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Agency Information

AGENCY : ROCKCOM
RECORD NUMBER : 178-10004-10418
RECORD SERIES : ASSASSINATION FILE
AGENCY FILE NUMBER : A-II (F) INTERVIEW OF L. FLETCHER PROUTY

Document Information

ORIGINATOR : ROCK
FROM :
TO :
TITLE : INTERVIEW OF L. FLETCHER PROUTY

DATE : 05/15/1975
PAGES : 16

Released under the John F. Kennedy
Assassination Records Collection
Act of 1992 (44 USC 2107 Note).
Case#:NW 53244 Date: 06-12-2017

SUBJECTS :
ASSASSINATIONS, FOREIGN LEADERS
ANTI-CASTRO ACTIVITIES
BAY OF PIGS
CIA
CUBAN EXILES
PROUTY, L. FLETCHER

DOCUMENT TYPE : PAPER, TEXTUAL DOCUMENT
CLASSIFICATION : Secret
RESTRICTIONS : 1A; 1B; 1C; 4
CURRENT STATUS : Redact
DATE OF LAST REVIEW : 08/15/1993

OPENING CRITERIA :

COMMENTS : Interview of L. Fletcher Prouty conducted by Marvin Gray of the Rockefeller Commission staff.

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A-II(F)

178-10002-10394

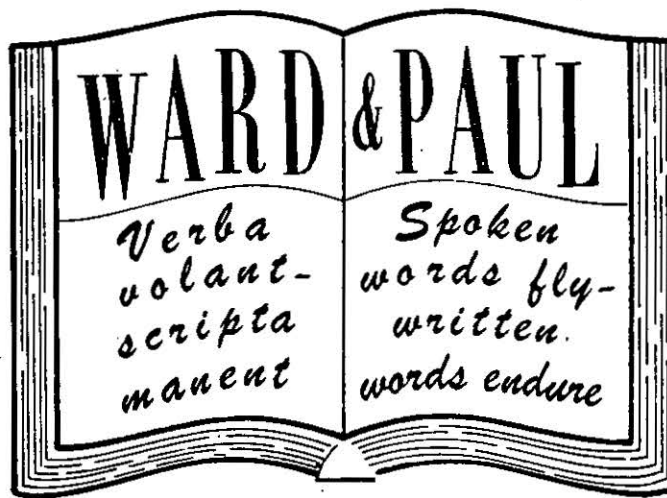
178-10004-10418

STAFF INTERVIEW
PRESIDENT'S COMMISSION
ON CIA ACTIVITIES

1 of 2

Thursday, May 15, 1975

Washington, D. C.



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STAFF INTERVIEW
PRESIDENT'S COMMISSION
ON CIA ACTIVITIES

Washington, D. C.

Thursday, May 15, 1975

The Staff met, pursuant to notice at 4:00 o'clock p.m.,
at 712 Jackson Place, N. W., Washington D. C.

PRESENT:

MARVIN L. GRAY, JR., Staff member

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P R O C E E D I N G S

Whereupon,

L. FLETCHER POURTY

called for interview by Counsel for the President's Commission on CIA Activities, having been first duly sworn by the Notary Public, was examined and testified as follows:

EXAMINATION BY COUNSEL FOR THE COMMISSION

BY MR. GRAY:

Q Sir, would you state your full name for the record?

A My name is L. Fletcher Pourty.

Q And you are a retired Air Force Colonel, who for a substantial period of time, and particularly around the late 1950's and early 1960's served as a CIA appointed liaison with the Air Force with certain support of a paramilitary nature is that correct?

A But it should be the other way around, I serves as an Air Force officer in support of CIA, I was in the Air Force.

Q And your office was in the Air Force?

A Yes, my office was in the Pentagon, in the Air Force.

Q Before the reporter arrived you told me that in December 1959 or January 1960 or possibly as late as February 1960, you were approached by the Air Division of the Covert Action Staff of the CIA, who said they had a special job requiring Air Force support, and they wanted an L-23, is that correct?

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1 A. Yes.

