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Investigators show interest in Ruby, telephone number

By EARL GOLZ

House Assassinations Committee investigators are showing a keen interest in the relationship between Jack Ruby and ex-convict Russell Douglas Matthews, former Dallas police character now employed in a Las Vegas casino.

Investigators told Matthews they intended to subpoena him for questioning about a report that Ruby had his telephone number with him when he gunned down accused assassin Lee Harvey Oswald in the basement of the Dallas Police Department on Nov. 24, 1963.

Matthews, 57, has told committee investigators he doesn't "know anything about" the assassination, Matthews' Dallas attorney, Frank Wright, said.

THE COMMITTEE, however, also is interested in any contacts Matthews may have had with Ruby in Cuba in 1959 when Matthews was working in the gambling casinos of the Hotel Deauville in Havana. Federal documents recently declassified indicate Ruby was active in attempts to free organized crime figure Santos Trafficante from a Havana prison that year.

The Warren Commission, which investigated the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, made no mention of a Matthews phone number on Ruby or in any of the notebooks he had.

Toll records, however, showed a 13-minute long distance call from Ruby's Carousel Club here to Matthews' ex-wife in Shreveport, La., on Oct. 3, 1963. The call to Elizabeth Ann Matthews was made on the night of the same day Oswald arrived in Dallas from a 10-day trip to Mexico City. In Mexico City, Oswald had tried unsuccessfully to get a visa for travel to Cuba.

Mrs. Matthews said after the assassination she "could not recall having received a long distance telephone call from Dallas on or about Oct. 3, 1963," according to an FBI report.

MATTHEWS TOLD the FBI in 1963

that he was only a "passing acquaintance" of Ruby and had known him for about 12 years.

However, a longtime friend of Ruby's, Charles Duarte, told the FBI several days later in December 1963 that Matthews was "well acquainted with Ruby."

Several months later, Warren Commission staffer Burt W. Griffin placed long distance calls inquiring of a Ruby-Matthews link just two days before the commission's final report was submitted to President Lyndon Johnson.

Griffin called four people — Ruby's sister Eva Grant, his roommate George Senator, business partner Ralph Paul and Carousel Club bartender Andy Armstrong. None knew of any connection between Ruby and Matthews or Matthews' ex-wife in Shreveport, they said.

GRIFFIN TOLD The News he made the last-minute phone calls before the Warren Report was released, "trying to check out the phone call" to Mrs. Matthews in Shreveport.

"It was a matter of wanting to make sure that we hadn't left any stones unturned," said Griffin, now a county judge in Cleveland.

Oswald was not known to have been suspected of ever being in Cuba until last December when FBI documents were declassified. FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, in one memo, said Oswald "made several trips to Cuba; upon his return each time we (FBI) questioned him about what he went to Cuba for and he answered that it was none of our business."

Hoover could have mistaken Oswald for Ruby except that the Dallas nightclub owner was found by the FBI to have visited Cuba only once, in 1959.

THE WARREN Commission stated that Ruby in January 1959 "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." This was during the month

that Fidel Castro took control of Cuba.

Ruby subsequently made at least two trips to Cuba during 1959 and possibly more, according to recently released federal documents.

Ruby still was working on the jeeps-for-prisoners exchange when crime figure Trafficante was arrested by Castro authorities in Havana and jailed in April 1959.

Ruby approached Robert McKeown of Houston, a friend of Castro and a convicted gun smuggler, and offered him \$5,000 per person if he could help get three people out of a Cuban prison, according to FBI documents.

About a month later, Castro ordered the deportation of Trafficante. Trafficante, however, was not released from prison until September 1959.