

PROBE*FBI on Ruby files**From the July-August, 1995 issue (Vol. 2
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Gunrunner Ruby and the CIA

by Lisa Pease

It's not as if they didn't know. Assistant counsels to the Warren Commission Burt Griffin and Leon Hubert wrote, in a memo to the Warren Commission members dated March 20, 1964, that "the most promising links between Jack Ruby and the assassination of President Kennedy are established through underworld figures and anti-Castro Cubans, and extreme right-wing

Americans." ¹ Two months later, Griffin and Hubert wrote another memo to the Commission, significantly titled "Adequacy of the Ruby Investigation" in which they warned, "We believe that a reasonable possibility exists that Ruby has maintained a close interest in Cuban affairs to the extent necessary to participate in gun sales or smuggling."

***"They're going to find out about Cuba.
They're going to find out about the guns,
find out about New Orleans,
find out about everything."***

Ruby had talked about it himself while in jail, reportedly telling a friend, "They're going to find out about Cuba. They're going to find out about the guns, find out about New Orleans, find out about everything." ² Tales of Ruby running guns to Cuba abounded in the FBI reports taken in the first weeks after the assassination, yet neither the Warren Commission nor the House Select Committee pursued those leads very far. Griffin and Hubert expressed concern over this, saying that "neither Oswald's Cuban interests in Dallas nor Ruby's Cuban activities have been adequately explored." ³

If They Dared

Hubert and Griffin expressed in their memo of May 14 to Rankin that "we

believe that the possibility exists, based on evidence already available, that Ruby was involved in illegal dealings with Cuban elements who might have had contact with Oswald. The existence of such dealings can only be surmised since the present investigation has not focused on that area." ⁴ They expressed concern that "Ruby had time to engage in substantial activities in addition to the management of his Clubs" and that "Ruby has always been a person who looked for money-making 'sidelines'." They even suggested that since the Fort Worth manufacturer of the famous "Twist Board" Ruby was demonstrating the night after the assassination had no known sales, and was manufactured by an oil field equipment company, that "[t]he possibility remains that the 'twist board' was a front for some other illegal enterprise." But what Griffin and Hubert kept coming back to is that there was "much evidence" that Ruby "was interested in Cuban matters, citing his relationship to Louis McWillie; his attempted sale of jeeps to Castro, his reported attendance of meetings "in connection with the sale of arms to Cubans and the smuggling out of refugees"; and Ruby's quick correction of Wade's remark that Oswald was a member of the Free Cuba Committee, a group populated with such notables as Clare Booth Luce, Admiral Arleigh Burke, and Hal Hendrix. "Bits of evidence link Ruby to others who may have been interested in Cuban affairs."

What was their recommendation, based on such tantalizing evidence? "We suggest that these matters cannot be left 'hanging in the air.' They must either be explored further or a firm decision must be made not to do so supported by stated reasons for the decision." History has given us the commission's decision on this, but a clue to the motivation shows up in this same memo, in regards to Seth Kantor, who claimed to have seen Ruby at Parkland hospital around the time of Kennedy's death. "We must decide who is telling the truth, for *there would be considerable significance if it would be concluded that Ruby is lying.*" [emphasis added] The concern was not what the truth was, but what the truth might mean if it was uncomfortably discovered.

Ruby *was* lying, and the implications are enormous.

Cuban Excursions

Ruby had told the Warren Commission he had only been to Cuba once, on vacation, for a week to ten days. Not true. According to Cuban travel records, Jack Ruby entered Cuba from New Orleans on August 8, 1959; left Cuba

September 11, 1959; re-entered Cuba from Miami on September 12, 1959; and returned from Cuba to New Orleans on September 13, 1959.⁵ But bank records⁶, Dallas police records⁷, and FBI records⁸ showed Ruby in Dallas August 10, 21-31, and September 4, days which fall right in the middle of his supposedly continuous stay in Cuba. Somehow, *Ruby was getting in and out of Cuba without the Cuban authorities detecting and recording such.* Why was Ruby making multiple excursions to Cuba during this time? What were the nature of these visits and why did he choose to hide them?

The reticence of investigative bodies to investigate these matters make sense when one realizes that Jack Ruby was not going to Cuba on pleasure trips. The Warren Report tells of an incident in early 1959 where Ruby made "preliminary inquiries, as a middleman, concerning the possible sale to Cuba of some surplus jeeps located in Shreveport, La., and asked about the possible release of prisoners from a Cuban prison."⁹ Ruby's sister indicated the jeeps might have been military surplus from W.W.II.¹⁰ Both the story of the jeeps and the story of the prisoners tie Ruby to some interesting Cuban activities.

