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MEMO - 5/25/76

TO: Dave Marston

FROM: Gaeton Fonzi

I returned from Key West early this morning more frustrated than tired. Although there are a few lines I left out down there which I'll check back on in a couple of days, and a few here in Miami yet to be checked, there's a possibility that George Faraldo's story may eventually wind up a valid question mark. For that reason, there should be a record of the details of my investigation, in addition to minor nuances and suspicions which later may turn out to be relevant. More importantly, however, are a couple of fascinating investigative sidestreets which coincidentally (I like to believe) popped up.

I initially talked to Faraldo last Friday by telephone. After an hour's conversation with him, I was left with the impression, as I mentioned then, that he seemed a credible character. There were, however, strange undulations in his ability to recall details. Some recollections were extremely detailed, others extremely fuzzy. (He was absolutely sure the number of the plane was CU-T 583; yet he wasn't too sure about the month or even the year.) Still, there were no inconsistencies in the details he told Sarah, those he told to me on the telephone and those he told to me in person. And, in fact, undulations in recollected details may be a characteristic of memory after 13 years.

The basic details remain the same: The incident occurred in the late summer months, late July, August or early September, in, he believes, 1963. He is absolutely not sure of the year, but doubts whether he would have remembered Oswald or Ruby if he had seen them more than a year prior to the assassination. Faraldo was in the hospital when Kennedy was killed. He had had, I believe, a heart problem. His recollection of the incident is that it occurred not too long before that. He was manager of the Key West International Airport then and arrived at work between 9 and 9:30 in the morning. The group was in the lobby of the airport when he arrived. The lobby has two parts to it, the ticket counter area and the waiting area, both very small, a glass partition and doors separating them. The group was in the ticket counter area, and most of them remained in that area all day. There were between 30 and 40 in the group. They were, most of the time, in clusters, many sitting in small circles on the floor, a few with guitars. They were relatively quiet, well-behaved and caused no disturbance. Neither, according to the guy who was janitor then, did they leave much of a mess. They were mostly young, boys and girls, "hippie-looking," a few dressed in olive-drab fatigues. Faraldo recalls he had a rule against being shirtless in the lobby area (not a general rule in most Key West establishments) and he did have to tell a few (of the guys, I presume) who had wandered outside, removed their shirts in the heat, to put them back on when they returned to the lobby. That's one of the factors which makes him sure it was in the summer.

Faraldo says he learned from talking with a few in the group that they were going to Cuba to cut sugar cane and that they had something to do with the Fair Play for Cuba Committee. The leader of the group appeared to be a guy with a beard, but he wasn't an obvious leader barking orders or giving commands. Although Oswald was a part of the group, says Faraldo, he was more distinctive than the others: in that he moved about more and appeared a bit nervous. (That, at least, made him distinctive to Faraldo who was then daily on the look-out for potential hijackers.) Oswald was dressed casually, sport shirt and pants. Ruby also was casually dressed, but he spent most of the time not mingling with the group but standing against the doorway that led from the waiting area to ^{the} rear plane-boarding area. (There are no ramps or corridors; the airport building is rectangular, the planes taxi right off the runway and up to the building.)

Once, as Faraldo reported to Sarah, he saw Oswald approach Ruby and heard him ask: "Have you heard anything from the Big Bird yet?" Faraldo recalls thinking Oswald may have been asking about when the plane was coming in, but he later had doubts about that assumption when he again overheard Oswald asked others in the group specifically about the time the plane was coming in.

Faraldo recalls that a plane finally did arrive late in the evening to pick up the group. He says Oswald got on the plane with the group. He didn't see Ruby get on and doesn't know if he did.

