

**KENNEDY'S ASSASSINATION:
THE KEY WEST CONNECTION**



This is the fifth in a series by Tim Gratz and Mark Howell about the Keys connections to the assassination of President John F. Kennedy

Searching for ghosts: Did Oswald meet Ruby at Key West airport?

BY TIM GRATZ

Special to The Citizen

AND MARK HOWELL

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This is the fifth of a five-part series.

Sometime in 1976, an aide to Sen. Richard Schweiker of Pennsylvania entered the senator's office and told him he had a phone call from Key West.

Schweiker was a member of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence that was investigating CIA abuses. Schweiker and Sen. Gary Hart of Colorado were concentrating on the Kennedy assassination.

The man from Key West told Sen. Schweiker he had information on the Kennedy case that might be helpful.

Sen. Schweiker sent his chief investigator, Gaeton Fonzi, to Key West to investigate the man's story.

Fonzi was the man who first found out that the leader of the Alpha 66 exile group had claimed he'd seen his CIA case officer meeting with Lee Harvey Oswald in Dallas. That report, covered in Saturday's story, opened up an entirely new avenue of the Kennedy investigation.

In 1991, Fonzi wrote a book about his work titled "The Last Investigation." Chapter Seven is called "Searching for Ghosts in Key West." It tells of how Fonzi drove to Key West in 1976 to check out the Key West International Airport — "a cinderblock structure the size of a small city post office" — and to talk to George Faraldo, the airport manager.

It was Faraldo who had called Sen. Schweiker's office with the incredible claim that he had seen Lee Harvey Oswald, Kennedy's assassin, and Jack Ruby, the assassin's killer, together at the airport in the summer of 1963.

Fonzi thought there might be something to it because the FBI had connected Ruby to a gun-smuggling operation in the Florida Keys. He ended up spending a week here.

He got to know Faraldo, "a thin, swarthy man in his late fifties," and liked him. Faraldo was soft-spoken, he appeared honest and was

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Ghosts

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"consistently normal. He wasn't an oddball." In fact, he was "very intelligent, a college graduate ... well-known in the community, a generally respected man whose wife sings in the church choir."

Faraldo had been manager of the airport since it was called Meacham Field in 1946. He told Fonzi that in the summer of 1963, a group of young people had hung out in the airport terminal, all day and most of the night, waiting for an Aerovia Q plane to take them to Cuba.

Dressed in dungarees or olive-drab fatigues, they said they were part of the Fair Play for Cuba Committee and were off to help cut the sugarcane crop in Cuba.

Fonzi writes that Faraldo "pointed out exactly where he saw Oswald and exactly where Ruby was standing most of the time. Faraldo appeared so sure of what he was saying that I could almost see images of the two still standing there."

He recalled that Oswald was the only one of the group to keep circulating, "chatting briefly with various clusters." At one point, said Faraldo, Oswald approached Ruby and talked to him briefly. Ruby did not mingle with the group but spent most of the time standing next to the doorway that led to the plane boarding area.

Faraldo chatted with various members of the group through the day, but not Oswald or Ruby.

"After the assassination, George told me on the sly that he had seen Oswald and Ruby together at the airport. I have never told that to another soul except Norma [Faraldo] and you. I never told my wife what I was doing."

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Oswald joined the group in boarding the plane when it finally arrived that night. Faraldo did not see Ruby get on and did not know if he had.

But he did film the group, with a movie camera that he used as a stringer for WTVJ-TV in Miami.

In his investigation while in Key West, Fonzi spoke with a woman who worked the ticket counter for National Airlines at Key West in the early 1960s. She said she did remember a group going to Cuba to cut sugarcane. Then Fonzi contacted news director Ralph Rennick at WTVJ who remembered Faraldo and the story about Oswald and Ruby but could find no trace of the film.

The Citizen's staff photographer (presumably the late Don Pinder) told Fonzi that all his negatives from the early 1960s had been lost in a hurricane. At Monroe County Library, Betty Bruce could find no mention in the archives of any visit by Fair Play for Cuba members.

At the end of Fonzi's visit, Faraldo mentioned a photo lab that he'd built at the back of his machine shop. Fonzi asked to see it. He was amazed to discover sophisticated electronic and photographic gear, "well over \$100,000 worth of top-notch equipment," plus the housing of an aerial reconnaissance camera.

Fonzi asked Faraldo what the equipment was for. He replied that he had flown over Cuba and photographed the Russian missiles there long before President Kennedy announced their existence.