2 Q. And I don't think I can repeat what you explained to
3 me about the L-28, so maybe you had better repeat that.

4 A. The L-28 was a special single engine plane that had
5 been purchased by the CIA called the Helio Courier. The Air
6 Force owned a number of these air craft. So we provided
7 cover for CIA by giving them Air Force insignia and Air Force
8 designation, the L-28, and Air Force serial numbers. And these
9 aircraft, or at least some of them, were based at Eglin Air
10 Force Base in Florida. They were at Eglin Air Force Base
11 because that is where the CIA kept most of its aircraft in the
12 country.

13 Q. And how was this mission originally described to you?

14 A. Originally it was one of a number of missions that we
15 were operating over a period of time. But it was one of the
16 few that we operated with L-28's. The people who came over
17 from the Air Division stated that they had a place to land the
18 plane in Cuba on a road, on a small road, and they had a photo-
19 graph of it. And they were going to let two men out there and
20 then fly the plane back with a pilot and copilot to Eglin Air
21 Force Base. And the men that were being left off would be
22 equipped with a high powered rifle and a telescopic sight.
23 They were Cubans. We never saw them, of course. This is what
24 we were told they were, because we didn 't interfere with who
25 was on the plane, we simply put the plane in the air. But this

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1 was a normal procedure. And the object of their mission in
2 Cuba was to go to a building in Havana where one of the men
3 knew his way around and was pretty sure that he could get into,
4 and if possible, he would shoot Castro.

5 Q Did you recall who told you this?

6 A No, I don't, because we were working every day with
7 these people. And I think if you had a listing of the Air
8 Division staff at that date I probably could tell you it was one
9 of four men, something like that, a Division of maybe 30 men,
10 it would have been one of three or four, or two of three or four.
11 The thing was, we were doing these things every day, it was not
12 an odd thing that came up, it was something that we were doing
13 quite regularly.

14 Q It surprises me that the CIA would describe the
15 mission to you in this much detail, it doesn't seem consistent
16 with compartmentation and need-to-know particularly in view of
17 the sensitive nature of the mission.

18 A That is an awfully good point you are making. In
19 those days it did, because the more urgent part of my job was
20 to brief my boss, the Chief of Staff, Air Force, and through
21 him the Secretary, Air Force, or the Secretary of Defense,
22 or whoever, as required.

23 Q Let's go off the record for a minute.

24 (Discussion off the record.)

25 MR. GRAY: Back on the record.

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1 THE WITNESS: And since that was a real serious respon-
 2 sibility, we wouldn't fly the mission unless we knew that it
 3 had the approval of the Security Council, or that at least
 4 the overall program had approval of the Security Council. And
 5 this was understood for years. We had no problem with that at
 6 all. I don't think that I ever sent out a mission that we
 7 didn't know what they were going to do and where they were
 8 going. And this seems, at least in certain applications, to
 9 have ceased in this day and age. But I think that is due to
 10 other things. But in 1959-60 we would know where it was going -
 11 even to the point that I would want to know when they came back,
 12 I would really want to know if they went where they told me.
 13 We were pretty sure about how we did it.

14 BY MR. GRAY:

15 Q Do you recall briefing the Chief of Staff or any of your
 16 other superiors on this mission?

17 A Yes. My usual arrangement was to brief the Director
 18 of Plans, the Major General who was my immediate boss.

19 Q Did you remember who that was at that time?

20 A In 1959 I would say that was General Cary, or possibly
 21 General Martin. Again, it is a question of who was where at
 22 that time. But I think if we put those two names down we will
 23 be awfully close to it.

24 Q Was this mission concerned at all as to the proprietary
 25 or morality or whatever? Did thoughts of that nature concern
 you when you heard it?