At various times during the day, Faraldo wandered around the airport taking photographs of the group. He used a movie camera and a 35-mm still camera. (At first he told me he used a Pentax 35mm, later said he had thought about it and didn't think he had his Pentax at the time and used either a Leica or an Argus.) He shot the movie film for WTVJ-TV, a Miami television station, for which he was a regular stringer. He sent both his movie film and his 35mm film undeveloped to Miami with a crew member of a National Airlines flight, which was his regular procedure. His movie film was in an envelope marked WTVJ. The crew member was told to give it to a cab driver at the Miami airport to deliver to the television station. It was addressed to Ralph Renick, the news director. The still film was put in a brown manilla envelope, folded over, taped and addressed to "Director, FBI, Washington, D.C." (Faraldo believes he put just his name as a return address.) The National crew member was told to drop the envelope in a mail pouch or box at the Miami airport. Faraldo doesn't remember the crew member's name or the National flight number.

I spoke with about 20 persons who might possibly have been in a position to corroborate Faraldo's memory of the group being at Key West Airport. Less than a half dozen were directly suggested by Faraldo. Only a few remembered such an incident, none with any clarity or detail. Clennie Demeritt, for instance, who worked the ticket counter for National Airlines at Key West then, says he does remember something

about a group going to Cuba to cut sugar cane, thinks they were Americans and Canadians, but doesn't remember when they went. He thinks it might have happened on his day off and he was told about it.

Herbert Carmen, with the Immigration Department then, vaguely remembers reading something about such a group in the newspapers, but thought they left from Canada or Mexico.

Kenneth Bauman, who has been with the Federal Aviation Administration at Key West for 20 years, also vaguely remembers reading about such a group, but thinks he didn't see them because he was on the late shift then.

Anthony Alonso Sr., then the Key West Airport janitor, does recall the group, corroborated Faraldo's contention that there were 30 or 40 in the group, thinks they were "foreigners" or "strangers," and pins the time down as "'62 or '63." (He is a very old man, initially answered "Yeah!" to most of my questions and would not be considered a reliable witness, probably, because of his age.) Don Pinda, a photographer for the Key West Citizen, who Faraldo thinks might have covered the incident, doesn't remember it at all and says all his negatives from that time were lost in a hurricane.

A page-by-page check of the bound volumes at the Citizen's office produced no record. The Historian at the Public Library, a Mrs. Betty Bruce, who was described as "remembering everything," could not recall the incident but will doublecheck the microfilm files this week for me.

John Mangialletto, currently FAA Chief at Key West, told me FAA records are kept only 15 days before being destroyed. He had no recollection of the incident.

Neither U.S. Customs nor Immigration has any records of any such outgoing flight as Faraldo describes.

No one who worked the control tower in 1963 has any recollection of such a flight. (Prior to the Cuban missile crisis in October of 1962, Key West Airport had no control tower.)

One of the key questionable factors in Faraldo's contention is that a Cuban-owned Aerovia Q Airline plane was sent up from Cuba to pick up the group late at night. Although we spoke to about a half-dozen former Key West employees of Aerovia Q, none could remember such an incident. Aerovia Q, however, quit its regular flights from Cuba to Key West late in 1961 and records indicate that the last payment for office space in the airport was made in March, 1962. Faraldo contends it would still have been possible for an Aerovia Q plane to fly in from Cuba to Key West in 1963 merely by filing a flight plan with the FAA. (As noted, flight plan records are not retained beyond 15 days.) Henry Till, flight service attendant for the FAA in Key West since 1961, says it's "very unlikely" that a Cuban plane landed in Key West in 1963.

There is another major inconsistency in Faraldo's contention. He says he is absolutely sure he kept a copy of the manifest (the passenger list) of the flight. He says he kept the manifests of all of Aerovia Q's daily flights, each day would staple them all together, fold them and put them in a white envelope and put the envelope in a cardboard box. He says the manifests were prepared

by Aerovias Q personnel and said that the person who would have prepared the manifest for the flight in question was Celia Godinet. Through her brother who is still in Key West, Faraldo got me her address in Miami. She told me she left Aerovias Q when it closed down its flights in 1961.