A Whole Lot of Jeeps

Texas gunrunner Robert McKeown said Ruby "had a whole lot of jeeps he wanted to get to Castro." Ruby wanted McKeown to write a personal letter of introduction to Castro for Ruby so he could talk to Castro about releasing some unnamed friends detained in Havana.¹¹

At that time, Santo Trafficante was being held at the Trescornia detention center in Cuba. Was Ruby instrumental in winning Trafficante's release at that time? John Wilson Hudson (a.k.a. John Wilson), an English journalist supposedly detained with Trafficante in the camp, indicated that Ruby came to see Trafficante in Trescornia.¹² After Ruby shot Oswald, according to CIA cables, Wilson contacted the American Embassy and reported that "an American gangster called Santo...was visited by an American gangster type named Ruby."¹³ If Ruby was trying to sell jeeps to *Castro*, as McKeown said, was this an arms-for-hostages type deal? Get Castro the jeeps and get Trafficante out of jail? Recent events remind us this certainly wouldn't have been the only such effort in history. Trafficante was released from the

detention center in August, 1959, ¹⁴ possibly just after Ruby's appearance there.

Questioning Trafficante

Trafficante is a person often portrayed as one of Ruby's mob contacts. But Trafficante was one of the "gangsters" who participated in the CIA's Castro assassination attempts, according to the CIA Inspector General's report. Key to understanding the seriousness of defining Trafficante's relationship with Ruby are the questions originally put to him before Blakey took over the HSCA, by then-chief counsel Richard Sprague. ¹⁵ To all of the following, Trafficante's response was, "I respectfully refuse to answer that question pursuant to my constitutional rights under the 1st, 4th, 5th, and 14th amendments." This is the legal outlet allowed when a truthful answer will be self-incriminating, and Trafficante used it throughout.

"Mr. Trafficante, have you at any time been an employee, a contract employee, or in any manner been in the service of the Central Intelligence Agency, or any other agency of the Federal Government of the United States?"

The first question out of Sprague's mouth is probably indicative of why he was eventually ousted - he had a habit of getting right to the point:

"Mr. Trafficante, have you at any time been an employee, a contract employee, or in any manner been in the service of the Central Intelligence Agency, or any other agency of the Federal Government of the United States?"

The rest of the questions followed in a similar vein:

"Mr. Trafficante, did you know John Rosselli?"

"Mr. Trafficante, did you know Sam Giancana?"

"Mr. Trafficante, do you know Robert Maheu?"

"Mr. Trafficante, prior to November 22, 1963, did you have information that President Kennedy was going to be assassinated?"

"Mr. Trafficante, prior to November 22, 1963, did you advise other people of the assassination of President Kennedy?"

"Mr. Trafficante, prior to November 22, 1963, did you know Jack Ruby?"

"Mr. Trafficante, have you ever met with representatives of the Central Intelligence Agency to discuss the assassination of various world leaders, including Fidel Castro?"

"Mr. Trafficante, is any agency of the U.S. Government giving you any immunity with regard to any plans to assassinate any world leaders?"

"Mr. Trafficante, did you ever discuss with any individual plans to assassinate President Kennedy prior to his assassination?"

"Mr. Trafficante, while you were in prison in Cuba, were you visited by Jack Ruby?"

When the questions were opened to the others present, more questions followed in the same vein. Note: *no one was asking questions about Trafficante's mob involvement.* They were interested in his ties to the government:

"Mr. Trafficante, as a result of your appearance here today, have you been threatened by anyone, any group or agency? Has your life been threatened in any way?"

"Mr. Trafficante, have you been contacted by any agency in the executive branch, say the CIA or FBI, in connection with your possible testimony before or after you received formal subpoena to appear before this committee?"

Trafficante's involvement with the CIA and Ruby bear further scrutiny. The Review Board should be asked to release all CIA and FBI files on Santo Trafficante.

The story of Jack Ruby getting Trafficante out of a Cuban jail was not the only such allegation. There is *another* allegation from a different source that Ruby was involved in some *guns for hostages* deal.

Nancy Perrin Rich told the Warren Commission a fascinating story about a group running Enfield rifles to Castro in order to run refugees out of Cuba to Florida. The guns were to be run through Mexico. Ruby was evidently the bagman for this group, since his appearance on at least one occasion made the cries about lack of money disappear when he walked in. ¹⁶

Nancy Perrin Rich's story is perhaps the most widely retold of Ruby's gunrunning episodes. But there are a number of other odd stories that bear dissemination, some with more substantiation than others. There are the new Elrod revelations that put Ruby in the middle of yet another gunrunning scenario. ¹⁷ And there is a story from Islamorada, Florida that leads to interesting places.

