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JFK ASSASSINATION SYSTEM  
IDENTIFICATION FORM

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10/21/75

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MEMORANDUM

TO : Fritz Schwarz

FROM: Paul Wallach

DATE: July 22, 1975

RE : Staff Interview of George McManus (Monday, July 21, 1975)

As we discussed last week, I asked George McManus to come down for an interview Monday evening. The interview lasted approximately three hours; the substance of that interview -- as reconstructed from both Joe DiGenova's and my own notes -- is reflected in the attached memorandum.

McManus should make a brief appearance before the Committee. He worked closely with both Helms and Harvey, and his testimony will allow a different perspective on the Mongoose operations and the assassination issues.

McManus will also testify as to his perceptions of Robert Kennedy, and Messrs: Helms, Lansdale, McCone, and Harvey. More specifically, McManus may show us that Helms was not as "on top" of the Cuban operations as he would have had us believe on June 13 -- a position from which he attempted to back away during his most recent Committee appearance.

cc: William Miller  
Curtis Smothers

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Historical Data:

McManus retired in May 1970 after some 20 plus years of covert/ clandestine agency service. In the early 1950s he headed up the CIA's European Defector Interrogation Center. He was subsequently appointed Canadian Station Chief and later Director of the Cover Staff.

In mid-December 1961, Helms asked McManus to apply his European expertise to the Agency's Cuban Defector Interrogation Center. McManus headed for Florida on Christmas Day and spent the following week at the Opa Locha Center. He reported directly to Helms on his findings, conclusions, and suggestions in a memorandum dated January 3, 1962.\* McManus recalls that the "center" was then inoperative; he called for an immediate operational restructuring. McManus stressed the importance of the positive intelligence that the Center could, and indeed eventually did provide at the time of the Missile Crisis.

It was not until early January 1962 that Helms formally brought McManus "on board" as his assistant for "Cuban activities. The initial weeks were dedicated to ensuring that the revitalized Center got off the ground; subsequent

\*This afternoon I requested a copy of McManus' January 3 memorandum.

weeks allowed for attention to the full panoply of Cuban activities. McManus describes himself as "Helms' eyes and ears" in the Cuban area.

McManus spent his final years with the Agency as Director of Cover (1963-1965), Assistant to Admiral Rayburn (DCI: 1965-1967), and as Station Chief in Europe (1967-1970).

McManus on the meeting in RFK's office (January 19, 1962):

McManus--at Richard Helms' side--attended the January 19 meeting. McManus was to take notes to ensure that McCone was adequately briefed and to substantively support Helms should RFK ask about the CIA's Cuban Defector Center. One copy each of McManus' handwritten and typed notes (the latter with numerous typographical errors) are attached hereto.

Surprisingly enough, the January 19 meeting was McManus' first Cuban operations "briefing". McManus recalled that RFK "firmly" stressed the need to do something about Cuba. He analogized the Attorney General's remarks to those of a football coach's during halftime. (albiet, a Don Schula and not a Vince Lombardi). However, RFK did not specifically delineate what was to be done; this was left to the Operational Chief, Edward Lansdale. McManus now recalls RFK stating--in addition to the alleged direct quotes as set forth in his memorandum--"we've got to get on with it", and "we've got to get this fellow off our necks". McManus was naturally surprised by the high priority which the Attorney General placed on Cuban activities.

The quotation marks in McManus' handwritten notes were intended to reflect verbatim statements by the Attorney General. However, McManus--who was at that time was just "a beginner in Cuban operations" hastened to add that this



was not a question and answer session; without attempting to understand this meaning he penned the Attorney General's words. (With the exception of discussion relating to Opa Locha Center--see typed memo, at paragraph 3).

McManus assumed that RFK was speaking for the President. McManus "never got anything off the ground as fast as he did the Cuban Refugee Center". However, at no time did McManus discuss the meeting or RFK's statements with either McCone or Helms. At the meeting McManus thought in terms of increasing our positive Cuban intelligence. He did not really tie RFK's stress into sabotage operations.

Aside from the January 19 meeting McManus claims that he was not aware of continuing Cuban pressures emanated from the Attorney General. According to McManus, Helms met regularly with the President and "much less often with the Attorney General." McManus neither was present nor discussed the substance of those meetings with Helms.

McManus on being Helms' assistant for Cuban operations:

As Helms' assistant for Cuban activities, McManus was in daily contact with both Helms and Harvey. Moreover, he often assisted Task Force W in responding to and indeed often implementing Lansdale's plethora of requests.

Soon after the January 19 meeting, Harvey was brought in as Director of the Cuban Task Force. McManus understood that part of his job was to keep track of Harvey who was "quite an independent fellow", and not "extremely forthcoming with information". McManus explained that Helms shared his feeling that "we had to get off our asses and get moving on Cuba". However, Helms as DDP had "lots of other important concerns."