For whom was he working, Fonzi asked.

Faraldo said he'd been told that he was working for the United States Information Agency.

Could it really have been the CIA?

"Yes," said Faraldo. "I would think so."

The story of George Faraldo

George Faraldo was born in Key West in 1919. By the age of 15 he had learned to fly small

aircraft. He joined the Navy at the outset of World War II, just after marrying his childhood sweetheart, Norma Barroso (also a Conch).

He flew many missions for the Navy in the South Pacific theater and was badly injured when a Japanese bomber strafed an airport on New Georgia Island.

When Faraldo returned from the war in 1944, he sold his car to purchase an airplane and started a flying school in Key West.

Two years later he took over management of Meacham Field. It was under his management that the runways, taxiways and terminals were completed and Key West Airport was officially dedicated on July 4, 1957. All that it lacked was a tower.

The Citizen visited with Faraldo's widow Norma during the course of this investigation into the Keys connection to the Kennedy assassination. Among several stories she told of her adventurous husband was what happened on a Sunday in October 1962 when her husband received a call from Washington.

"Something serious and secret" was about to happen, Faraldo was told, and he was ordered to construct a tower at the airport as fast as possible.

It being a Sunday, Faraldo had to roust up the owner of the

lumber yard in Key West. He purchased all the wood available and by Wednesday, working around the clock without sleep, Faraldo had constructed the tower — just in time for the 14-day Missile Crisis at the end of October.

The strain of the effort began Faraldo's heart troubles that would afflict him the

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rest of his life. Another injury he incurred in 1962 was from a beating he took at José Martí Airport in Havana.

Faraldo had gone on a fishing trip to Cuba accompanied by The Citizen's sports editor at the time, Jack Burke, now 83 and living in North Carolina. The Citizen asked Burke to recall the trip.

Just months before the Missile Crisis, he said, "A fisherman called Mr. Brooks who owned a

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magazine invited George and me to fish in Cuba.

"In the three days we were in Cuba, we fished in various places and some of the time the guides took us to some illegal spots.

"I took pictures of these places, though George didn't know I did. He went to houses at night and spoke to the people in Spanish. I said to him, do what you have to do.

"At the airport in Havana, George was taken to a room by Cuban customs officers and interrogated. He was let go two days later."

(In 1976, Faraldo told Fonzi that he was beaten while incarcerated.)

"I flew back to Miami alone," continued Burke. "I gave my film to Ralph Rennick, the news editor at WTVJ, who developed the film and broadcast some of the photos.

"After the assassination, George told me on the sly that he had seen Oswald and Ruby together at the airport. I have never told that to another soul except Norma [Faraldo] and you. I never told my wife what I was doing."

Oswald and Ruby knew each other before the assassination, that fact alone would be tantamount to proof of a conspiracy, since Ruby murdered Oswald.

There are hundreds of reports of individuals who claimed they saw Oswald and Ruby together before the assassination, though most such reports proved to be baseless or were generated by individuals of questionable credibility. Several, however, cannot be easily dismissed.

One report of an Oswald/Ruby link that seems credible comes from the mother of a former attorney general of Texas who had seen Ruby and Oswald eating together in the restaurant in which she was a waitress.

If Faraldo was the only credible source ever to have seen Oswald and Ruby together, it would be easy to dismiss him as being simply mistaken. But he was not the only one.

Nor does his story, which Norma Faraldo has told The Citizen he maintained was the truth to his dying day, appear to be deliberate misinformation.

Fonzi states that most of the stories linking Oswald with the Soviets or Cuba were eventually traced to U.S. or other friendly intelligence services, planted in order to deflect investigators' curiosity about the hiring of organized crime figures to kill Castro. But there is no indication that the intelligence services were planting false stories about Oswald in 1976, when Faraldo first made his official report about Oswald and Ruby. Nor did any of the "planted stories" purport to link Oswald and Ruby.

It is possible that Faraldo was simply mistaken in his identification, though he insisted, consistently, that he was not.

