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COMMISSION ON CIA ACTIVITIES WITHIN THE UNITED STATES

Washington, DC 20500

May 19, 1975

MEMORANDUM

TO : The File
FROM : David W. Belin
SUBJECT : Interview with Mr. Nestor Sanchez

Belin: Mr. Sanchez, this is May 19, 1975, and I'd like to summarize the conference we've had here at the Commission headquarters at 712 Jackson Place. I wonder if you could state your name and address and your office phone where we can get in touch with you.

Sanchez: Nestor Sanchez, 6636 Langdon Court, McLean, office phone number is extension 6176.

B: And you worked with the CIA since 1961--51, 1951?

S: Yes, I have.

B: And prior to that time, what did you do?

S: I started out in Korea, I was in Korea '51 to '53.

B: Had you been in the service during World War II?
Or shortly thereafter?

S

S: Yes, I had been.

B: And what did you do after World War II?

S: I went back to school and was called back as a reserve officer in 1951 when I was going to the Georgetown Graduate School.

B: Where did you take your undergraduate work?

S: New Mexico Military Institute in Roswell.

B: And did you finish up your graduate work at Georgetown?

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S: An M.A., but I didn't write my thesis since I was going on to a Ph.D. without writing the thesis, and going on for the doctorate. I was called back to the Service at that time.

B: And after you were in the Service you worked with the CIA while you were in the Service?

S: Yes, I was called back to active duty and assigned to CIA in 1951.

B: And then you've been with them ever since?

S: I've been with them ever since.

B: And, where were you during the 1950s, so far as the Agency was concerned?

S: I started in Korea, I was in Korea for three years. I then spent five years in--a short time in Guatemala and Central America, in late '53, early '54. Then I spent five years in Morocco--Casablanca. I came back to Washington in late 1959.

B: And then what did you do?

S: I was in charge of the part of the Arab States in the Near East Division for two years.

B: And then what?

S: I was preparing to go to Cairo at that time and was assigned on temporary duty to the Special Operations Group on Cuba.

B: And who was your superior in that group?

S: Bill Harvey was in charge of the group at that time.

B: Was there anyone else in the Agency in a supervisory position that you had contact with, besides Bill Harvey?

S: Seymour Bolton was part of the group and part of the --on the psychological political action part of the staff, and I was working first with him when I first got in there, but then after Bill Harvey left and Fitzgerald--Desmond Fitzgerald took over I became a special assistant for the organization of the collection of intelligence first and the organization of the military inside Cuba.

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B: Bill Harvey left for Europe around June or so of 1963, and did you say that Desmond Fitzgerald took over that position?

S: Yes. Later on during that summer sometime during the summer.

B: Fitzgerald is now dead?

S: Yes, he is.

B: And, Fitzgerald had a relationship with what was known as the Special Group or the Special Group (Augmented)?

S: As I understand it, he did, yes.

B: Did he have a personal relationship with Robert Kennedy also?

S: I understand that he did have a personal relationship with the Kennedys. To the best of my knowledge he did.

B: Now, during the first part of 1963 or prior thereto were you aware of the existence of any possible plans for the assassination of any Cuban leader?

S: No, I didn't.

B: Some time in the latter half of 1963 you stated that you came in contact with a person who I will call a contact, who was someone inside Cuba in a position of --a relatively high position in the Cuban government or military, is that correct?

S: Yes, I did.

B: And I understand that you first met him in Latin America on a trip some time in the latter part of 1963, is that what you said?

S: Yes, in the Fall, early Fall of '63.

B: Then you subsequently met this contact in Europe?

S: Yes, I did.

B: On one occasion in Europe, or two occasions in Europe?

S: Probably more than that --on three or four occasions-- but at least on two occasions, yes.

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B: At that time, could you give by way of background, the overall situation so far as the Special Group (Augmented) and your relationship to it? What was the purpose of the Group, and what were you doing in regard to the Group?

