
ROSE CHERAMIE

Staff Report
of the
Select Committee on Assassinations
U.S. House of Representatives
Ninety-fifth Congress
Second Session

March 1979

ROSE CHERAMIE

(1) According to accounts of assassinations researchers, a woman known as Rose Cheramie, a heroin addict and prostitute with a long history of arrests, was found on November 20, 1963, lying on the road near Eunice, La., bruised and disoriented. (1) She was taken to the Louisiana State Hospital in Jackson, La., to recover from her injuries and what appeared to be narcotics withdrawal. (2) Cheramie reportedly told the attending physician that President Kennedy was going to be killed during his forthcoming visit to Dallas. (3) The doctor did not pay much attention to the ravings of a patient going "cold turkey" until after the President was assassinated 2 days later. (4) State police were called in and Cheramie was questioned at length. (5) She reportedly told police officers she had been a stripper in Jack Ruby's night club and was transporting a quantity of heroin from Florida to Houston at Ruby's insistence when she quarreled with two men also participating in the dope run. (6) Cheramie said the men pushed her out of a moving vehicle and left her for dead. (7) After the assassination, Cheramie maintained Ruby and Lee Harvey Oswald had known each other well. (8) She said she had seen Oswald at Ruby's night club and claimed Oswald and Ruby had been homosexual partners. (9)

(2) Ironically, the circumstances of Rose Cheramie's death are strikingly similar to the circumstances surrounding her original involvement in the assassination investigation. Cheramie died of injuries received from an automobile accident on a strip of highway near Big Sandy, Tex., in the early morning of September 4, 1965. (10) The driver stated Cheramie had been lying in the roadway and although he attempted to avoid hitting her, he ran over the top of her skull, causing fatal injuries. (11) An investigation into the accident and the possibility of a relationship between the victim and the driver produced no evidence of foul play. (12) The case was closed. (13)

(3) Although Cheramie's allegations were eventually discounted, her death 2 years later prompted renewed speculation about her story. It was noted, for example, that over 50 individuals who had been associated with the investigation of the Kennedy assassination had died within 3 years of that event. (14) The deaths, by natural or other causes, were labeled "mysterious" by Warren Commission critics and the news media. (15) The skeptics claim that the laws of probability would show the number of deaths is so unlikely as to be highly suspect. (16) As detailed elsewhere, the committee studied such claims and determined they were erroneous. (17) Nevertheless, allegations involving Rose Cheramie, often counted among the "mysterious" deaths, was of particular interest to the committee, since it indicated a possible association of Lee Harvey Oswald and Jack Ruby; an association of these individuals with members of organized crime; and possible connection between Cheramie's confinement at the State Hospital in Jackson, La.

and Oswald's search for employment there in the summer of 1963.

(4) The committee set out to obtain a full account of the Cheramie allegations and determine whether her statements could be at all corroborated. The committee interviewed and deposed pertinent witnesses. Files from U.S. Customs and the FBI were requested. Information developed during the investigation by New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison was examined. Records of Cheramie's hospitalization at the East Louisiana State Hospital were studied.

(5) Hospital records indicate Melba Christine Marcades, alias Rose Cheramie, was brought to the State Hospital in Jackson, La. by police from Eunice on November 21, 1963 and officially admitted at 6 a.m. (18) She was originally from Houston, Tex., where her mother still lived. (19) She was approximately 34 years old in 1963, had used many aliases throughout her lifetime and had lived many years in Louisiana and Texas. (20)

(6) According to the clinical notes, the deputy accompanying Cheramie said the patient had been "picked up on [the] side of [the] road and had been given something by the coroner." (21) The coroner in Eunice was contacted by doctors at the hospital and he told them Cheramie had been coherent when he spoke with her at 10:30 p.m., November 20, but he did administer a sedative. (22) He further indicated that Cheramie was a 9-year mainlining heroin addict, whose last injection had been around 2 p.m., November 20. (23) The doctors noted that Cheramie's condition upon initial examination indicated heroin withdrawal and clinical shock. (24)

(7) Relevant to Cheramie's credibility was an assessment of her mental state. From November 22 to November 24, Cheramie required close attention and medication. (25) On November 25 she was transferred to the ward. (26) On November 27 she was released to Louisiana State Police Lieutenant Fruge. (27)

(8) The hospital records gave no reference as to alleged statements made by Cheramie or why she was released to Lieutenant Fruge on November 27, 1963. These records do indicate Cheramie had been hospitalized for alcoholism and narcotics addiction on other occasions, including commitment to the same hospital in March 1961 by the criminal court of New Orleans. (28) During this stay, the woman was diagnosed as ". . . without psychosis. However, because of her previous record of drug addiction she may have a mild integrative and pleasure defect." (29) Her record would show she has "intervals of very good behavior" but at other times she "presents episodically psychopathic behavior" indicative in her history of drug and alcohol abuse, prostitution, arrest on numerous, if minor, charges. (30)