Having researched the matter for the past two months, The

Our conclusion

If it could be proven that

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KENNEDY

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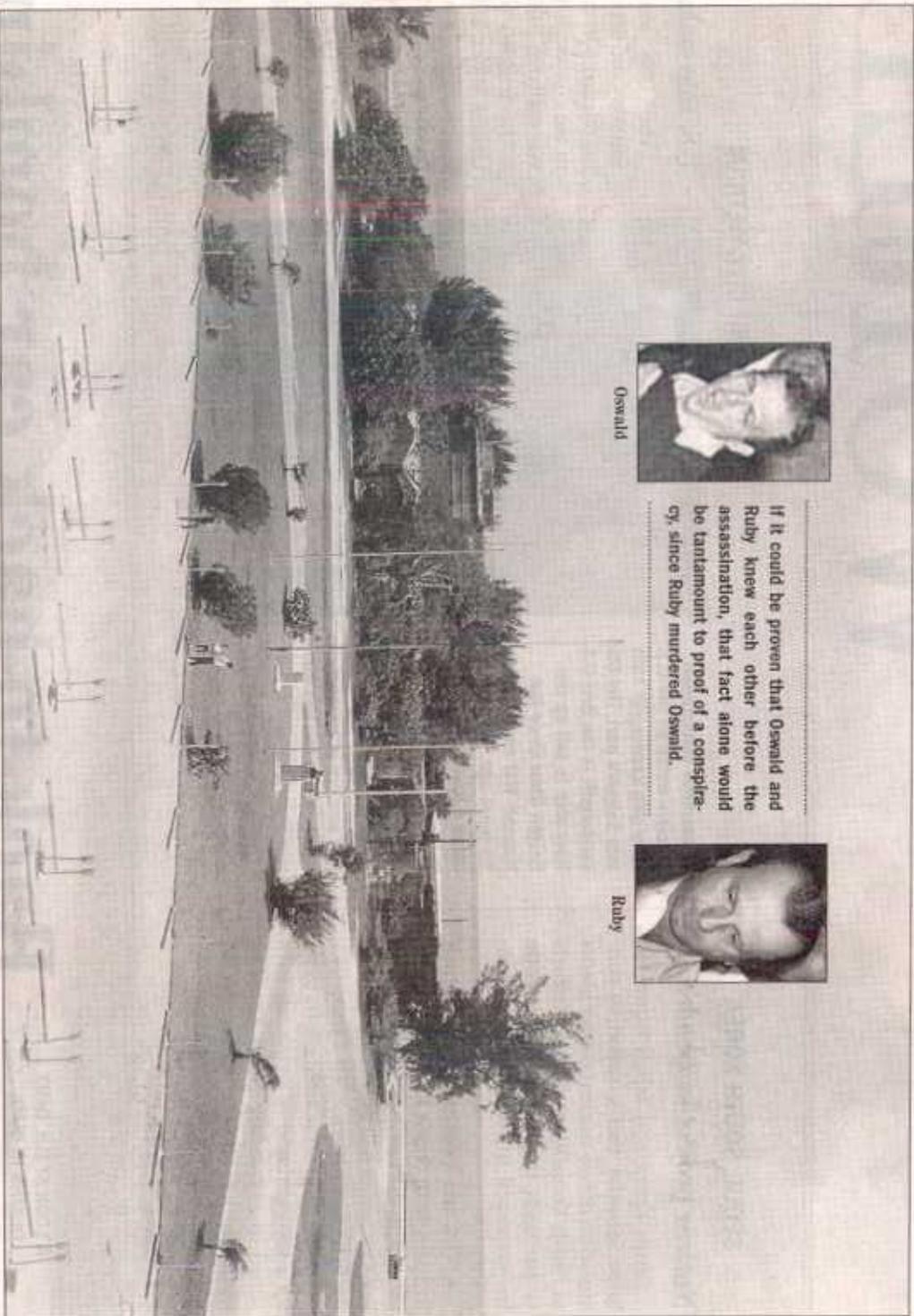


Oswald

If it could be proven that Oswald and Ruby knew each other before the assassination, that fact alone would be tantamount to proof of a conspiracy, since Ruby murdered Oswald.



Ruby



Were Lee Harvey Oswald and Jack Ruby together at the Key West Airport in 1963? George Faraldo, the airport manager, said he saw them together at the airport.

Special to The Citizen

Citizen could find no reason for George Faraldo to have concocted his story.

No official record exists of Oswald having been in Cuba, there exists a file memo from J. Edgar Hoover, written the day of the assassination, in which Hoover reports advising President Johnson that Oswald had visited Cuba more than once.

Mark Howell and Tim Gratz, having spent weeks researching these stories in the fever swamps of assassination lore, are now each demanding that the other produce proof of his alibi for Nov. 22, 1963.

(In a photograph to yesterday's story, Antonio Veciana is to the left; the individual with him, unidentified in the caption, is Armando Fleites, secretary general of the Second Front of the Escambray.)

Handwritten initials or signature.