S: I wasn't a party or had any--attended any of the meetings of the Special Group--Special Group Augmented. My particular task at that time was--that was assigned--particular task that was assigned to me was to collect intelligence and to try to organize a group of military officers inside Cuba who were opposed to the Cuban regime--the Castro regime.

B: And in discussing matters with these people, I assume you had contact with a number of Cuban exiles, is that correct?

S: Not many, but with this one particular fellow I did because of his--he was one of the few people who could travel outside of Cuba at that time.

B: But he was not a Cuban exile. He was a--

S: --not an exile, excuse me. With exiles, at that time, I didn't have any contact with the exile at that time.

B:

B: With this particular person inside Cuba, I wonder if you could just summarize the discussions you had with him at your first meeting, for instance in Latin America what he said and what you said to the best of your recollection.

S: To the best of my recollection when we first met, my objective was to attempt to find out what the feelings were against the Castro regime within Cuba, to try to find out if there were people opposed still within the regime but opposed to the regime, and to find out by name and by position where these people stood in the regime.

B: And did you get information from him in that regard?

S: Yes, I did.

B: Were there any discussions at this first meeting about possibly assassinating any Cuban leader?

S: No, there weren't.

B: All right. Now the next meeting you met with this contact was in Europe?

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S: Yes.

B: And do you know approximately when that occurred?

S: The month thereafter, it must have been in September --as best I can recollect.

B: Of 1963?

S: '63.

B: And what happened at that meeting?

S: We continued the discussions which we had started in Latin America, again talking about the personalities inside, getting into more detail on the organization of a group inside Cuba which could be used in an internal coup against the Castro government.

B: In connection with this coup, was there any direct discussion of--well, I'll have to stop here, we're at the end of the tape. I'll continue on the next tape.

(Tape 2)

During the meeting in Europe was there on the first meeting in Europe, was there any discussion concerning possible assassination of Castro?

S: The subject of assassination was never raised by me. It was never discussed in that context. In discussing the coup and how a coup would be carried out, the, this particular contact did raise the possibility and in his mind the very real possibility that there would be bloodshed, and that somebody would be killed. Their, or his, opinion was that to even get the internal revolt, a coup, underway that the leadership--the top leadership--would have to be neutralized. Specific assassination of any of the people, it was not discussed in those--in those particular terms.

B: I think during your interview you mentioned that you said in substance that it is often in coups a natural outgrowth that the leadership would be, you said, neutralized or perhaps die as a result of a coup.

S: Yes. This was a position that he maintained, although we were not willing to talk about this or to discuss anything in conjunction with assassination or with the elimination of the leadership. We would have preferred, I presume, to have seen a bloodless coup, but in his, certainly in his estimation this was not going to be possible and we must--he

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felt that he should be prepared and that the group inside should be prepared to spill blood if this is what--if this is the way it went.

B: Now, at the first meeting in Europe that you had, did he make any specific requests of you?

S: Yes, he did.

B: What were those requests?

S: He questioned the sincerity and the resolve and seriousness of the U.S. Government to follow through with this type of operation. He requested a meeting with a policy--a high level policymaker in Washington, specifically mentioning Robert Kennedy as one of the people who, with whom he would like to talk, to ensure, to get some assurance that Washington was serious about proceeding with this type of an operation.

B: Did he make any other requests?

S: That they would need some help in--in arms probably--in getting started, in kicking off the coup. He felt that once that happened they would--a small amounts of arms because they felt that they could capture sufficient arms to carry on once they started.

B: Did he mention any particular kinds of arms?

S: High-powered rifles and scopes and---

B: Then what did you say to that request of his?

S: I said that I was not authorized to--to approve such a request, and that I would certainly pass his thoughts and his request on to Washington.

B: Did you do that?

S: Yes, I did.

B: And who did you talk to?

S: To Desmond Fitzgerald.

B: And what did Fitzgerald say or do?