Nevertheless, Faraldo specifically remembered where he had kept that box of manifests at the airport. With the help of the current airport manager, we rummaged through every possible storage area without success. The one storage room where Faraldo is most sure they were was recently gutted after a rain storm ruined the ceiling and flooded it. The box, said Faraldo, was on a shelf suspended from the ceiling between air conditioning ducts. The ceiling and the ducts were torn out and thrown in a black soggy heap on the side of the building. The current manager, R. Kenneth Agnew, said everything that had been stored in that room also was thrown out. We probed through the heap of discarded material without any luck.

With the Key West angles almost exhausted, I finally decided to check Ralph Renick at WTVJ this morning. As soon as I mentioned Faraldo's name he said, "I know what you're talking about. He mentioned it to us some time ago and we went back through our files and couldn't find anything. It would have been a damn good story for us to break, obviously, if we did find it. He had Oswald and Ruby in the group, right?" That took care of my oblique approach. Because of my interest, Renick said he would check the files again. He said he did vaguely recall such a group being in Key West "either coming or going." He admitted, however, that contributions from stringers doesn't get the same careful treatment as the station's own film, and that's not too careful, "so," he said, "there's the possibility it slipped through our fingers. If it's not filed it didn't happen."

So, in sum, what do we have? On the surface we have, up until this point, a story that cannot be corroborated with hard evidence in any way. We have, in fact, a few factors that seem strangely suspect and may even fit into a pattern of misinformation associated with assassination investigations. There are, however, other factors which make it difficult to totally discard Faraldo's contention. He is, most of all, a guy with a good reputation. An engineering graduate of Auburn, he was airport manager at Key West for 31 years and is nationally known in his field. Today he runs a successful diesel injection servicing business and does commercial aerial photography. He has provided information for other government agencies and was described by one Federal agent for me as a source of "highest ranking" whose information is always "very good."

Faraldo retained his credibility over the many hours I spent with him. He is now, however, very anxiety ridden and perhaps on the edge of a nervous breakdown. He was visibly distraught when we were told the manifest records he had kept over the years were so casually discarded. In addition, he and his wife are extremely upset about the shooting and sinking of their houseboat. In checking out that incident, I am absolutely certain now it has nothing to

do with our investigation. A few weeks ago, Faraldo had filed a claim in court against a fellow named Michael Gill for an unpaid \$599 bill for repair to his 40' sailboat, the "Restless Lady." Faraldo won the case and got a judgement against Gill. Gill's lawyer was Key West city attorney Manny James, recently indicted with a few ~~xxx~~ other city officials for drug dealing; most were convicted, James was acquitted on a legal technicality. Faraldo had noticed some marijuana stashed on Gill's boat when he was repairing it. Before the judgement, Gill had the boat ownership transferred to a friend named Hollifield. A week after the judgement was filed, Gill was arrested for cocaine dealing. It appears that Gill and his friends are seeking revenge on Faraldo. Hollifield was seen just last Saturday ~~x~~ cruising around the boatyard where Faraldo is repairing his boat.

As credible as he is, there is another factor which may be an influence on the quality of Faraldo's memory: Several years ago he was attacked by an irate tourist who had gone bezerk after being told to move his car out of a no-parking lane. A huge guy, a building contractor from North Carolina, he smashed Faraldo's face in, crushing his facial bones and damaging his eyes. He then kicked him on the ground, breaking his neck and back. Faraldo still wears a neck brace constantly and often a back brace. He has been unable to get the guy extradicted from North Carolina, despite the fact the fellow has attacked three other people there.

Here are a few other things I found out about George Faraldo:

A Navy veteran, he is an experienced pilot, an expert photographic technician and an electronic expert. I would estimate the value of photographic and electronic equipment I saw myself at well over \$100,000. He was very early involved in intelligence gathering activity in Cuba for the United States Information Agency. (I asked him if he thought it was possible that he was really working for the CIA. "Yes," he said, "I would think so.") He said he had known Batista personally ("I think he was one of the best friends the United States ever had," he said) and was very friendly with former Castro Air Force Chief, Pedro Diaz Lanz -- although, like Howard Hunt, he didn't remember the guy who fled Cuba with Lanz, our friend Frank Fiorini.

