

7/1/68

*Cuban Camps across Lake Pontchartrain*

Breakfast with Jack, when the heat of the day settled early and he slept late after I had arisen and typed what remained of the previous day's notes, was dinner-size. He phoned before we left so that it would be ready, ordering two sausage patties each when I had said I wanted but an egg and juice, grits when I acknowledged I loved them but would not eat them, and speed, because he was overdue at the hospital. With this urgent need for haste, he went slowly until he started the car and we arrived before breakfast was ready, for which he gave the waitress a two-dollar tip. Knowing Jack, she served breakfast including a double order of toast each, already well buttered—he sent his back for a solid coat—four large patties, <sup>pancakes</sup> two eggs each, a dish of grits and juice, with jelly, etc. It lasted me all day.

Driving along after the decent rest, I wondered what to do not to waste the trip across the lake, what my reception would be if a Yankee began inquiring about a touchy local thing so thoroughly hushed up, and decided the only thing to do was find out. My genuine opinions, in a different context, exactly suited the local prejudices. I tried it on Lester Davis, who's small bar on the right side of Highway 190 had the very small identification of a simply-lettered "Lester's Club" no wider than two feet under a commercial beer sign. The waitress and two patrons were immediately interested. Not in the camp, or camps, of which they knew nothing, but the assassination (didn't believe official story), Garrison (great guy, courageous, had to be right from enemies) and my books (how could they get?). The chatting was brief before Lester appeared from the back and was cooperative. He said if anyone would know anything it would be Luther Moran, a deputy sheriff (my bad eyes were better than Lester's, so I scanned the four pages of that part of the phone book—882-5310— and Lester phoned with my nickel. His memory is failing so I called off each number to him. If not home, Luther would be at Bosco's \*882-5047. Next to that, see Henry Keller, who had a Conoco Station at Lake Road. Another phone in the scrawled notes is 882-5463.

~~ANRzxastherzuzaszRudyxerzRahyKanzxKrankxZapx~~

Never did find Moran home, although I found his quiet, isolated home past the frame, store-front bank opposite Keller's, across the tracks and the pulpwood logs awaiting loading on a siding, across a public road at the guard, an ample acknowledgement of the governmental realpolitik of agricultural La., then to the right down the first road. There is nothing at the end but Luther's.

Tooling along after Lester and the uniform and sincere good wishes of his patrons and employee, I thought perhaps it would be worth making a random stop in the general area Deyanh had indicated, the Covington side of the Big Branch sign, the location of which was vague in my mind, my only knowledge coming from the single sighting Good Friday. A Conoco station, which should have given me an idea of the distance to Keller's, <sup>was</sup> on the left and I drove in.

It had a canopy under which I parked, to shelter ADO 470's black, heat-absorbing paint from the already intense sun. I realized when I left the car that my trousers were already heavy with absorbed sweat. A pale skinned, smiling-faced, light brown haired young woman I estimated to be about 21 sat to the right, behind a desk. I explained my business and her face lit up. It is a mobile, pleasant face with an obvious and often-indulged lust for smiling, and all of it smiles at once, particularly the bright eyes. She interested her sister, Glynda, who was at a table in the compartmented section of the building toward Covington. Glynda had a young boy Jimmy with her. Glynda, when Chelise Ann asked, took over responsibility for tending the pumps at "Dad's" station.

In describing herself as "friendly", Chelise Ann was not exaggerating.

She readily agreed to be taped. We sat at that table, my left leg against a dirty truck-tire until I got Jimmy to move it. This is the essence of her story:

In the summer of 1963, after school was out (11th grade), she was living with her grandmother and working at the frozen-custard place run by Rudy or Ruby Kern. It is about a block toward Covington and is called "Frost Top" (she also worked at another). One night a very pleasant man came in and there was an incident in which he could display good manners and consideration for the female unknown in the area. She had earlier and as soon as I had mentioned "Cuban camp" given me his name with a sighing "Ah" and an open face, "Richard Davis". Her description is perfect and entirely spontaneous. She did not know of his use of Rudolph, Ricardo or any other name. Always in a business suit, neat, represented as New Orleans business man. She estimated his age, with the opinion of older people of the 11th grade mind, at 27-35.