Jack and James

Mrs. Mary Thompson met a man named "Jack" accompanied by a woman, not his wife, named "Isabel" at the home of Mary Lou and James Woodard in Islamorada, Florida. ¹⁸At the time, Mary Thompson was accompanied by her daughter Dolores and Dolores's husband. Jack was said to be from Chicago originally. Mrs. Thompson placed the date of this encounter around the end of May of 1958. Interestingly enough, she said Jack's first real name was Leon but went by Jack. Jack Ruby's *middle* name was Leon.

Mary Lou Woodard said Jack had a trunk full of guns he was going to supply to Cubans. Mary Thompson stated she'd been told there were supplies of guns hidden in the marshes that were being collected by the Indians in the area to be sold to the Cubans, as this was around the time of the Cuban revolution. Mary Thompson's daughter Dolores also saw and described this same Jack, as did Mrs. W. R. Simons.

Dolores recalled that her husband's friend James Woodard, while drunk one night, declared he would run guns to Cuba with Jack. Woodard had two or three guns of his own but said Jack had a lot more. When shown a photo of Jack Ruby she said it resembled the man she remembered, although she didn't remember his last name as being "Ruby."

A check of the Knoxville FBI files showed that James Woodard was considered "armed and dangerous", packed a weapon, and had a violent temper when drinking. Interviewed by the FBI in September of 1963, Woodard "in somewhat rambling and incoherent manner" talked of his participation in an invasion of Cuba prior to the Castro regime, that he had again participated in the Bay of Pigs and had furnished ammunition and dynamite to both Castro and the Cuban exile forces. On October 8, 1963, Woodard was questioned again, this time concerning dynamite found at his residence in South Dade County, Florida, as the dynamite had been stolen from a construction company. He claimed the dynamite was being used by Cuban exile forces fighting the Castro regime.

After the assassination, James Woodard's sister said James had been in Texas a lot, and that she had asked James if he ever knew Ruby. He said no, but then promptly disappeared and hadn't been seen since November 25, 1963. If he truly had been running guns with Ruby to the CIA-sponsored Cuban exile

forces, one can surely imagine a hefty motive for his sudden disappearance after Ruby appeared on the public scene by shooting Oswald. Woodard is another person whose records the Review Board should look into to shed light on Ruby's contacts with Cubans and gunrunning.

Perhaps Ruby was concerned enough to hide his activities not so much because he was running guns, but because of *who* he was running them for, and with.

By far the most interesting account of Ruby's gunrunning is found in an FBI report taken a week after the assassination. Informant "T-2" (Blaney Mack Johnson) revealed that in the early 1950s a man he knew then as "Rubenstein" arranged illegal flights of weapons to the Castro organization in Cuba. He added that Rubenstein "left Miami and purchased a substantial share in a Havana gaming house in which one COLLIS PRIO (phonetic) was principal owner." ¹⁹ One recognizes the name Carlos Prio Socarras, especially when T-2 linked "COLLIS" to Batista. In the early 50s Prio was a supporter of the Batista regime under which he had grown exceedingly wealthy, but in the mid to late 50s Prio worked hand in hand with Castro, aided by the CIA, to overthrow the increasingly difficult Batista.

In a letter to Lee Rankin of the Warren Commission, Hoover had this to say of the ongoing (since 1952) investigation of Dr. Carlos Prio Socarras, a.k.a. Carlos Prio: "The neutrality and registration act investigation related primarily to the activities of Carlos Prio Socarras, who, with a number of others including McKeown, was involved in a conspiracy to ship arms, munitions, and other war materials to Fidel Castro to assist him in his efforts to overthrow the Batista regime in this investigation." ²⁰ In the attachment, the FBI had McKeown knowing Castro and Carlos Prio Socarras personally. As referenced earlier, McKeown was the one who revealed Ruby's possible jeep deal and Ruby's attempt to get friends released from Cuban detention. McKeown also said that Ruby came to him offering a large sum of money in return for a personal letter of introduction to Castro. ²¹

Mysterious Mr. Browder

But T-2's account revealed possibly a contact of Ruby's even more interesting than Prio. T-2 stated that the man he recognized as Ruby but knew formerly as

Rubenstein was smuggling arms to Cuba with one Donald Edward Browder. T-2 went on to name three people who he said could corroborate his story: Joe Marrs of Marrs Aircraft whom Ruby contracted to make flights to Cuba; former Chief of Police in Hialeah, Florida Leslie Lewis, who would know of Ruby's gunrunning and smuggling operations; and Clifton T. Bowes, Jr., formerly captain of National Airlines, Miami, for further corroboration.