(9) The committee interviewed one of the doctors on staff at East Louisiana State Hospital who had seen Cheramie during her stay there at the time of the Kennedy assassination. (31) The doctor corroborated aspects of the Cheramie allegations. Dr. Victor Weiss verified that he was employed as a resident physician at the hospital in 1963. (32) He recalled that on Monday, November 25, 1963, he was asked by another physician, Dr. Bowers, to see a patient who had been committed November 20 or 21. (33) Dr. Bowers allegedly told Weiss that the patient, Rose Cheramie, had stated before the assassination that President Kennedy was going to be killed. (34) Weiss questioned Cheramie about

her statements.(35) She told him she had worked for Jack Ruby. She did not have any specific details of a particular assassination plot against Kennedy, but had stated the "word in the underworld" was that Kennedy would be assassinated.(36) She further stated that she had been traveling from Florida to her home in Texas when the man traveling with her threw her from the automobile in which they were riding.(37)

(10) Francis Fruge, a lieutenant with the Louisiana State Police in 1963, was the police officer who first came to Cheramie's assistance on November 20, 1963, had her committed to the State Hospital, and later released her into his custody following the assassination to investigate her allegations.(38) As such, he provided an account further detailing her allegations and the official response to her allegations.

(11) Fruge was deposed by the committee on April 18, 1978.(39) He told the committee he was called on November 20, 1963 by an administrator at a private hospital in Eunice, La. that a female accident victim had been taken there for treatment.(40) She had been treated for minor abrasions, and although she appeared to be under the influence of drugs since she had "no financial basis" she was to be released.(41) Fruge did what he normally did in such instances. As the woman required no further medical attention, he put her in a jail cell to sober up.(42) This arrangement did not last long. The woman began to display severe symptoms of withdrawal.(43) Fruge said he called a doctor, who sedated Cheramie and Fruge transported Cheramie to the State hospital in Jackson, La.(44)

(12) Fruge said that during the "1 to 2 hour" ride to Jackson, he asked Cheramie some "routine" questions.(45) Fruge told the committee:

She related to me that she was coming from Florida to Dallas with two men who were Italians or resembled Italians. They had stopped at this lounge . . . and they'd had a few drinks and had gotten into an argument or something. The manager of the lounge threw her out and she got on the road and hitchhiked to catch a ride, and this is when she got hit by a vehicle.(46)

Fruge said the lounge was a house of prostitution called the Silver Slipper.(47) Fruge asked Cheramie what she was going to do in Dallas: "She said she was going to, number one, pick up some money, pick up her baby, and to kill Kennedy."(48) Fruge claimed during these intervals that Cheramie related the story she appeared to be quite lucid.(49) Fruge had Cheramie admitted to the hospital late on November 20.(50)

(13) On November 22, when he heard the President had been assassinated, Fruge said he immediately called the hospital and told them not to release Cheramie until he had spoken to her.(51) The hospital administrators assented but said Fruge would have to wait until the following Monday before Cheramie would be well enough to speak to anyone.(52) Fruge waited. Under questioning, Cheramie told Fruge that the two men traveling with her from Miami were going to Dallas to kill the President.(53) For her part, Cheramie was to obtain \$8,000 from an unidentified source in Dallas and proceed to Houston with the two men to complete a drug deal.(54) Cheramie was also supposed to

pick up her little boy from friends who had been looking after him.(55) (14) Cheramie further supplied detailed accounts of the arrangement for the drug transaction in Houston.(56) She said reservations had been made at the Rice Hotel in Houston.(57) The trio was to meet a seaman who was bringing in 8 kilos of heroin to Galveston by boat.(58) Cheramie had the name of the seaman and the boat he was arriving on.(59) Once the deal was completed, the trio would proceed to Mexico.(60)

(15) Fruge told the committee that he repeated Cheramie's story to his supervisors and asked for instructions.(61) He was told to follow up on it.(62) Fruge promptly took Cheramie into custody—as indicated in hospital records—and set out to check her story.(63) He contacted the chief customs agent in Galveston who reportedly verified the scheduled docking of the boat and the name of the seaman.(64) Fruge believed the customs agent was also able to verify the name of the man in Dallas who was holding Cheramie's son.(65) Fruge recalled that the customs agent had tailed the seaman as he disembarked from the boat, but then lost the man's trail.(70) Customs closed the case.(71)

(16) Fruge had also hoped to corroborate other statements made by Cheramie. During a flight from Houston, according to Fruge, Cheramie noticed a newspaper with headlines indicating investigators had not been able to establish a relationship between Jack Ruby and Lee Harvey Oswald.(72) Cheramie laughed at the headline, Fruge said.(73) Cheramie told him she had worked for Ruby, or "Pinky," as she knew him, at his night club in Dallas and claimed Ruby and Oswald "had been shacking up for years.(74) Fruge said he called Capt. Will Fritz of the Dallas Police Department with this information.(75) Fritz answered, he wasn't interested.(76) Fritz and the Louisiana State Police dropped the investigation into the matter.(77)

(17) Four years later, however, investigators from the office of District Attorney Garrison in New Orleans contacted Fruge.(78) Fruge went on detail to Garrison's office to assist in the investigation into the Kennedy assassination.(79)

