

# The saga of Rolando Cubela

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P. 1A

The Citizen's Thursday story on the Keys connection to the Kennedy assassination described the suspicious travels of one-time Key West resident Gilberto Lopez, who was in Texas the day of the assassination and only days later returned to Cuba via Mexico.

It is possible his mysterious travels were merely coincidental. But if Lopez's location in Texas the day of the assassination was sinister, his subsequent flight to Cuba implies that Castro motivated the assassination, in what can only be characterized as retaliatory self-defense.

From the early 1960s the CIA had, on numerous occasions, attempted to

kill Castro, sometimes through schemes that in retrospect seem ludicrous. The CIA even engaged the Mafia to kill Castro on its behalf.

Any investigation of Castro's possible involvement in Kennedy's death must consider the story of Rolando Cubela.

Cubela was a high-ranking official in the Castro regime and longtime associate of Castro. In 1961 he approached the CIA about defecting to the United States, but the CIA wanted him to stay undercover in Cuba.

On Sept. 7, 1963, Cubela was attending a conference in Sao Paulo, Brazil. There he approached the CIA and stated he would stay in Cuba if he could do something very big for the cause. He offered to kill Castro for the United States. First, however, he wanted proof that his operation was

## KENNEDY'S ASSASSINATION: THE KEY WEST CONNECTION

This is an additional story supplementing the five-part series by Tim Gratz and Mark Howell, which concluded

Sunday, about the Keys connections to the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.



endorsed at the highest level of American government. He demanded to meet with Attorney General Robert Kennedy.

The CIA knew Cubela was capable of murder. In 1956, Cubela entered a fancy Havana nightclub, walked up to the head of the Batista security forces

See CUBELA, page 3A

## Cubela

Continued from page 1A

and shot him in the head.

The very same day that Cubela approached the CIA in Brazil, Castro entered the Brazilian embassy in Havana and granted an unusual interview to an American reporter. Castro stated that the leaders of the U.S. government would not be safe if they continued their efforts to kill Cuban leaders. Castro's remarks were widely reported in the American press.

Cubela's demand to meet with Robert Kennedy was out of the question, of course. But the CIA decided to send Desmond FitzGerald, the number-three man in the CIA, to meet with Cubela and give him the assurances he required. FitzGerald would tell Cubela that he was the personal emissary of Robert Kennedy.

Richard Helms was the number-two man in the CIA at that time. Helms later testified that he told FitzGerald that this representation could be made without the express approval of Robert Kennedy.

There were, however, other high-ranking CIA officials who warned against the Cubela operation, fearing Cubela might be an agent provocateur for Castro.

The first meeting with FitzGerald and Cubela took place in Paris on Oct. 29, 1963. Cubela asked for a rifle with a telescopic scope. FitzGerald promised Cubela an appropriate assassination weapon so he could kill Castro without forfeiting his own life.

FitzGerald also told Cubela the U.S. would assure him presidential approval for the plan to kill Castro by having Kennedy, in a speech planned for the Inter-American Press Association, call the Castro regime "thugs" and call for their removal.

The Kennedy speech to the IAPA occurred in Miami on a Monday later in the following month. Kennedy used the exact language FitzGerald had promised to Cubela.

Four days later, FitzGerald met for a second time with Cubela, again in Paris. At this meeting, FitzGerald gave Cubela a CIA-designed pen

with a microscopic hypodermic needle designed to inject the deadliest poison into Castro without his knowledge.

The Kennedy speech to the IAPA in Miami occurred on Monday, Nov. 18, 1963. The meeting at which FitzGerald gave Cubela the poison pen occurred on Friday, Nov. 22. Before the end of the meeting, FitzGerald received news of the Kennedy assassination and he immediately called off the Cubela operation.

When news of the CIA/Mafia plots first started to surface, the CIA had its inspector general prepare a confidential internal memo on all CIA plots to kill Castro, which was only declassified in 1993. Chillingly, the Report of the Inspector General concluded that Kennedy was killed at the very moment FitzGerald was meeting with Cubela to give him a CIA-designed weapon to kill Castro.

After President Lyndon B. Johnson reviewed the report, he told a reporter, in confidence at the time: "Kennedy was trying to kill Castro. Castro got him first."

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P. 3A