

KEY JFK SOURCE LIED, AUTHOR GERALD POSNER REVEALS

On public radio last week, author Gerald Posner revealed that a key source for his recent book, *Case Closed*, had admitted an "astonishing" fabrication to Congress in a research interview for the book.

Using extensive quotes from Tony Zoppi, the discredited source, Posner's book portrayed Jack Ruby as a "low-level loser" who shot Oswald without underworld influence. The book did not mention Zoppi's admitted lie to Congress or other credibility problems.

G. Robert Blakey, chief counsel of the House Select Committee on Assassinations, found Posner's use of Zoppi's statements "particularly amazing" given this disclosed fabrication.

Zoppi is identified in *Case Closed* only as "a prominent entertainment reporter" for a Dallas newspaper. But on radio, Posner acknowledged three of "Mr. Zoppi's problems":

- The admitted fabrication to Congress: Zoppi detailed to the House Select Committee a conversation with Ruby two hours before the JFK assassination. Zoppi judged Ruby "too calm that morning to have been involved in a conspiracy." But confronted by Posner with Ruby's conflicting testimony, Posner revealed on radio, Zoppi admitted having fabricated this account. Zoppi "just tried to make the story sound more interesting by putting himself there," Posner explained. Posner called Zoppi's fabrication "astonishing."
- A bogus alibi for Ruby: Zoppi also furnished an elaborate alibi for Ruby's 1959 visit with Mobster Lewis McWillie in Cuba, which the House Select Committee believed was underworld-related. Under skeptical questioning by Congressional counsel, however, Zoppi's alibi was found based on an event that happened five months after Ruby's actual trip.
- Questionable Mob ties: Zoppi further told the House Select Committee that Dallas had "no syndicated or organized crime" he knew of. But Zoppi provided several plugs in his columns for the Egyptian Lounge, a notorious Dallas Mafia hangout that he patronized. Zoppi was also friends with Dallas "gambler and murderer" Lewis McWillie.

Posner explained on radio that he was "aware of Mr. Zoppi's problems" and "very, very carefully" screened his statements. "I didn't use him to establish a fact." Yet Posner actually presented his book's conclusion on a critical issue in contention, whether Ruby shot Oswald under Mob direction, in Zoppi's words:

[Ruby's] legal difficulties, and his associations with criminals, have been the basis of much speculation that his killing of Oswald was ordered by the Mob to silence the President's assassin. **"It is so ludicrous to believe that Ruby was part of the mob," says Tony Zoppi. "The conspiracy theorists want to believe everybody but those who really knew him. . . ."**

Zoppi goes on to describe Ruby as too talkative for a trusted underworld role—a variation on his prior fabricated portrayal of Ruby as "too calm" on November 22nd for such a role.

David Scheim, Ph.D., author of *Contract on America*, calls the use of 500 words of Zoppi's remarks in *Case Closed* "an unconscionable fraud." Posner was "very, very careful indeed not to mention a word about Tony Zoppi's 'astonishing' fabrication to Congress or other flagrant credibility problems. Posner featured Zoppi's discredited assessment of Jack Ruby while ignoring the extensive federal evidence of Ruby's Mob affiliations and activities."

Cyril Wecht, M.D., J.D., a distinguished forensic pathologist and expert on the JFK case, concluded: "This disingenuous use of Zoppi's remarks disqualifies Posner as a credible participant in the historical examination of the JFK assassination."

Enclosures

1. Transcript of Gerald Posner's remarks on Zoppi, WAMU-FM, 9/15/93
2. References for cited quotations and assertions.

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Enclosure 1. Transcript of Gerald Posner's remarks on Zoppi

Comments by author Gerald Posner about source Tony Zoppi on the WAMU Diane Rehm show, Washington, D.C., September 15, 1993.

Opening question by interviewer Diane Rehm:

Rehm: Why do you believe that Americans were and continue to be so skeptical of the lone gunman theory?

Posner: Well, I think there are a lot of good reasons in this case. Probably the biggest reason was Jack Ruby's murder of Lee Harvey Oswald on Sunday. I mean here we have somebody with obvious Mob connections—I talk about those in the book, and they are clear and they're on the record—who kills Lee Harvey Oswald in Dallas police custody two days after. It certainly looks like on its surface a silencing that is Mob ordered. . . .

David Scheim: Hi, Mr. Posner, I'm glad that you admit that the Ruby-organized crime angle is the important issue to deal with. That's what the House Select Committee focused on, which I guess as you know, concluded that there was a probably conspiracy with possible Mob complicity.

Posner: Right. They said the Mob had the means and motive and opportunity.

Scheim: That's correct. And you mention my book several times, which I was pleased about, but

Posner: Is this Mr. Scheim?

Scheim: Yes.

Posner: Hi, Mr. Scheim.

Scheim: Hi. I'm sorry to say, though, you made an enormous blunder in your treatment of Ruby which calls your entire book into question. And that is, in your treatment of Ruby, you extensively feature the quotes of Tony Zoppi. You quote him eight times from four different interviews saying things like Ruby is like horseshit, all over the place, he's a nobody, he has no connection with the Mob. And you fail to mention that Tony Zoppi is a friend of Dallas gambler and murderer Lewis McWillie.

Posner: Right.