We finally computed that she had seen him for only a very brief period ending with the FBI raid. He came for her one night in haste, saying he had just had an urgent call. He drove her down a bewildering crisscrossing of back roads for about 15 minutes. She is not certain where they began for she was soon hysterical and without that would not have been able to make her way back. All the roads were in woods and underbrush, some so overgrown she could not see the road and so high they noisily scraped the bottom and sides of the car. This began about 8 p.m., as I recall her story, but her account of what she saw and remembers would indicate it was later, unless, perhaps, the area was not then on Daylight Time. Her story of being at the camp is a story of the darkness of night, yet her identifications and comments from pictures indicates otherwise.

At one point in the trip Davis gave her a pistol she cannot identify except as a small one and told her to keep it in the event there was trouble and she needed it. In terror, she says, she opened her legs and put it under her dress, finger fixed on trigger, in fright, ready to scream.

She really was set off when at one point two men armed with what she took to be machineguns sprang from behind trees and stopped them. They were satisfied with Davis and it was okay. Davis proceeded to the house, of which her apparently clearest recollections is of windows and length (remarkable suggestive of Deyahn's). She remained in the car. The windows were in some cases not screened

This led her to a comment that describes something on which she is vividly clear.

"With all those bugs and mosquitoes", as I recall it, exact words being on tape, "not one of 'em wore a shirt". She doesn't see how they could tolerate it. Instead, each wore a pair of ammo bandoliers ~~xxxxxxxx~~ crossing the body from each shoulder. Every man she mentioned, in or out of the house. She says they all got together in a single room which they crowded but she could see through the window, and Davis spoke to them. She estimated the number at about 40, but conceded it could have been the 27 Davis told me.

Her recollection of the weaponry of the two men who intercepted them is vivid and of larger weapons than rifles, she is familiar with rifles. Other men there wore them.

After the parley, she and Davis left. He told her he had emergencies to take care of, that he had to move the men and would get school busses, I think she said singular, to move them. She said he did, that night, and others confirm.

She was so terrified when she got home she told her family she was afraid to see him ever again, manners or no manners.

He returned a year or so later with two other neatly-dressed men and looked for her. The custard place directed them to her home, She was not there (perhaps, I do not clearly recall, by then having been married to Deputy Sheriff Cole, to whom she is now married).

Parenthetically, this estimate of time, repeated on the tape, is after the assassination and prior to the time Davis could have taken Dick Billings there. She also made no reference to any photographer, which would seem to eliminate Billings and LIFE. It would not eliminate F<sup>u</sup>ebees. I think this is who they were and her time estimate may be lengthened by her shortness of years. Davis, in any event, was back not too long after the assassination and under circumstances not indicative of his desiring another date with her.

Everything she says is consistent with those things Deyahn told me. She said that although she knew the area well, she could not possibly find that camp. She would now not know where to begin. From the time they left the paved road they were not again on a single one, and they were on many roads, all gravelled. To her, on questioning, there was no distinction between gravel and the small shells locally used as a more economical substitute, the delta land having no stones and the shells being a by-product of marine industries. Jack had to tell me

stone are so expensive they are sold by the pound for landscaping, not the ton. My last purchase of crushed stones was at not much over \$2.00 per ton. In the New Orleans (Nuh Yawlins) area, they must be trucked in from considerable distance away.

Now driving down these roads, as I did, causes a thin almost white ~~mist~~ cloud of grayish dust to rise. Much of the land is of similar color along the roads, and both are consistent with Deyahn's description of the soil she recalls from the visits she said she made.

Interestingly, aside from the girls and, when later I met him, Deputy Cole, no one in the Mandeville area knew or acknowledged knowing (I think the former but cannot rule out the later), anything about the camp. This is consistent with Davis's description to me of the great care taken to keep it secret. If Cole had any personal knowledge of it he did not so indicate.

Of the local people who might be able to help, including the chief of police I did not have time to seek (and Mayor Cordes, recommended by, I think, a young man at a general store down toward Luther's-it came out Maiah, and I thought he meant "Meyer"-who I also did not look up on a Sunday), the only one with slight help was Alfred Knight, who lives along the lake, down the street (Gerard) opposite Dad's. Knight was napping on a small steel cot on his lake-facing screened porch and was pleasant about being awakened. He is a guard at Mandeville hospital and all this is "before my time". However, he does know of a building such as D described. It is not, as she surmised, a food warehouse but is used by the State, he thinks police. He is not knowledgeable about the terrain behind it so he has no knowledge of any fire break behind it.