SIMILAR TO
PARKLEY
REMEMBER

Faraldo said he made a number of intelligence gathering trips into Cuba after Castro took over and was once retained and beaten by Castro police. He also flew numerous aerial photographic missions and claims to have shots of the missile sights long before Kennedy announced they existed. He explained how he had aerial cameras built into the bottom of his plane and wired to be triggered by him from the cockpit. He claims he never accepted a cent in pay for his intelligence-gathering work but when I asked him ^{IF USA} was funding his equipment, he smiled and said, "No comment."

Once, Faraldo said, he was approached by a man from Washington who gave him a card which said he represented the "Union"-something. (Perhaps "Union News," Faraldo isn't sure.) The man said he was interested in Faraldo's "Cuban operations" and said he would pay him a quarter of a million dollars if he worked with him.

Faraldo said he didn't believe ^{him} and told him to deposit the money first in his bank account. The man said he would but, according to Faraldo, he never showed up again. Faraldo said he thought he still had the man's card, but before I left on Monday night we spent two hours looking for it, first at his home and then at his office.

In the course of that search here are names from other cards we came across, each of whom Faraldo says he has had contact with:

Reinaldo Padial - a "hunting and fishing guide" who led Faraldo to the Cuban interior on one trip to a possible submarine base near the Bay of Pigs.

Gordon Kelly - United States Information Agency; Washington #383-7700.

Forrest K. Geerkin - Consul of the United States of America.

C. Conrad Manley - Officer in Charge, USIA, Miami

G. L. Latimer - U.S. Customs, Enforcement, Miami.

Faraldo wouldn't tell me the details of his relationship with any of these fellows, neither would he tell me the name of his regular contact with the "USIA."

Faraldo says he stopped working for the USIA a few years ago when after a dangerous trip to Cuba he personally hand-carried his film to Washington to the USIA office on Pennsylvania Avenue. Yet when he checked on it several days later he was given the run-around about what had happened to it and ~~he~~ finally told it had been "lost in the soup." (ruined while being developed) So, Faraldo says, except for his supplying information to certain drug enforcement agencies, he is out of the intelligence business today.

Immm. Funny how these casual over-the-transom leads turn out to be far more maze-like than they first appear.

* * *

ddendum: However the Faraldo lead turns out, I may have come across a bigger break in coincidentally meeting the current manager of the Key West airport, Ken Agnew. Faraldo told me he had once managed the Marathon airport and my grapevine sources here in Miami had some time ago told me that the fellow who once managed the Marathon airport had extensive photos of the No Name Key operation. Turns out Agnew is the man. He had, in fact, gotten to know the boys pretty well. Yes, he knew Richard Whatley and, yes, he remembered the fellow with the mohawk haircut. He didn't remember his name, but his description of the guy makes him a pretty warm prospect for the Odio connection. Agnew is going to dig up some photos for me. (Remember the No Name Key group was a Fiorini/InterPen/IAB operation described by Hans Tanner as financed by "dispossessed hotel and gambling room owners who operated under Batista.")

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P.S.: Just located and called Faralido's former secretary who now lives here in Miami. It's by no means hard corroboration, but she does recall the group being at the airport and Faralido running up and down to his office taking photos. She doesn't remember anything in particular about the group, except that it was at the Key West Airport. She worked upstairs in the office and only went down to the coffee shop to get a cup of coffee. She says she went to work for Faralido shortly after the Cuban missile crisis in October, 1962. She left Key West 10 years ago. Although her memory wasn't detailed, she thus far provides the best backing of Faralido's recollection that the incident occurred in the summer of 1963.

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