Scheim: He frequents the Egyptian Lounge, a Mafia hangout, he promotes the Egyptian lounge in his columns. When questioned about organized crime, he says there's no organized crime in Dallas. But that's just the beginning. Zoppi testified before the House Select Committee and actually personally advanced an alibi for Ruby's trip to Cuba in '59 to see McWillie in which Zoppi spins this elaborate fable of how it was all because Zoppi was going to review a show in Cuba and Ruby was going to tag along. The House pointed out that the timing of Zoppi's alibi was five months after Ruby's visit to Cuba. Also, Zoppi and Ruby both testified before the Warren Commission that Ruby stopped by in Zoppi's *Dallas Morning News* office two hours before the assassination of Kennedy. Zoppi details Ruby's composure during that time, talks about their conversation. Ruby in his testimony twice says Zoppi was not there when he came by.

Posner: Right.

Schein: So you rely on a Mob promoter who is a probable perjurer. The question I would have: is this a blunder or did you know of Zoppi's background before quoting him eight times?

Posner: No, as a matter of fact, Mr. Schein, no, it's not a blunder. And let me tell you Mr. Schein, the author of *Contract on America*, which is a well-researched book although I disagree with its conclusions, but he did his homework certainly on that book and is one of the better conspiracy books. I definitely am aware of Mr. Zoppi's problems. I very, very carefully watch my interviews with him, and as you note, I did not use him to establish a fact. Now this is very important. As a matter of fact I grilled him about what is this inconsistency between you saying you were there when Ruby showed up at the Dallas Morning News on the day of the assassination and Ruby not saying it. And he admitted to me that he just tried to make the story sound more interesting by putting himself there. He wasn't there, in fact, when Ruby showed up. So it's astonishing to me. So I was very careful. If somebody admits that to me on the record I'm going to be very careful about taking anything. I did not use any of Zoppi's supposed alibis for Ruby about Cuba, as you know. I don't use him to establish a fact. What I did try to do, and this is the call eventually as a journalist as you know when you put your book together, you get a feeling for somebody's credibility and the limits of their credibility. What I thought Tony Zoppi was useful for since he knew Jack Ruby was commenting on his personality and those details about life in Dallas. And I did try to use him for that. That he knew. We can't say that Zoppi didn't know Ruby. It was clear that they knew each other. And I don't think his judgment of Ruby is affected. I know what you're doing. I don't view his association with the other, this sort of guilt by association, as affecting his view on what Jack Ruby was.

Enclosure 2. References for cited quotations and assertions

In the notes below, HSC denotes the House Select Committee on Assassinations, WC denotes the Warren Commission, and "xH nnn" denotes volume x, page nnn.

Gerald Posner's use of source Tony Zoppi: *Case Closed* (New York: Random House, 1993), pp. 355-56, 357, 361, 362, 370, 374, 377, 399. Ruby is a "real low-level loser": p. 355. It is "ludicrous to believe....": p. 361.

Zoppi's fabricated account to the HSC of an encounter with Ruby on November 22, 1963, 10:30 AM: HSC 5H 170. The interview with Committee counsel took place April 18, 1978 at Zoppi's office at the Riviera Hotel, Las Vegas, Nevada, where he was then employed.

Jack Ruby testified (WC 5H 183) and told the FBI (WC C.R. Hall Exhibit 3, p. 4) that he went to Zoppi's office that Friday morning but Zoppi was not there.

Zoppi's alibi for Ruby's 1959 visit with McWillie in Cuba: HSC 5H 170-73, 9H 168-9. Zoppi told the HSC that Ruby had arranged for Zoppi to review acts at the Tropicana Hotel in Cuba, where McWillie was employed. But then Zoppi was invited to review a major "summit meeting" show at the Sands Hotel in Las Vegas occurring at the same time, and Zoppi ducked out of the Cuban visit, leaving Ruby to go alone. Under skeptical questioning by HSC counsel, Zoppi admitted this "summit meeting" show actually took place five months after Ruby's Cuban visit.

HSC believed that Ruby's Cuban visits were Mob-related: HSC Report, p. 152; HAH 9H 177; Blakey and Billings, *The Plot to Kill the President* (New York, Times Books, 1981), pp. 293-94.

Zoppi proclaimed that Dallas had no "syndicated or organized crime": HSC 5H 169.

Zoppi furnished "quite a few write-ups" of the Egyptian Lounge and patronized that establishment: From the testimony of its owner, Dallas Mafia underboss Joseph Campisi, HSC 9H 378.

The Egyptian Lounge was so notorious as a Dallas underworld hangout, according to one Dallas intelligence officer, that you could not go in "without getting your picture taken by the FBI" (*Houston Post*, April 20, 1975, p. 2A).

Zoppi friendship with Lewis McWillie: HSC 5H 28, 168.

McWillie identified by Dallas Police as a Dallas "gambler and murderer": WC Exhibit 1693.

Extensive FBI evidence detailing Ruby's Mob operations and connections: see, e.g., David E. Scheim, *Contract on America* (New York: Shapolsky, 1988), chapters 7-9. Noteworthy was a description of Ruby as a "frequent visitor and associate" of Dallas Mafia boss Joseph Civello included in paragraphs from an FBI document (WC CD 84, p. 91) that were blanked out when published by the Warren Commission as Exhibit 1536. Dallas Mafia underboss Joseph Campisi told the FBI of a "contact" he had with Ruby the night before the JFK assassination, "when Ruby came to the Egyptian Lounge for a steak" (WC CE 2259). Campisi visited Ruby in jail four days after the Oswald shooting (WC CD 86, pp. 138-39; WC CE 2259).