubbles" Abdallah. I explained that the latter individual proposed to accompany the manager of the Teresa to Cuba, the manager being an elderly gentleman with some difficulty in walking. I explained to the investigators that I had no further contacts with these people after I discovered that Abdallah was wanted, or under indictment - I forget which - by Texas authorities for smuggling drugs from Mexico. Mr. Robert Kelly was clearly interested in pursuing the matter of who assigned my "Code Name." I indicated that the documentation that I received came from the Office of Security but that I did not know whether that Office selected the name or not.

5. We went over again the story of my contact with a Canadian named "Joe" (I know this man's last name but have not been asked for it and have not volunteered it). I described one meeting and a telephone call involving Joe. In the meeting he claimed that he could travel back and forth from Canada to Cuba; revealed to me that he was interested in starting a smuggling activity involving goods on the proscribed list; that he wanted United States citizenship and a great deal of money in exchange for allowing us to send materials or tamper with some of the shipments if we could get the proscribed goods to Canada. I explained to the investigators that my interest lay in the fact that Joe claimed he could speak with Che Guevara and that I had attempted to get Joe to serve as a means of communication between us and Che, which Joe refused to do. As for the telephone call, I told them that when Joe returned from his trip to Cuba he called to say that big things were going on in Cuba and we should meet right away. Being aware that at that point we in the Agency were deep into what would later be called the Cuban Missile Crisis, I told Joe I could not see him and that we probably already knew what he had to tell me. That was the last I heard of Joe.

6. We spent a great deal of time going over my meetings with the Attorney General and his interest in a small group of Cubans who claimed to have supporters in Cuba ready to create an uprising in Santiago Province. This is the case described in paragraph 3 of my earlier memorandum. The investigators were quite interested in the identity of the man whom I saw at the request of the Attorney General. I went over this again in as much detail as I could remember but without being able to recall who this man was. I was asked if I could describe the

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man and I said that I recalled him as a fairly tall man of average build with black hair, black eyebrows and glasses. Of considerable interest is the fact that perhaps 15 to 20 minutes later I was shown an 3 X 10 glossy photograph of several people walking in front of what appeared to be a public building and was asked whether I could identify any of the people in the picture. I could not. Mr. Postal pointed to the central figure and asked if I could identify him. I said I could not. (The picture was of a man probably in his mid-sixties with flowing white hair - somewhat on the order of Senator Keating - a large down-curving nose, white, straight eye brows behind dark glasses, a somewhat lined, puffy face, and a slightly receding forehead accentuated by the fact that his hair was combed straight from front to back. The man was wearing a dark blue or black suit, and one man appeared to be accompanying him to his left and slightly ahead, and another man slightly to his right and rear. Without having any reference points by which to judge, my best guess would be that the subject was about 5'10" tall. He appeared to be rather heavy, perhaps in the range of 220 pounds. There seemed to be a caption of some sort at the bottom of the picture but this was hidden from my view.) Mr. Postal asked whether the main figure in the photograph could have been the man the Attorney General directed me to see. I replied that, even allowing for the difference in years, the man in the photograph in no way resembled the man I saw on behalf of the Attorney General.

7. Messrs. Postal and Rhea again brought up the subject of assassination and asked whether I had engaged in or had heard mention of, in Task Force W or SAS, discussions on the subject of assassination either in general or specifically with respect to Castro. I told the investigators that the subject came up repeatedly when we were speaking with Cubans, many of whom, having been forced to flee Cuba, sincerely wished for Castro's immediate demise. I said that I had never heard of or engaged in conversations with Agency officers about any plan the direct and only aspect of which was the assassination of Fidel Castro. I pointed out that on a number of occasions I dealt with Cubans who wanted to kill Castro, but that my job was simply to attempt to extract from these contacts the names of people in Cuba who might be of potential use to us in intelligence operations. I said that I had never engaged in plotting with Cubans regarding assassination but that I had many conversations with Cubans regarding their desire to conduct paramilitary activities which, as a by-product, might well result in Castro's death. I pointed out emphatically that the Agency's policy prohibits political assassination.

8. I was asked if I knew [redacted] and Nestor Sanchez. I told them that I knew them both and that Nestor and I shared an office for a short period near the end of my attachment with SAS. I was asked if "AMLASH" meant anything to me and I replied in the negative. This was followed by whether Bill and Nestor had discussed with me or mentioned an operation of theirs involving a high level officer of the Cuban government, a military man who made frequent trips out of Cuba. Again I could only reply in the negative. I added the juxtaposition of Bill and Nestor in the context of a single operation surprised

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me inasmuch as I believed Nestor to have been involved only in psychological operations and (Bill) working at collecting foreign intelligence. I was then asked if the word "AOTS" meant anything to me and I said it did but that all I could say was that it had to do with counterintelligence activities. Mr. Rhea asked me whether I could say that the "AOTS" activity was concerned with contacting Cuban exiles in the Miami area and I indicated that this was my understanding. The subject was not pursued further.

