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MEMO - 3/20/77

TO: Tanenbaum

FROM: Fonzi

Re: Interview with Rolando Otero

I spoke with Rolando Otero on March 16, 1977, at the Okaloosa County Jail, near Eglin Air Force Base, Fort Walton Beach, Florida. I was with his attorney, Bob Rosenblatt of the Miami Public Defender's Office, who had earlier contacted our office about Otero's wanting to talk with us about the Kennedy assassination. Otero was scheduled to be sentenced the following day and both he and his attorney expected a long term, perhaps 10 years. They were convinced the judge had been swayed by the FBI and was prejudiced against Otero. Otero had been convicted on one of nine charges involving the bombing of public buildings in the Miami area. Earlier last year he had been found innocent of the very same charges in a Federal court, so when the State brought the same charges against him, Otero and his attorney claim, the FBI went all out to get him convicted in order to cover its embarrassment of his earlier acquittal. The Federal judge in the case, District Judge Norman Roettger, specifically commented before the verdict in Otero's first trial that the Government's case was "weak." There is a very strong case to be made for Otero's innocence, which is relevant to his now feeling that he has suffered the last straw in the American system of justice. The FBI's case against him was originally made by their veteran informant, Riccardo Morales, a CIA contract agent now working for the Venezuelan security police. Otero believes Morales set the bombs he is charged for and, in fact, may be a Castro double agent. Otero admits he is a terrorist bomber who has devoted his life to fighting Castro and communism, but claims he would never plant bombs within the United States, which is exactly, he says, why Morales would want him out of the way.

All of the above is relevant to why Otero wanted to speak with us. At this point, he said, he has nothing to lose. He asked for nothing for himself in return for the information he gave. And, in fact, his evaluation of his situation seemed to be verified on the day after I spoke with him when the Okaloosa County Circuit Court Judge Clyde Wells sentenced him to 40 years in prison. The day after that, Otero took an overdose of tranquilizers in an attempt to commit suicide. He was in critical condition for two days but this morning seemed to be recovering.

According to Otero himself, his knowledge of the Kennedy assassination is based on two factors: Second-hand information and his long association with and knowledge of the tactics and procedures of CIA operations. (Although his opinions are strong, Otero was anxious that we do not evaluate too highly the quality of the information he provided, since it is not first hand.) Otero's involvement with the CIA goes back to when he was 18 and a member

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of Brigade 2506 that was captured at the Bay of Pigs. He spent 18 months in a Cuban jail and since his release in December of 1962 was involved in a series of anti-Castro operations in the Caribbean and Latin America, including an aborted assassination attempt on Castro in Venezuela in 1975. He appears to have always been a lower-level, front-line operator and so his direct knowledge of the strategic directors of most of his operations is limited.

Even in reviewing the conversation with Otero, it is difficult to filter out the specific details from the general analysis he provides of numerous aspects of the Kennedy assassination. He insists, first of all, that any involvement of the Mafia with it is, in his word, "bullshit," deliberate misinformation planted by the CIA to throw off a legitimate investigation. He feels the Mafia angle was first injected at the time of Garrison's investigation when the Agency decided that it was a way of short-circuiting his efforts. It has since, says Otero, further developed the misinformation scenario. The attempts against Castro's life involving the CIA and the Mafia were, says Otero, very lightly considered, never got beyond the conversational stage, if that, but are now being advanced as having been of serious significance. He feels that any attempt to lay the blame for the Kennedy assassination on Castro is part of the ploy to throw the investigation off the true track.

Oswald, says Otero, was sent to Russia as a CIA agent and that the decision to kill Kennedy was made before his return to the United States. He says he has no specific knowledge but he figures, from his general knowledge of CIA operations and from what he has heard about it over the years, that there were between 30 and 35 CIA agents in Dallas on the day Kennedy was killed, including the actual hit team. He figures there were at least three on the hit team, at least one in front and one in the rear of Kennedy.

Otero says he heard that most of the final planning and coordination took place at meetings held in the Dallas YMCA building.

Otero says he also heard that at least three unsolved murders of Cubans in Miami over the last several years were connected with the Kennedy assassination. He doesn't know the men killed but gave me the locations, which I'll have to check out. This, he emphasizes, is not hard information.

These are the people Otero says were involved in the Kennedy assassination: Howard Hunt, Bernardo Torres, Norman Diaz, Orlando Urra, Nildo Acevedo. Otero says he was told by a source that Torres worked with Oswald and was posing as a photographer on Dealey Plaza on November 22nd. He says he does not know how directly involved the others were, although he says he does know there were a few recent attempts on Diaz's life. Otero gave me the name of his source of information, which I'll follow up. I'll also send separately copies of notes Otero made

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before and during our interview. The interview was taped but because Otero thought there was a possibility that the room in which we were was bugged, he often gave me vocally contrary answers to questions while indicating on paper the real answers.

Otero has been transferred to another jail since his sentencing and suicide attempt. Since it's closer to Miami, this will make it a bit easier for me to re-contact him for additional information.

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