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1 A. The concern that we would have was that the military
 2 would not be involved. We just wouldn't participate in it.
 3 And actually the CIA had the same idea at that time. What we were
 4 doing was helping Cubans. And if the Cubans, with their own
 5 little command structure, wanted to operate and could, you
 6 might say, convince CIA that this was something that was important
 7 to them, or that they thought they could achieve, on their
 8 own, if we would just give them so much as a little help, the
 9 missions would be sent. As a result, we didn't concern ourselves
 10 with too many of them, for the simple reason, we weren't asked
 11 for. It was almost like mechanics, you know. There were
 12 missions that we turned down, but mostly because we thought
 13 they wouldn't succeed or that we would not be able -- the
 14 favorite phrase -- to disclaim plausibly that the military or the
 15 Government of the U.S. was involved. And we were serious about
 16 that business in those days.

17 Q. Did you recall anyone else that you briefed on this
 18 raising any questions about this particular mission?

19 A. No, with no, what you might say barriers to the
 20 operation, with everything cleared and laid on in a perfectly
 21 normal manner, we got on with other business. We knew right
 22 away that it didn't succeed -- I say right away, within 10
 23 days -- and there were so many other things going on, it was on
 24 with the rest of it.

25 Q. Did you ever hear what happened to interrupt the

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plans?

A. I don't think I have a clear memory about it. But all of us in that business kind of felt that most of those Cubans were not able to do what they thought they could do. Castro was operating the bloc system, and I think it was a lot more effective than we gave him credit for.

Q. How are you able to place a time as to December 1959 or January 1960 or February 1960? Why are you sure it is in that two- or three-month period.

A. I will tell you why that is pretty easy to figure. The Agency wasn't running what I would call hard missions until late in 1959. You know Castro came in at the beginning of 1959. And things didn't really jell until later in the year. And a good reason for that, the training of Cuban exiles hadn't produced really professionals in terms of pilots or drop teams or saboteurs or what have until after they had had quite a bit of training. At the other end of the calendar, General Eisenhower had made it very clear to all of us who were operating overflights that nothing was to be done. A little later in 1960 when he was supposed to meet at the summit with Khrushchhev and other world leaders, we halted every overflight. And to this day I can't understand why the U-2 went out. But all the flights that I had anything to do with, the Tibetan flight, the Laotian flights, the Cuban flights, all of that overflight program we halted on direct orders. And since the meeting in

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1 Paris was scheduled for May 1, I doubt if we flew anything
2 after March 15, or even maybe March 1, because there would
3 be no interference with it. So I can put it between those
4 dates without any trouble.

5 Q You said at times it was a matter of concern to make
6 sure that the operations you had requested to support, or at
7 least the type of operation, had been approved by the National
8 Security Council, or whoever else was required. Did you recall
9 when you made any such inquiries in this case?

10 A The way we would work that is, having briefed, you
11 might say, the Air Force chain of command, if I was not told
12 to stop, it was gone. Again, it was a matter of working with
13 people that I had been with for years. It wasn't one kind.
14 They knew me, they knew the program. And if I briefed them
15 and there was nothing to interfere within a day or two, we
16 would go. Now, sometimes they would want additional briefings.
17 But I don't remember one in this case.

18 Q I believe at some point one of the news coverages
19 had the name of one of the Cubans involved.

20 A I don't put much story in that. I looked up some
21 notes that I thought might be pertinent, but I don't -- we
22 didn't work with the Cubans -- there were a few Cubans we got
23 to know, like Artemo, but they were not involved in this kind
24 of operation.

25 Q Did you ever get a project name for this, or is there

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1 anything that you can suggest, in other words, that we can go
2 to the Agency indices to try to track down the paperwork behind
3 it if any.

4 A. No. You see our overall project was called TAB-6.
5 That was the code, an international code, Agency and military.
6 And if we called it TAB-6, just like a TAB-7 or TAB-3 in a lot
7 of documents, people all over the world knew that TAB-6 was a
8 certain type program. And most of the time when it was like
9 this, pure mechanical program, we would just continue calling
10 it TAB-6, maybe with a date and an airplane number, but
11 nothing else. Now, sometimes a program would be broken off
12 TAB-6, and we would have a separate code number. This was just
13 an ordinary flight.