McManus prepared a weekly report for Helms wherein he summarized intelligence information and the operational work of Task Force W. Apparently, the operational section was prepared by Harvey and simply reviewed by McManus prior to transmittal to Helms. Helms in turn reviewed the draft report. The final version was eventually disseminated to seven recipients, including "inter alia", McCone, Lansdale, Defense, and the White House."

Although McManus was Helms' "Cuban eyes and ears" he disclaims any knowledge of discussions, plans or attempts relating to the assassination/elimination/liquidation of Fidel Castro. Although we did not show McManus specific

documentation of assassination attempts (for the reasons discussed last week), we informed McManus generally as to the nature of the plans and attempts, their time sequence, and the cast of characters. McManus admitted that he was surprised that these were just now being called to his attention. He told us that assassination was "a completely different ball game". Indeed he stated that assassination was in his opinion senseless; "viz., our leaders would have been sitting ducks".

McManus on General Lansdale:

McManus described Lansdale as "Kook", "wild-man", and as "just plain crazy". He told us that Lansdale was similarly viewed by most others at the Agency. Unfortunately, Lansdale was "sponsored by the Kennedys" and "as good soldiers the CIA had to cooperate."

McManus vividly recounted Lansdale forays into the sabotage arena. He presented his initial laundry list of Cuban action proposals early in 1962, of course, he expected immediate CIA action on his requests. In McManus' words, the CIA was "required to assist Lansdale in these "unrealistic", "half-baked," and "half-ass" schemes. McManus added that with every new dawn a Lansdale courier bearing yet another "half-baked scheme" would arrive at Task Force W's door.

McManus succinctly painted a picture of the Agency's -- and more specifically, McCone's, Helms', Harvey's and McManus' -- resentment of Lansdale. Lansdale -- with the CIA "as his troops and horses" -- was ready to do battle, albeit indirectly, with the Castro regime.

McManus stressed that "Lansdale's projects simply gave the impression of movement. Although the frenzy of activity gave a whirlwind impression, it was without substance. McManus noted some higher ups regarded Lansdale as a mystic, viz, "they must have believed that despite Lansdale's insane ideas, he had some sort of power to accomplish results or they wouldn't have kept him."

Neither Helms nor McManus had daily contact with Lansdale.

As mentioned above, Lansdale often communicated directly with Harvey. (Who also held Lansdale in contempt). McManus added that the Task Force was a new and unusual concept, and not "really part of the Agency organization."

McManus on the Special Group (augmented):

McManus was surprisngly uninformed as to the Special Group (augmented) and the established approval structure we have heard so much about. He felt that the "33 tasks" were so broad that virtually any and all sabotage/propaganda activities envisioned by the task force would ha ve been permissible. In pressing McManus as to authorizational scope, he again reiterated that assassinations were not within the perimeters of permissible activities.

McManus admitted that as a result of Mongoose, Castro's death might result from a Cuban uprising. However, McManus sees clear moral and political distinctions between this indirect death and U. S.-sponsored assassination attempts. One practical distinction mentioned was that "targeting Castro was tantamount to placing our leaders in a shooting gallery."

McManus is aware of the make-up of the Special Group and Lansdale's focal role. However, he claims to have had virtually no contact with the non-CIA members (Querre: how did McManus formulate the opinions set forth in his November 5, 1962, memorandum).

McManus on his November 5, 1962 Memorandum

In early November Helms asked McManus what he thought about the past year's Cuban operations. McManus replied that he would rather put it in writing. The November 5, 1962 memorandum is his "thinkpiece." Helms never discussed the memorandum with McManus. However, McManus deduces -- from the handwritten notation in the margin which reflects that the document was removed from the files of McCone's executive assistant -- that Helms reviewed the memorandum and forwarded it to McCone.

McManus ducked many of our specific questions relating to the memorandum. He had said earlier in the interview, however that the Attorney General "viewed the project in a political light -- i.e., as the means to limit Castro's advances in Latin America. Moreover, McManus did not sufficiently answer our questions as to which of the other players shared his expressed views.

I would think that we will want to review this memorandum with McManus tomorrow.

McManus on not being informed of assassination attempts while Admiral Rayburn's executive assistant:

As noted previously, McManus disclaims any knowledge whatever of assassination plans or attempts. He rejects the notion of "plausible deniability" at the operational level; i.e., where the operatives would not inform the SCI or DDP. In adamantly rejecting the existence of any such unwritten law in the intelligence community, he stressed that DCI must be fully informed as to all ongoing Agency operations. Indeed, McManus told us that McCone, Rayburn, and Helms were all "inquisitive" men.

McManus believes that McCone would have been "morally outraged" if informed of assassination attempts. However, the "accuracy" of McManus' statement may be questioned as he also stated that "Helms would have been opposed to assassinations." When I explained that Helms was aware of such attempts, he could not provide a satisfactory response.