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MEMO - 5/17/77

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TO: Tanenbaum

U.S. HOUSE SELECT
COMMITTEE ON ASSASSINATIONS

FROM: Fonzi

Re: Otero leads

Some interesting new developments have come up relating to the Rolando Otero leads and I thought it would be a good idea to organize (for both of us) what we have so far and where we should go with it.

First of all, there are details in Otero's background which may be significantly related to what we're interested in. Otero was first tried last August in Jacksonville in a Federal court on charges relating to nine bombing incidents he is alleged to have committed in Miami on October 17th and December 3rd and 4th, 1975. As Federal agents later admitted, the heart of their case was based on information supplied by Ricardo Morales. Morales never testified at that trial because, according to Federal prosecutors, he "wasn't available." Morales was working at that time (and still is) for the Security Section of the Venezuelan police department. Yet while the trial was going on in Jacksonville, Morales traveled regularly between Miami and Caracas. I had no problem locating him myself (I got the number of the girlfriend he was living with here) and just missed him one weekend before he returned to Caracas. He dropped in frequently at the Little Havana Activities Center to chat with his old friend Rafael Villaverde, a guy with heavy intelligence connections.

I didn't pursue Morales at the time because what I wanted to talk to him about then wasn't pressing. Morales himself has an interesting background. He was once a member of Castro's Intelligence Agency (G-2), defected and became a highly trained explosives expert and contract agent for the C.I.A., working openly for the Agency as late as 1965 in the Congo. He was very close to Bay of Pigs leader Manuel Artime and a member of Operation 40, the special assassinations unit. He was charged with at least one murder here but never tried. In 1968 he was arrested for a series of bombings but he became an F.B.I. informant and was never sentenced. He was the chief government witness in the 1968 trial of Orlando Bosch, who was convicted and sentenced to 10 years. (He was paroled in 1972, skipped the country and was free until his arrest in Caracas with Veciana-associate Luis Posada this year on charges of blowing up the Cubana Airlines plane in Barbadoes. Morales reportedly set him up for the arrest, which may be just protective custody.)

What I wanted to talk to Morales about last year was an item in a transcript of a tape recording that emerged in the Bosch trial of 1968. In a secretly taped meeting with Bosch, Morales talked

about "a fellow named Hunt" who "gave \$15,000 to some representatives of Cuban Power to place bombs." Bosch later assumed that Hunt is the "one of the wells," but I wonder about that.

At any rate, with Morales never being called to testify in Otero's Federal trial, Otero was found not guilty of every count. That seemed to really disturb the F.B.I. and, no doubt, its trusted informant Morales, because immediately afterwards the Bureau and Morales teamed up with State authorities to smack Otero again with the same nine charges, this time on a State level. And this time the trial was held not in an urban setting but in the back country of Florida's Panhandle where most of the jurors, although employees of Eglin Air Force Base, were actually residents of Alabama, red-blooded Americans who knew the difference between the good-guy F.B.I. agents and some crazy Cuban bomber. Nevertheless, Otero was found guilty of only one of the nine charges, that of placing a bomb in a locker at Miami airport. The prosecution had presented a locker handle with his thumb print on it. Otero's lawyers claimed that Morales had enough sophisticated C.I.A. training to know how to transfer a print and that if Otero could not be linked to the other bombings only Morales could have done them. I think Otero made a significant point in his defense when, after admitting he was a fanatic anti-Communist and terrorist, he said that any bombs placed within the United States were of propaganda value only to Castro. Nevertheless, Otero was found guilty on that one count and, for that single charge, given 40 years.

Now all of that may be important in terms of the information Otero is providing us and where it is going. Although the F.B.I. seemed to be out to get Otero, a Bureau report I got indicates that strange things happened early in its efforts to gather information relating Otero to the bombings.

Also relevant may be this: In 1975, Otero says, he was involved in a plot to kill Castro in Venezuela. That plot, he says, was planned without the support or knowledge of the C.I.A. One of those involved in the plot was Otero's friend Hector Serrano. Early in January, 1976, Serrano caught a rumor that he, Antonio Gonzalez and Ciro Orizondo were going to be framed by the F.B.I. linking them to a connection with Otero and the bombings. Fearing that, Serrano went to the F.B.I. and told them his story.

According to the F.B.I. report, Serrano told the Bureau that Gonzalez had been in touch with Arturo Cobos, described as "a Cuban known to have contacts in the C.I.A."

This is what the F.B.I. report then says: "Cobos furnished the name of Bernardo Torres...as the man to call with contacts on a high level with the C.I.A. in Washington, D.C. Torres advised Gonzalez that he contacted his source in the C.I.A. and learned that the F.B.I. is aware that Rolando Otero did commit the bombings, and that Otero's three friends, Ciro Orizondo, Tony Gonzalez and Hector Serrano are going to be framed by the F.B.I. for their involvement in the same bombings. Gonzales stated that on January 14, 1976, the C.I.A. was sending a man down to Miami, Florida, to arrive at about 12:30 p.m., January 14, 1976, to interview these men, who should get to a 'safe' house in Miami until the C.I.A. man arrives."

What happened then was this: A fellow by the name of Mike Hall suddenly shows up in Miami. He gathers together Otero's associates and takes them to a "safe house" where, he assures them, they'll be safe from an F.B.I. frame up. He holds them there for a couple of days during which time they are visited by Ricardo Morales, who fills them in on the 'details' of Otero's involvement with the bombings. Hall then gathers together a couple of Otero's tape recorders, a typewriter (which, he hints, may have been used to write notes relating to the bombings) and a few other pieces of equipment and leaves town with it all. That's the last anyone sees of the stuff or Mike Hall.