14 Q. You say the use of the L-28 was fairly rare. Would
15 there be any Air Force records which would enable us to pin
16 down any flight this war or pin it down to one of a few, some-
17 thing like that?

18 A. Well, there were two things I think you would find.
19 We usually went to elaborate detail to cover the flight. For
20 example, if a plane leaves and is not in the air -- if it doesn't
21 land it is presumed lost. Now, we would put another plane in
22 the air to cover it, one with the actual numbers of the one
23 that was supposed to be in the air. We would put that one in
24 the air from some field where nobody knew it took off. And
25 if the one would pick up the flight, come in and land, so that

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1 control towers, air traffic controllers could show a record of
2 a plane coming in.

3 Now, this was normal procedure for the people at Eglin,
4 whether the plane was going to Guatemala, or Nicaragua, anything
5 what we called black flight would be covered that way.

6 Q I would presume that you have got a record of those,
7 or that it could be available?

8 A Now, sometimes when the crew would, say, be mercenaries
9 like Air America, they would just take off. And they knew we
10 had them covered in Air Defense Command. And there would be
11 no record at all, nothing, they wouldn't tell anybody where
12 they were going. We would have to see what Eglin had on its
13 record. But I would think, my personal view would be that they
14 ran this very professionally, and you will find there was a
15 flight.

16 Q Would that be preserved after 15 years, or be
17 destroyed?

18 A I say there are two sides of this. The man in the tower
19 at Eglin would just know plane number 1, 2 or 3 was left, and
20 I think it would be dropped from the book with the others, and
21 I think the law requires 90 days or something like that. The
22 other thing is, the Air Defense Command would have a record,
23 because it is harder to tell the Air Defense Command not to go
24 after a bogey in the sky than to have them go. But again,
25 15 years is a long record.

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1 Q. What about on the Agency's side, would you be familiar
2 enough with their records and records-keeping processes to offer
3 any guidance as to how we might try to run this down.

4 A. Well, the Cuban program was a big program that had
5 general approval so long as only Cubans were involved. And up
6 to the point that the Agency was involved, I think you would
7 find them very professional, I think you would find that
8 they have records. But to say what happened after it left the
9 Agency control, then I don't think there would be a record.
10 That is the base program. And of course, I imagine you have
11 heard that from other people too, that you have got to disclaim
12 plausibly. We went so far as to take the decals off the motors,
13 to take the decals off all the engine parts, to take all the
14 American language fuels classification symbols, or whatever,
15 so that the plane was what we call sanitized. Now, if that
16 plane went down, everybody would just disclaim entirely that
17 they had ever even heard of it anywhere. Which means that you
18 don't have any records anywhere, not even the airplane. That
19 is the kind of mission the thing was.

20 Q. But the pilots would normally at least have been Agency
21 people, and not Cubans, is that right?

22 A. In this instance they would be either Agency contract
23 employees -- not Agency full-time employees, but contract
24 employees, or Cubans, because that is what we were doing in
25 Guatemala, we were training them. You would find either one.

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1 But in either case they would have been people flying, you
 2 might say, under Agency supervision. We never knew what
 3 nationality they were, whether they were like Air American
 4 pilots, of indeterminate nationality, or whether they were Cubans
 5 I would presume, if I look back at it, since the L-28 was very
 6 easy to fly, that it was a Cuban crew.

7 Q. Is there anything else you can think of that would
 8 give us more lead on running this down, either through the
 9 Agency or through the Air Force or some other suitable source ?

10 A. I have been looking through the New York Times
 11 micro film. I have a little flickering memory that there was a
 12 little announcement from Havana. I must admit that it was only
 13 a light recollection, and I have been trying to find it in the
 14 New York Times micro film myself since I talked with Dan Shore.
 15 To date I haven't found it. But that kind of thing -- Havana
 16 used to blaze every time they got one of those. And that was
 17 one way we knew how far they got sometimes.

18 Q. If you find that, would let me know?

19 A. I certainly will.

20 Q. Aside from this instance, was there any other similar
 21 operation, Agency operation that you knew of, similar to the
 22 one that appeared to be designed to assassinate a foreign
 23 leader or support an assassination attempt upon a foreign
 24 leader?