Knight recommended he go see Gene Hano, who he says hunts extensively and knows all that land and presumably the stories about it. He might know where the camps were, about the firebreak, etc (there is no problem with the bridges in D's story, there are that many of them). Jimmy directed me to the Hano home, like so many for no apparent reason behind chain-link fences. We were thrice greeted, by his wife, his mother and his brother, each of whom in open and friendly manner inquired into our business and each of whom responded in virtually the same words: Gene had been out late the night before (it was then 2 p.m.) and had come in very drunk, and the one most terrible thing in life was to awaken him.

The local policeman was not home. He lives on the road back to Dad's.

Cole was there and he said he knew nothing in a way that clearly indicated he did. My response was to add "that you feel you can tell me" to what he had said and he smiled knowingly and in a not unfriendly fashion. I asked him who might be able to help were he so inclined and he gave me two names: J.M. Daumy in Covington and Red Irwin, former sheriff, who lives in Folsom, which is on the other side of Covington. He consulted the phone book and wrote Daumy's address as 221 East 21 Ave. The phone is correct, 892-2942. In looking it up for me Cole corrected

the address to 551. After losing much time when I later <sup>returned</sup> ~~re-visit~~ there only to find I lost all the time, I discovered the address is 521 East 20 Ave. Daumy responded to my explicit phone request by saying he would talk to me about the camps. When he did, with his son~~s~~ and daughter-in-law present, it was to tell me he knew nothing about them, so we chatted about Cuban affairs, his conception of the politics and international responsibilities, Castro's politics, etc. His is the typical attitude of the higher-class origin Cuban refugees. He is apparently a professional man working for a New Orleans university, Tulane or Loyola, and possibly in a hospital or medical capacity. Seeing Daumy for nothing required a drive all the way back to then again away from Covington.

By phone Red Irwin confided he had then been sheriff (until 1964) but for the last two years, because of the health problem that led to his retirement, had been relatively inactive. He claimed to have no personal knowledge, having cooperated with the FBI and assigned <sup>two</sup> ~~to~~ deputies. He said both deputies were now dead. He was apparently (but not certainly) wrong. He recommended I see out Buddy Mowze (I got him to spell the name), whose name is Clarence, Slidell Chief of Police. There is none in the phone book, and I ran out of time.

From him or someone else I got the name of Melvin Bennett, who is still a deputy. His phone is 892-1697. He lives at 427-25th Ave. He invited me over when I explained my mission, greeted me in a friendly fashion, and when his wife returned in that awful heat, she insisted on preparing something cold for me. It was delicately-flavored but oversweet iced tea that I took on the road in a paper cut I had in the car.

Bennett is one of the two deputies he knows of on the case. Irwin denied Davis' story about his "hopheads" taking the sheriff prisoner, saying it did not happen to him, he hadn't gone there, and didn't think it had happened to anyone. Bennett confirmed that it had happened, the night before he had gone there, and to a former deputy whose name he spelled as Heilm, Philip, <sup>(it is Helm)</sup> now a bondsman at Pearl Acres off Gauss Road, Slidell (the spelling is wrong, the operator could not give me the number, and when I drove to Slidell and got his number and called it several times, there was no answer. 643-1775. Bennett said Helm was also a deputy with the FBI on the raid (he is certain pictures were taken and reports made and will try and get them for me, as he also will have someone try and find the place and take pictures of the area, house and any tree with carvings or any stumps of a pine near the house). Nothing Bennett says is inconsistent with what Deyahn said and much is confirmatory.

It was about 8 p.m. the night after the "hopheads" threw their guns on Helm that he and Helm went back. He confirms that there were machineguns there, as D had said, confirms that he had heard they had speed competitions in firing them, and on the difficulty of finding the place. He said, "If my life depended on it, I could not now find it", and he is a still-active deputy for the area. (Lt.)

He confirms her identification of Sgt Titus, adding that he was sent from Baton Rouge, which I do not recall Dhaving told me, from Troop A, and that his purpose was to investigate and report. It is my recollection and the suggestion of the illegible notes that the two deputies went with Titus that night, that they went to three camps is positive, and strangely, that at one they were afraid to look in and talk to anyone for fear it would ~~spook~~ "spook" them. There were men at all three camps but at this one, for some special reason he did not make explicit, there was special apprehension the men would flee.