S: I don't know what he--what he did, as to who he talked to or who he saw because I wasn't with him when he--when he--when that--when he did that. I do know that in about a month--about a month after that, this particular contact was preparing and was ready to go back to Cuba. We had to move

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rather fast and talk to him if he was going to do that. Or if he was going to make up his mind to defect and to stay away --not to return to Cuba. The answer that I got from Fitzgerald was that he would go to Europe as a representative of the Administration to present the policy assurances to this particular contact.

B: Do you know whether or not Fitzgerald ever contacted anyone in the Administration on this?

S: No. I don't know, I would presume that this was cleared.

B: But do you know if it was cleared inside the Agency or inside the Administration, or both.

S: I don't know. I did not attend any of those meetings with Fitzgerald with anybody within the Agency or within the Administration.

B: You mentioned that Fitzgerald did have a social relationship with Robert Kennedy. Is that correct?

S: Well, again, to the best of my knowledge he had a personal--I wouldn't call it a social--but there was certainly, I would think, a I understood--there was a personal relationship, in addition to the official relationship.

B: Had you ever been in Fitzgerald's office when he directly called Robert Kennedy?

S: Well, as I told you during the interview, at one time on a particular paper that was being prepared for the Special Group (Augmented) there was a question as to whether the paper had been requested and was still needed by Robert Kennedy. At which time Mr. Fitzgerald made a direct call to Robert Kennedy to ascertain if this particular paper was still required and received the answer directly from him.

B: Now, Fitzgerald did go to Europe, is that correct?

S: He did.

B: Were you with him at all, or not?

S: Yes, I was.

B: Were you with him when he met with the contact in Europe?

S: Yes, I served as an interpreter.

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B: And what was said in that conversation by Fitzgerald and this contact and yourself, if you can remember.

S: To the best of my recollection, it was Fitzgerald assured him that the Government--that the U.S. Government was serious about this operation, that the policy assurance that he was looking for was given to him by Fitzgerald. Fitzgerald also informed the contact that the U.S. Government was prepared to support the coup and that when they launched the coup as soon as they established themselves in any reasonable manner inside Cuba that the U.S. Government would support them.

B: Do you know what the contact said if you can remember?

S: He appeared, as I recall again, he appeared satisfied with the answer, with the assurance that he received. He accepted Fitzgerald, although using an alias, as a representative, as a high level U.S. Government representative talking for the policy level of the Government.

B: Did Fitzgerald use an alias or was the contact the one who used the alias?

S: Fitzgerald used an alias. He did not use--he did not use, he was not introduced to him in true name. Neither was I known to him in true name.

B: Any other remembrance you might have of that conversation?

S: An insistence on the part of the contact that --

B: (buzz) Go ahead, we have another half-minute.

S: they not be left in the lurch, that they--that the U.S. Government follow through on the operation as discussed.

(Tape 3)

B: Now after the meeting with Fitzgerald and the contact did you have another meeting with the contact in Europe?

S: Yes I did.

B: Do you know about when this occurred?

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S: It must have been a few weeks after the - that contact or a month after that. But, precisely no. I had a meeting before he, before Fitzgerald left Europe with him to ask him if he was satisfied with the policy assurances that had been given to them, and he was adding the qualifier provided you really mean what you said of giving us the full and complete support that we require. I then met him again in later November 20 ... well it was a different date there because of the time change, but it was approximately 22 November..

B: November 22, 1963?

S: Yes, with a date change - with a time change, it was in late November. Yes, yes it was.

B: Now that was November 22, 1963?

S: November 22, 1963, yes it was.

B: Now, can you give some background on that meeting as to what the background was as to what conversations took place and then relate what did take place at that meeting?

S: Yes, the contact, as with the policy meeting that he had requested before, had always questioned as to whether the U.S. Government was serious about entering into this type of an operation and it questioned the resolve of the U.S. Government to follow through with the operation. He also talked about the support that they would require, and the need for something to protect himself in case he was, in case there was a leak in the operation once it was organized inside Cuba and he was confronted by Castro. He had in mind some type of esoteric gadget with which he would be able to defend himself if this confrontation came about and it was in such a surrounding in which he was not personally armed.