9. I was asked about my visit to New Orleans (which I had mentioned during the previous session) and I explained that these two trips were for the purpose of attempting to find ways of establishing channels of communication between the exiled Cubans in New Orleans and their friends in Cuba. I indicated that I had been able to come up with a very fine prospect, a Cuban, and that I had turned him over to one of our FI Case Officers. I also said that I had several discussions with an American whom I declined to identify under the general ground rule relating to sources of information. Messrs. Postal and Rhea asked if I would respond affirmatively if they were to suggest some initials which might correspond to the name of my American contact. I agreed to do this but the initials which they mentioned meant nothing. (Unfortunately, I cannot recall them!) I volunteered the initials of my contact, "FJ", and this produced a blank expression on the part of both investigators and a shrug of Mr. Rhea's shoulders. The final question I was asked was whether I had any knowledge of the "Ponchartrain Operation". I told them that I knew where Lake Ponchartrain was, and that's as far as it went.

10. We spent a little time on the subject of General Landsdale. I admitted I had attended one meeting in General Landsdale's office in the Pentagon. I was asked whether anyone else was there and said that I could recall only one name, Cornelius Roosevelt, but that there were two other people at the meeting. In response to a series of questions about what was discussed at that meeting, I said that General Landsdale was interested in various paramilitary possibilities and that my role was limited to giving a quick assessment of whether we had the agent assets to assist in carrying out the various possible operations that General Landsdale suggested.

11. I was asked whether the term "Mongoose" meant anything to me and I indicated that it was a general term used to refer to a composite of planned operational activities. I said that I had no knowledge of any specific activity being planned under this name and further explained that it was possible that some of my Cuban contacts might have been taken over by other Case Officers for use under "Mongoose" but that I had no direct knowledge of such having been done.

12. Mr. Robert Kelly expressed considerable interest in the organization of Task Force W. At one point he asked how many echelons there were between me and Mr. Helms. I told them that I reported to Bill Harvey; that my title was Special Assistant; that Mr. Harvey reported to Mr. Helms; that I frequently received

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assignment and reported to Sam Halpern; and that occasionally I undertook tasks for Bruce Cheever, Harvey's deputy, although these tasks were concerned with the workings of Task Force W and did not involve contact with the Cubans. I was asked if there were any Special Assistant other than me in Task Force W and I replied that Mr. Zogby, C/11/4 prior to Mr. Harvey's arrival on the scene, had been retained as a member of Task Force W in an SA status. I said that there may well have been others because people would show up from time to time for short tours of duty for several months or so and then depart to carry on their work elsewhere, but that I could not recall anyone by name at the present time.

13. I was asked whether I used the name Fiscalini in circumstances other than those described. I said that I frequently carried identification in that name and used it on several occasions. I described one occasion which was an amusing one-time contact with no bearing on any item of interest to the committee. The investigator asked whether I had ever contacted Cubans in Miami and I replied in the negative.

14. I was asked if I had ever made contacts with people in New York City other than those described. I said that indeed I had but that in one case, although the man in question lived in New York, the meeting took place in Newark, New Jersey. In response to a question I said that the lead was provided by the FBI. I declined to identify the man involved on the grounds of the sensitivity of his position at that time and the fact that I do not know at present where he is or what he is doing. (This was the beginning of the unsuccessful ECHO Operation which should be recorded somewhere in the Task Force W or Miami Station files.)

15. I was asked whether I had any knowledge of a meeting of the Attorney General and Cuban exile leaders in the summer of 1962. I said that such a meeting would not have been unusual, in my opinion, but that I had no knowledge of such a meeting. I pointed out that it was common practice among many Cuban leaders to try to acquire the support, or at least the appearance of support, of U.S. agencies and prominent U.S. political figures. I further stated that numerous attempts were made to get the U.S. to support a Cuban government-in-exile and that I had had one meeting in Washington with a Cuban leader who was constantly attempting to get us to support him as head of such an arrangement. I identified this man as Mario Garcia-Kohly and added that he was sentenced to prison some years later for counterfeiting Cuban pesos. The name "Kohly" obviously rang a bell with Mr. Postal as he repeated it aloud in a surprised tone of voice. However, Mr. Postal did not pursue the matter.

16. Some of the other topics which were surfaced in connection with the above major items: I was asked whether I knew the following people or recognized the names. (My responses are summarized in the parentheses and I can't vouch for all the spellings):

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- (1) Carlos Teppedino (never heard of him)
- (2) Jose Orta (never heard of him)
- (3) Sam Giancana (read about him in newspaper; never met him)
- (4) Roselli (read about him in the newspaper; never met him)
- (5) Trafficante (read about him in newspaper; never met him)
- (6) Manuel Artime (a prominent member of Cuban brigade; never met him)
- (7) Big Jim O'Connell (heard about him in the newspaper; never met him)

I was asked whether 'No Name Key' meant anything to me and I gave a negative response.

I was asked if I had visited Chicago in the course of my work and I told them I had not.

17. This is probably the appropriate point to underline my conviction that the main, if not the only, point of concern to the investigators is whether I was directed to sally forth and initiate contact with members of the underworld in the U.S. and who directed me to do so. Their interest is even more pointedly focussed on whether I had anything to do with the Rosselli, Giancana, et al, "operations". Once again, I explained that my job was broader than this by a long shot, and that I was never directed to take the initiative in establishing contacts with the underworld. I said that several, probably no more than five or six, of the people with whom I dealt were somewhat "shady" characters, in some cases with recorded run-ins with law enforcement agencies.

Charles D. Ford
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