

**KENNEDY'S ASSASSINATION:  
THE KEY WEST CONNECTION**



This is the fourth in a five-part series by Tim Gratz and Mark Howell about the Keys connections to the assassination of President John Kennedy.

Tomorrow's concluding story is "Searching for Ghosts in Key West," a report on the sighting of Oswald and Ruby together at Key West Airport that was investigated by the Senate Intelligence Committee.

# The bishop and the pawn

**BY TIM GRATZ**

Special to The Citizen

**AND MARK HOWELL**

Citizen Arts & Entertainment Editor

Forty years ago today, President John F. Kennedy was assassinated.

Several days after the assassination, Antonio Veciana, head of the militant Cuban exile group Alpha 66, answered a knock on his door in the Little Havana section of Miami.

The man at the door introduced himself as Cesar Diosdado, the

United States Customs officer for Key West.

Diosdado asked Veciana if he knew anything about the Kennedy assassination. When Veciana said no, Diosdado left.

Thirteen years later, Veciana told an investigator for the U.S. Senate a shocking story that shifted the focus of the entire assassination investigation.

In 1975, Sen. Richard Schweiker of

See **KENNEDY**, page 4A



Special to The Citizen

**President and Mrs. Kennedy arrive in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963. Hours later, the president was dead.**

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1 of 3

P. 11 A  
22 Nov 1963  
Kennedy's assassin

## Kennedy

Continued from page 1A

Pennsylvania (now deceased) sat on the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence inquiring into the CIA's efforts to assassinate foreign government officials. Schweiker, who believed that Oswald had the "fingerprints of intelligence" all over him, hired Gaeton Fonzi, a noted investigative journalist, to help the investigation.

In yesterday's story we reviewed the "Odio incident" regarding three men who visited Silvia Odio's apartment in Dallas two months before the assassination, one of whom was introduced to her as Leon Oswald and whom she later identified as Lee Harvey Oswald. The Warren Commission dismissed the Odio incident because it believed a report that it was not Oswald at her door but rather an Oswald look-alike named William Seymour, an American soldier-of-fortune trained at a camp in No Name Key in the Florida Keys.

Fonzi heard speculation that one of the men who visited Odio may have been Antonio Veciana, prompting Fonzi's visit to Veciana. Fonzi quickly realized that Veciana was not one of the group that had visited Odio. Veciana did, however, tell Fonzi a startling story.

Veciana had been the president of the Cuban association of certified public accountants when Castro came to power. He had provided secret assistance to Castro and as a result was offered the position of finance minister in the Castro regime, an offer he declined.

Veciana became disillusioned with Castro and he started talking with friends about his dissatisfaction with the Cuban



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**Maurice Bishop is the CIA operative seen with Lee Harvey Oswald just before the assassination.**

leader. He was approached by a man who identified himself as Maurice Bishop, a businessman who offered to assist him in his anti-Castro activities.

It soon became obvious to Veciana that Bishop was more than a businessman. Veciana told Fonzi that he discovered it was Bishop who had, in fact, engineered the failed 1961 assassination plot against Castro that resulted in the imprisonment of Odio's parents.

That assassination scheme was initiated after the failure of the Bay of Pigs invasion, a failure that Veciana said Bishop blamed on Kennedy.

Bishop trained Veciana in the techniques of intelligence and Veciana assumed Bishop was a CIA official using a pseudonym.

In 1967 Johnny Roselli, a Mafioso from Los Angeles, publicly revealed that the CIA had employed the Mafia to try to kill Castro. In response, the CIA Inspector General prepared a report on those efforts, a report that was classified and reviewed at the time only at the highest levels of United States government.

That report did not disclose

CIA involvement in the 1961 Veciana plot to kill Castro, because it had not involved any members of the Mafia. Nor did the agency reveal its involvement in the 1961 Veciana plot either to the Warren Commission or to the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence that was investigating CIA plots to kill foreign leaders.