B: By gadget, what kind of a gadget do you mean?

S: He never specifically came around to it. He had in mind some sort of appellet pen or anything that was not a hand weapon that he could carry with him to, into such a conference.

B: He had made that request before the November 22 meeting?

S: He had but we had never pursued such a line because of our insistence in not discussing in any way the elimination of the leadership.

B: But, was anything undertaken to be developed inside The Agency in response to the request of this contact?

S: No, it wasn't up until that time and we had not, this is one of the subjects on which he thought, as we mentioned before during the interview, that somebody was bound to be hurt in this type of an attempt and that if he was going to give up his life, if it came to that, he wanted to take somebody else along with him. He did not want shall we say die in vain and wanted to be prepared to be able to this.

B: And so what did the Agency do in response to that request?

S: The request was made, the request was reported, to the Agency. Again, this became one of those points as with the policy question of trust, of whether we were serious about the operation. So it was decided that again we would not in any way become directly involved in such an operation but to show that there was resolve, that we were serious about the operation and also that we were concerned with his life and the danger he was going to undertake, it was decided to show him and to take a pen which had been, a syringe needle had been inserted into the pen and to give him an idea as to what, if he decided that he needed something like this that he could then, with a syringe, and Blackleaf 40 was mentioned to him as something he could get inside, which again we would not in any way become involved in providing for him that something like this could be rigged by him and any substance of this type could be used. But he was, when he was informed definitively that we would not provide him with any type weapon or pellet or anything else, he said the least we could do if we were concerned with his security is to give him some idea as to what he could do to defend himself and if necessary take the life of the other person if it came to that.

B: This was a ballpoint pen that had been developed which had a hypodermic needle inside when you pushed the lever the needle came out and you could inject poison in someone, is that correct?

S: Yes, this was not something that, this was something that was developed just after this request.

B: And did you ever deliver pen to him, this contact?

S: No, I didn't. I showed it to him and he didn't think too much of this idea.

B: When did you show it to him? On this November 22 meeting?

S: This was at this November meeting, yes. He didn't think too much of it because of the close proximity with which he would have to get to a person if anything developed in the form of a confrontation with him.

B: So what did he ask for instead?

S: He was told, and I was authorized to tell him at that time, that a cache of weapons would be put down for him in Cuba.

B: Any other memory that you have of that November 22 conversation?

S: No, he was not, he was not happy with the fact that we continued to refuse to help him on something that he felt was essential for him and his own safety and for his own protection, but he was satisfied that at least we were in the help that had been promised to him by his policy contact, that at least we were prepared to put down a cache for him of weapons inside Cuba. To the point that at that time he did state that he was prepared to return to Cuba. This had also been in question throughout this period of time as to whether he would return or would not return.

B: As I understand your standard operating procedure you would much prefer to have a person of that kind be a contact in place inside the country rather than be an exile, is that correct?

S: Yes, absolutely. Outside he would be of very little use to us either from the intelligence that he can provide from the outside or the help he could provide inside Cuba in developing the internal operation.

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B: As I understand it, one of the reasons he wasn't satisfied with this ballpoint pen arrangement was that he felt he wanted something that could be used if he was on one side of the table and Castro was on the other side of the table, that he would not have to get right next the man to use it, is that correct?

S: That's right, that's correct.

B: Did you ever have the final authorization to deliver it to him or was it just something that you showed him as part of your good faith?

S: No, it was primarily just to show him as part of our good faith. As I recall we did not think that he would be satisfied with this particular idea but-with this particular implement, which he wasn't. But at least it was another indication of good faith which he was demanding.

B: Any other remembrances you have of that November 22 conversation?

S: No, except that he, at that time, stated that he would return, that he had decided that he would return and to see what he could do to organize the group inside Cuba to get an updated reading on these people and their feelings against the regime and proceed with the organization we had been talking about.