Joe Marrs worked for Eastern Airlines. He claimed he never flew for hire or transported goods. He knew Browder, but claimed he avoided Browder as he saw him as a shady promoter who was all talk about air transport plans but no money (an amusing revelation from a man who just a few words earlier had said he didn't fly for hire.) ²²

Les Lewis, the former Chief of Police, denied knowing Jack Ruby and claimed to have "no knowledge whatsoever of persons flying weapons to Cuba." A Hialeah Police Chief having *no* knowledge of persons flying weapons to Cuba in the fifties is a bit hard to believe. And of course, Lewis completely denied ever knowing a Donald Edward Browder. ²³

Clifton T. Bowes was sure he never knew a Jack Rubenstein and said he first heard of Ruby watching him on television. He did not know a Donald Edward Browder but did claim to know Blaney Mack Johnson, saying he understood Johnson was ill and had been hospitalized, was "highly imaginative" ²⁴, the usual FBI line for an unwelcome witness.

When the FBI collected these denials, they returned to Johnson. Johnson stuck tightly by his story and insisted all the information he had provided had been true and accurate. He also said he understood why Lewis, Marrs and Bowes would have lied to conceal their knowledge of and/or involvement in Ruby's activities. And of course, Johnson replied he had never been hospitalized.

Enter Eddie Browder. Eddie Browder testified before the House Select Committee on Assassinations in the 70s. ²⁵ He was a former Lockheed test pilot who was serving a 25-year prison sentence for "security violations." He told the committee he worked for the CIA. One time he had leased a B-25 bomber under the name of a non-existent company and flown it to Haiti a year after the Kennedy assassination. He cashed a check signed by George DeMohrenschildt's Haitian business associate Clemard Charles, in the amount

of \$24,000. What's interesting is that the HSCA used Browder's testimony in the DeMohrenschildt section, not the Jack Ruby section. Is there a tie there linking DeMohrenschildt to Jack Ruby? Only three small "innocuous" reports of the more than 1000 pages the FBI has on Browder were released to the Warren Commission.²⁶ It's time the remaining documents on Browder, including the full text of his executive session testimony before the HSCA, were released. Any Browder who used the *Don Eduardo* alias²⁷, worked with DeMohrenschildt, and ran guns with Ruby to Cuba is worthy of further study.



(Continued in the next issue of *Probe*.)

Notes

1. George Michael Evica, *And We Are All Mortal* (University of Hartford, 1978), p. 161. ([Back to text](#))
2. Peter Dale Scott, *Deep Politics and the Death of JFK* (University of California Press, Ltd, 1993), p. 179. ([Back to text](#))
3. Memorandum to J. Lee Rankin from Leon D. Hubert and Burt W. Griffin, May 14, 1964, p. 3. ([Back to text](#))
4. Memorandum to J. Lee Rankin from Leon D. Hubert and Burt W. Griffin, May 14, 1964, p. 4. ([Back to text](#))
5. HSCA, Vol. 5, pp. 197-198. ([Back to text](#))
6. HSCA, Vol. 5, p. 204. On page 205 Stokes said that Ruby was admitted to his box on August 20th, but the copy of the FBI report on the bank records on the previous page show both a typewritten date of August 21 and a handwritten note with the same date. ([Back to text](#))
7. Anthony Summers, *Conspiracy* (Paragon House paperback edition, 1989), p. 439. ([Back to text](#))
8. HSCA, Vol. 5, p. 221. ([Back to text](#))
9. *Report of the Warren Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1964), p. 345. ([Back to text](#))
10. WC Vol. 26, p. 661, CE 3069. ([Back to text](#))
11. Summers, p. 437 ([Back to text](#))
12. Summers, p. 441. ([Back to text](#))
13. Summers, p. 440; HSCA Vol. 5, p. 365. ([Back to text](#))
14. HSCA, Vol. 5, p. 325. ([Back to text](#))

15. HSCA, Hearings March 16, 1977, pp.37-41. ([Back to text](#))
16. WC Vol. 14, pp. 349-350. ([Back to text](#))
17. For a lengthy treatment of Elrod, see the article by Ray and Mary La Fontaine, *The Washington Post*, 8/7/94, "The Fourth Tramp". ([Back to text](#))
18. WC Vol. 26, p. 642-649. ([Back to text](#))
19. WC Vol. 26, p. 634, CE 3063. ([Back to text](#))
20. WC Vol. 26, p. 650, CE 3066. ([Back to text](#))
21. Summers, p. 437. ([Back to text](#))
22. WC Vol. 26, p. 639. ([Back to text](#))
23. WC Vol. 26, p. 639. ([Back to text](#))
24. WC Vol. 26, p. 640. ([Back to text](#))
25. Jim Marrs, *Crossfire* (Carrol & Graf, 1989), p. 284. ([Back to text](#))
26. Marrs, p. 392. ([Back to text](#))
27. *Don Eduardo* was a well known alias of E. Howard Hunt. But James McCord also used the name *Don Eduardo*. Jim Hougan, *Secret Agenda* (Random House, 1984), p. 80. Blaney Mack Johnson said Don Edward Browder was sometimes called "Don Eduardo." WC Vol. 26, p. 642. ([Back to text](#))

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