Fearing Castro's intelligence arm was on to him, Veciana had fled Havana to Miami the night before the aborted assassination attempt. Soon after he settled in Miami, Veciana was again approached by the mysterious Bishop. Veciana stated it was Bishop who helped him organize Alpha 66, which soon became the most militant of the numerous anti-Castro exile groups.

Veciana had never before disclosed to anyone that Bishop was guiding the activities of Alpha 66. He did make one slip, however. In a recorded September 14, 1962 press conference announcing more Alpha 66 raids on Cuba, Veciana remarked that the planning for the raids was made by those "I don't even know."

Alpha 66 became infamous for staging a raid on the Havana harbor during the height of the Cuban missile crisis, a raid that resulted in a firefight against Russian troops on a Russian boat docked in the harbor and could have started World War III.

Veciana told Fonzi that the Alpha 66 raid on Havana harbor was also planned by Bishop, who hoped it would force Kennedy to move more forcefully against Castro.

In early September 1963, Bishop asked Veciana to meet him in Dallas. They met in the busy lobby of a large downtown office building, probably the Southland Center. As soon as he walked in, Veciana saw Bishop

283

4A

talking with a "pale, slight, soft-featured" young man.

Bishop never introduced the young man to Veciana, and Bishop ended his conversation with the young man shortly after Veciana arrived.

On the day of the assassination, Veciana recognized the television images of Lee Harvey Oswald, the accused assassin, as the young man he had seen in Dallas with Bishop.

Diosdado and his wife were born and raised in Laredo, Texas and moved to Key West in the mid-1950s. Diosdado was the customs agent for Key West from 1957 to 1968 when he left the Keys to join the newly created Drug Enforcement Agency.

Diosdado retired and now lives in California. Fonzi reports that Diosdado refused to be voluntarily interviewed by the House Committee on Assassinations. Although he spoke with *The Citizen* this month, Diosdado refused to answer questions posed about his meeting with Veciana.

Why did Diosdado, back in 1962, make the trip to Miami to interview Veciana? There was never any indication in the Warren Commission report that any agency other than the FBI was investigating the assassination.

One answer is that he never did, that Veciana is either mistaken or lying about the visit by Diosdado. And Diosdado has denied that he ever conducted a post-assassination interview of Veciana.

Since U.S. Customs was in charge of enforcing the Neutrality Act, which forbids United States residents from engaging in conflicts with foreign nations, it was Diosdado's responsibility to monitor exile raids on Cuba launched from the Florida Keys. That is why he orchestrated the December 1962 raid on the camp on No



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**Antonia Veciana, head of Alpha 66, claimed that most of its activities were controlled by Bishop. Shortly after the assassination he was interviewed in Miami by Cesar Diosdado, U.S. Customs agent for Key West.**

Name Key.

But two sources within the Miami Customs office told Fonzi that Diosdado was working for the CIA in Key West. Other evidence collected by investigators suggests that the CIA reimbursed Customs for Diosdado's salary.

Assuming Veciana is telling the truth, the reason the CIA sent Diosdado to interview Veciana within days of the assassination seems apparent. It wanted to determine if Veciana had recognized Oswald and, if so, whether he would report it.

It was Veciana's failure to report to Diosdado his sighting of Oswald with Bishop that might have led the CIA to believe it could stonewall the Warren Commission.

In 1964, the CIA denied to the Warren Commission that it, or

any of its agents, ever had any dealings with Lee Harvey Oswald.

In 1978, the CIA reiterated to the House Committee on Assassinations that it never had dealings with Oswald and never had an agent who used the name Maurice Bishop.

The evidence suggests that these denials were less than accurate.

*In tomorrow's concluding story, Tim Gratz and Mark Howell reveal who Maurice Bishop may have been and explore a report that Oswald and Ruby were seen together at the Key West airport.*

(Correction: The date in the caption to the photograph of Gerry Hemming in Friday's story should have been December 1962.)

3 083