B: He had originally been a supporter of the regime in getting rid of Batista?

S: Yes he had been but he had not been a member of the 26th of July movement but he had been one of the-a member of-one of the groups that overthrew Batista.

B: But then he became disenchanted with Castro?

S: According to what he said, yes he became disenchanted with Castro early on in or shortly thereafter, so it's shortly after Castro took over because of the policies that were being implemented by Castro and his government.

B: What policies didn't he like?

S: The harsh police state policies that were being carried out.

B: Now, did you have any meetings with him subsequent to November 22, 1963?

S: Yes I saw him, I saw him again in late, in late '64 in the fall of '64.

B: In between that time had weapons been delivered to him?

S: The cache I understand, one or two caches were put down for him, I did not-I was not a party to putting down these caches.

B: These were what kinds of weapons?

S: I presume the high-powered rifles that were, that were requested by him.

B: With scopes do you know?

S: I believe so, I don't know specifically, I didn't see the caches before before being prepared or anything like this, but I presume they included the high-powered weapons with the scopes.

B: Now, in addition to the caches of weapons was there any large amounts of cash that was ever paid to him to the best of your knowledge?

S: Not to the best of my knowledge.

B: Was there any amount of cash relatively small that was paid to him to the best of your knowledge?

S: He was given some money for expenses while I was, while I was meeting him in Europe. He did ask, he did ask for some money I understand later on but this was after, after my contact with him at last, this was in late '64.

B: Do you know if the large sum of cash was ever given to him?

S: I don't know. I don't believe so.

B: How much cash approximately did you get to him?

S: I-according to my recollection they were small amounts. They were, they were \$300-\$400 something like this for his living expenses, to help him with his living expenses, while he was in Europe. I don't recall giving him a large amount of money at any time. It was around a thousand at one time, no more than that.

B: Anything else that you can think of with regard to your 1964 contact with him?

S: No, except that at that time the decision had been made in Washington not to proceed with the operation and or to wind it down and there was even more reluctance in going through with it. So it was a matter of trying to- without telling him about it, without letting him know about it, is to put him-try to indirectly arrange for him to contact the external group, which had been organized, and see if they could work out an arrangement between themselves.

B: The external group, you mean the external group of exiles?

S: Yes, this was an exile group, the group that some exiles had organized.

B: Anything else that you can think of that might in any way be relevant to our inquiry?

S: No, not that I...that I....

B: Now, do you know if there were any other subsequent Agency contacts with this particular contact after you last met with him in the latter part of 1964?

S: No, I left, I left working on the project shortly after that and did not-keep up with it so to my recollection or to my knowledge I don't know.

B: What did you do after you left this particular project then?

S: I was assigned to Venezuela.

B: And when were you assigned there?

S: In '65, in early '65.

B: Now, was there some concern inside the Agency that perhaps part of these plans might have leaked out and that might be one of the reasons for winding it down?

S: Not, not so much as of the time, as of the time that, I don't, I don't, there was concern that quite a few people were becoming knowledgeable of the organization but before I left the operation there was not, as I recall, that much concern about it.

B: Anything else you can think of that might in any way be relevant to the inquiries of the Commission?

S: No, not that I...

B: Any other assassination plots or plans that you know of?

S: None.

B: Do you know if there was ever any request made by him possibly for silencers to go with any weapons?

S: Not that I can recollect except to hear that this was something that he requested after I had seen him the last time. This was, this was in the Madrid phase of the operation when he was in contact with the exile group and I had no knowledge of that part of the operation.

B: The Agency basically turned them over to the exile group then after you left?

S: This was, this was my last contact with him. Without specifically telling either the exiles or this particular contact that we were interested in this, or that we were behind it, the idea was to put them in touch with each other, which indirectly it was arranged.

B: Anything else you can think of?

S: No.

B: Thank you very much sir.

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