A further and I think significant comment he made is that since that time all those back roads have been changed around. A number noted here is 895-4926. It may not have come from Bennett.

He told me that the organization of the sheriff's office at that time made in almost certain that no notes or reports remain in the active files. Since then organizational reforms keep all such records available.

Bennett is difficult to understand, slow-speaking, but was friendly. He was dressed in suntans that were neat, pressed well, uncreased.

Before returning to Covington to look him up, more than justification for the trip that to Daumy was wasted, I had stopped at Henry Keller's Conoco Station. It is also a general store, garage, bar and general hangout. He was and stayed busy, "that old man" having gone to dinner and not returned. I remained with him for a while in the futile hope the "old man" would return. When I first mentioned my mission, Keller had said, in a mixed "whoosh" and whistle, "Feller's gotte be careful what he says. L<sup>ike</sup>ale to put his mouth in something he can't get it out"(sic). He was here joined by a customer at his cash register and there was an abrupt change to what ~~as~~ took to be Voodoo. I was corrected to a W, Woodoo. It was then about 1:30, he had just gassed an empty Negro-driven school bus. I was treated to vividly-recalled predictions of deaths within three months and the fulfillments of the predictions, and ~~at~~ to the explanation that it was fear that caused the deaths and fear that was inspired by the certainty of the accuracy of the predictions.

Henry shuffled with a limp. While I was waiting, trialing the elusive breeze through his hot walkways between the high counters most of which held sweets, A 6'3" garrulous customer, T-shirted, broad hatted (like the plantation straws that are in the area popular but an him seemed to be of pressed paper and spotless) Wasn't paper.

Here, at about 10, Deyahn phoned to say she <sup>wants</sup> ~~want~~ to have a little talk with me. She said <sup>she</sup> ~~he~~ was being torn, and I said, "you're gonna tear worse, kid." She said s she had <sup>not</sup> ~~not~~ <sup>side</sup> ~~nothing~~, and I said "I realize that". I told her only one ~~side~~ <sup>side</sup> was tearing at her. I said "It's going to get worse". She said, "I know that" And I think she said, "That's what I want to talk to you about." I asked her to bring any of the things she had said she could show me but I couldn't copy and she said,

"I can't do that").

Returning to Henry, the fat stranger, deeply bronzed as he was strongly tongued, told me about Henry:

(Another digression: I told Deyahn that I had had two very successful days of investigating and she said "Good" I said; "do you mean that" and she said she did.) FatTongue is 54. Henry, he said, is only 5<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>. My earlier estimate, when I had noted his appearance, was 70. He wore a still-spotless, still uncreased blue synthetic, long-sleeved shirt when I returned dinner time. He is horshoe-bald, with wispy white hair<sup>thin</sup> in volume and dimension.

A dark-hair, well formed woman of about 30 entered the store, wearing shorts. When she turned her back to me, facing the counter, it seemed as though half her left buttock had been removed, on the left side. Fat Tongue commented on her varicose veins "Very painful, Closer to skin, more pain. That's Henry's trouble. Cripples 'em."

On my return Henry was affixing a new ~~green~~ clamp to the hot lead of the battery on a much-abused pickup truck. He described its bad condition, telling me, when I noted the absence of a radiator cap, that it was probably to keep pressure from rising because there was a head leak. Eschewing the extra pair of hands I offered, Henry finally made it without going for the right tools he didn't have with him, commenting as he tapped the connector in place "Old battery. Won't take much."

We had all the chat that I believe would have been productive at the radiator, while he estimated whether the slight projection of the clip above the terminal could ground on the hood. He knew about the camp because he had been there, because the men had been brought to his place for drinks. He described a camp other than Chelise Ann and D. It had no pool, its house was like the picture of the one with the pool, its men were always neatly dressed in work clothes, possibly sun tans, and not armed constantly, not wearing bandoliers, Always shirted, never saw one man without. At old Shultz place (~~near~~ uncertain of spelling. Agreed to addition of H when I suggested it, Rudolph ownership before or after. Then Fletcher. It is off St Tammany Road. The men were brought to his place several times.

He also said there were two ammo dumps raided and under questioning he was and remained positive. The second he thought but was not certain may have been at Dixie Ranch.

Thus there are witnesses who seem dependable and positive in their recollections who specify three training camps and two ammo dumps.

Chelise Ann says the local police will probably be afraid to talk.