25 A. Well, I don't know how deep you go into these subjects.

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1 But I know what you might call the anatomy of an assassination
 2 doesn't begin with the assassination. If you can remove the
 3 government or assist people who are probably going to remove
 4 it inevitably, a successful one, and not assassination -- there
 5 are a number of those called coup d'états. There were quite
 6 a few of those things where, for many reasons, the Agency would
 7 be keeping in touch with a group who were not in power, but
 8 who, with the run of events, or with a little assistance, or
 9 even in some cases up to the point where if the man doesn't
 10 leave he may be killed -- he doesn't have much choice -- sure,
 11 the Agency was involved in that, there has been a record of
 12 that for years.

13 Q. What specific one do you have in mind?

14 A. I think one that is pretty clear is that over a period
 15 of time the Agency worked rather diligently with General Rene
 16 Barrientos in Bolivia when he made his move. Dr. Victor Paz
 17 Estenssoro, who was President of Bolivia left. So there was
 18 no assassination, he took over.

19 The Agency for a long time had worked with Barrientos.
 20 Now, I doubt if the Agency ever got to the point with any of
 21 them where they said, if he doesn't go by tomorrow we will have
 22 to shoot that guy, because events roll up, you see.

23 Another case where this kind of development took place
 24 was one removed from Trujillo -- I believe Trujillo was
 25 followed by Juan Boscit -- it might have been Bleager -- but I

1 think Juan Bosch. Juan Bosch, I recollect, was replaced by
2 Donald Reid Kabaral. Now, Kabaral was in my office in the
3 Pentagon at about 7:00 o'clock in the evening the day before
4 he became President of the Dominican Republic. Now, the only
5 reason he was there was because somebody in the Agency sent him
6 there. And we gave him a little bit of help that he needed.
7 He took an Eastern Airlines plane out of Washington for San
8 Juan that night, I think at 8:30, and transferred out of San
9 Juan for Santo Domingo. The change of government took place
10 that night, and he was the President of the Dominican
11 Republic the next day. And nobody was killed.

12 But that is really -- you know, the Agency can say,
13 and the government can say, that an assassination is not our
14 business. An assassination is when everything else fails.

15 Or like in the case of Diem, the President of South
16 Vietnam, where the government went to every extreme to persuade
17 him and his brother to go to Europe. Madame Nhu was already
18 in Europe. And they had brought tickets or arranged his flight
19 to Europe, and they had arranged for him to make a speech and
20 all that. But he didn't go. Well, what happens when you expose
21 the palace guard like that, they all know that thousands of
22 people hate them. Any palace guard is hated in most cases.
23 And they leave, they run for their own lives. And so when Mr.
24 Diem came back to the palace there was nobody there to protect
25 him. He made a mistake. And when he realized that he went in the

1 tunnel, and they found him at the other end of the tunnel, and
2 he was killed. There was no assassination plan. All that talk
3 about the assassination of Diem is by people who don't know the
4 inside. There was no assassination of Diem. But there was a
5 removal of Diem. And when it didn't work he got assassinated
6 by others. And that was, I think, the reasonably spontaneous.

7 Once another government knows that the support of the
8 CIA, or the support of this government, is being removed, then
9 many, many people are exposed, and they begin to run. Just as
10 we saw in Saigon. And if they don't run, they get killed.

11 So where a lot of people make a mistake is -- and I
12 worked on so darned many of these -- is that you don't start with
13 a plan to assassinate, that is what is wrong, that is why the
14 Agency says, no, we don't do that. Now, in that fine sense, I
15 could agree with the Agency. But all the rest of the machinery
16 is there. And it gives the people on the outside the initiative
17 to go further. And a lot of time the initiative improves the
18 gun and the bullets after everything else. Assassination has to
19 be treated wisely, or it becomes complete aberration.

20 MR. GRAY: We will conclude here.

21 (Whereupon at 4:30 p.m., the interview was concluded.)
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