Otero's attorneys later discovered that there is, indeed, a Mike Hall. He supposedly is a Treasury Agent in the Minneapolis bureau of the Alcohol, Tobacco Tax and Firearms Division. (His telephone in St. Paul: 612-725-7092). He wouldn't talk about his actions but said he used to be the ATT&F agent in charge of the Miami office until 1974. He said he received a call from an old "informant" (Torres) who supposedly wouldn't talk with anyone else in ATT&F except him. So he immediately flew in from Minneapolis and did his stuff. I hear the F.B.I. has filed an official protest about his involvement.

This is the way I read the significance of Hall's actions: I think he (and whoever he works for) wanted to make sure that while Morales was helping the F.B.I. to build its case against Otero, the Bureau didn't stumble across any untutored witnesses or evidence that would have knocked the case out early. Hence Hall's quick visit to Miami, the "safe house" bit and the gathering of the "evidence."

What I find interesting, considering the possibility that Otero could be out for revenge, is that he doesn't put in such a likely candidate as Morales into the Kennedy assassination, especially since he admits he doesn't have any hard evidence relating to the names he did give us. And he seems to have been acquainted with Bernardo de Torres only peripherally, the others less so. In addition, what he did give us he readily admits he got from a third party.

What we have so far on Bernard de Torres is this: He showed up in New Orleans very early in Garrison's investigation claiming he had important information. He said he was a private detective in Miami and wanted to help. Garrison recalls he mentioned the name of State Attorney Richard Gerstein as an entree. Miami newspaper clippings at the time describe Torres as the "military coordinator of Brigade 2506." He refused to comment to reporters on his role in Garrison's investigation. "He said some of the angles were 'classified,' such as reports of an Oswald visit here." [My personal opinion is that, from my experience, anyone who comes up with a story putting Oswald in Miami is a source of misinformation.] However, according to the clippings: "Torres was among a group of ten Cubans who helped Secret Service men protect President Kennedy when he visited Miami four days before his assassination."

The latter is interesting because the only one who ever had a story of localites assisting Secret Service men here in Miami on Kennedy's visit was Jerry Patrick Hemming, who says he also was involved in that security effort. Miami Police reports list Torres as an associate of Anselmo Leon Alliegro, an old pal of Hemming's. Police once found a quantity of explosives and weapons in Alliegro's home. Alliegro said they belonged to Torres.

Torres also has a connection with a boutique that is owned by another Otero lead, Norman Diaz. Diaz is the father-in-law of Miami City Commission Manolo Rebozo, a close associate of Manuel Artime's and a former member of Operation 40 himself.

Today Garrison feels that Torres was one of his early sources of misinformation. He hasn't yet checked his files on him, but from recollection he says whatever information Torres provided never went anywhere. The latest clipping I have on Torres reports that he was going to be summoned to testify before a Federal grand jury in Washington investigating the assassination of Chilian Foreign Minister Letelier. That was early this year.

I don't plan to approach Torres until I run the full circle around him. It's the little things that make me feel he may be important. Otero, for instance, told me that the source of his information, Juan Adames, the fellow he was in the Broward County Jail with for a brief period, visited his, Otero's, girlfriend when he was out for a short while last summer. Bob Rosenblatt, Otero's attorney, was recently talking to her and asked her about it. She said that Adames dropped by just to tell her how much he was in sympathy with Otero's plight and that he would try to help as much as possible. She said it was just a brief social visit. Yet, she volunteered, he did happen to bring up the name of Bernardo Torres and asked if Otero had ever mentioned him to her. (Adames knew that Otero has been in regular telephone contact with her from his Panhandle prison.) She said she told

Adames that she did not know Torres and that Otero had only pointed him out to her once in a movie theater.

It seems to me that Adames may have gone out of his way to check on whether or not Otero was passing around information which he, Adames, may have let slip to him in the camaraderie of a prison cell.

Meanwhile, I finally found Juan Adames. (a.k.a. Juan Isador; Juan Tappia; Victor Manuel Alonzo.) (D.O.B.: 7-15-41; born Dominican Republic; 170 lbs, brown hair, brown eyes, 5'9" tall) He is in the Dade Correctional Institution, a State prison in Florida City, about 35 miles from Miami. He was arrested in Fort Lauderdale in June, 1976, on forgery and worthless check charges. So Otero's story about meeting him in the jail there checks out. Adames bonded out for a brief period last summer, was brought back for trial, was found guilty and sentenced to 18 months.

According to investigators in the Broward State Attorney's office, Adames is a sophisticated con man. Yet he now desperately wants to get out of jail and has been cooperating with them. One of the areas Adames is talking about involves individuals who conspire to rob armories in order to sell or exchange the weapons for narcotics, small time hoods with indirect connections to organized crime. Adames said he was working with such a gang, casing targets by photographing them in advance. Adames claims he is a professional freelance photographer. When investigators asked him how he got involved with the gang, Adames said that one of the members happened to see in his apartment some documents which belonged to a close friend of his in the armaments business, Bernardo de Torres. To show the investigators that he was telling the truth, Adames produced a sheaf of documents which obviously belong to Torres. They deal with the sale of weapons to the Mexican and Columbian governments and to the DEA in Mexico City. Torres is listed on one of the documents as "Director of Operations for Central and South America" for the Military Armament Corporation.

The Chairman of the Board of Military Armament Corporation is our old friend, Mitchell Livingston WerBell III.

The pieces are coming together.

I'm following up, planning to approach Adames undercover. As soon as I get a chance, I'll send you copies of all the key stuff I have on WerBell. The latest word I have is that our old 544 Camp St. buddy, Gordon Novel, is living on WerBell's estate in Georgia. Small world.