(18) During the course of the New Orleans D.A.'s investigation Fruge was able to pursue leads in the Cheramie case that he had not checked out in the original investigation. Although there appeared to be different versions as to how Cheramie ended up by the side of the road, and the number and identity of her companions, Fruge attempted to corroborate the version she had given him. Fruge spoke with the owner of the Silver Slipper Lounge.(80) The bar owner, a Mr. Mac Manual since deceased, told Fruge that Cheramie had come in with two men who the owner knew as pimps engaged in the business of hauling prostitutes in from Florida.(81) When Cheramie became intoxicated and rowdy, one of the men "slapped her around" and threw her outside.(82)

(19) Fruge claims that he showed the owner of the bar a "stack" of photographs and mug shots to identify.(83) According to Fruge, the barowner chose the photos of a Cuban exile, Sergio Arcacha Smith, and another Cuban Fruge believed to be named Osanto.(84) Arcacha Smith was known to Kennedy assassination investigators as an anti-Castro Cuban refugee who had been active in 1961 as the head of the New Orleans Cuban Revolutionary Front.(85) At that time, he befriended anti-Castro activist and commercial pilot David Ferrie, who

was named and dismissed as a suspect in the Kennedy assassination within days of the President's death. (86) Ferrie and Arcacha Smith were also believed to have had ties with New Orleans organized crime figure Carlos Marcello. (87) Arcacha Smith moved from the New Orleans area in 1962 to go to Miami and later to settle in Houston. (88) The weekend following the assassination, Ferrie took a trip to Houston and Galveston for a little "rest and relaxation," while police searched New Orleans for him after receiving a tip he had been involved in the assassination. (89) The committee has found credible evidence indicating Ferrie and Oswald were seen together in August 1963 in the town of Clinton, La., 13 miles from the hospital in Jackson where Cheramie was treated and where Oswald reportedly sought employment. Allegations regarding Arcacha Smith and Ferrie and the committee's investigation are set forth in detail elsewhere in the Report. (90) Clearly, evidence of a link between Cheramie and Arcacha Smith would be highly significant, Arcacha Smith, however, denied any knowledge of Cheramie and her allegations. Other avenues of corroboration of Fruge's identification of Cheramie's traveling companion as Sergio Arcacha Smith and further substantiation of Cheramie's allegations remained elusive.

(20) U.S. Customs was unable to locate documents and reports related to its involvement in the Cheramie investigation although such involvement was not denied. (91) Nor could customs officials locate those agents named by Fruge as having participated in the original investigation, as they had since left the employ of the agency. (92)

(21) Since the FBI had never been notified by the Louisiana State Police and U.S. Customs of their interest in Cheramie, the FBI file did not have any reference to the Cheramie allegations of November 1963. (93) FBI files did give reference to the investigation of a tip from Melba Mercades, actually Rose Cheramie, in Ardmore, Okla. that she was en route to Dallas to deliver \$2,600 worth of heroin to a man in Oak Cliff, Tex. (94) She was then to proceed to Galveston, Tex., to pick up a load of narcotics from a seaman on board a ship destined for Galveston in the next few days. (95) She gave "detailed descriptions as to individuals, names, places, and amounts distributed." (96) Investigations were conducted by narcotics bureaus in Oklahoma and Texas and her information was found to be "erroneous in all respects." (97)

(22) A similar tale was told in 1965: FBI agents investigated a tip from Rozella Clinkscales, alias Melba Mercades, alias Rose Cheramie. (98) Like the stories told in 1963, Cheramie-Clinkscales claimed individuals associated with the syndicate were running prostitution rings in several southern cities such as Houston and Galveston, Tex., Oklahoma City, Okla. and Montgomery, Ala. by transporting hookers, including Cheramie-Clinkscales, from town to town. (99) Furthermore, she claimed she had information about a heroin deal operating from a New Orleans ship. (100) A call to the Coast Guard verified an ongoing narcotics investigation of the ship. (101) Other allegations made by Cheramie-Clinkscales could not be verified. Further investigation into Cheramie-Clinkscales revealed she had apparently previously furnished the FBI false information concerning her involvement in prostitution and narcotics matters and that she had been confined to a mental institution in Norman, Okla. on three

occasions. (102) FBI agents decided to pursue the case no further. (103) The FBI indicated agents did not know of the death of their informant on September 4, 1965, occurring just 1 month after she had contacted the FBI. Louisiana State Police investigating Cheramie's fatal accident also apparently did not know of the FBI's interest in her.

Submitted by,

PATRICIA ORR, *Researcher.*

REFERENCES

- (1) "The Bizarre Deaths Following JFK's Murder," *Argosy*. March 1977, Vol. 384, No. 8, p. 52 (JFK Document No. 002559).
- (2) Ibid.
- (3) Ibid.
- (4) Ibid.
- (5) Ibid.
- (6) Ibid.
- (7) Ibid.
- (8) Ibid.
- (9) Ibid.
- (10) Louisiana State Police Memo, from Lt. Francis Fruge, Parish of St. Landry, April 4, 1967, in (JFK Document No. 013520).
- (11) Ibid.
- (12) Ibid.
- (13) Ibid.
- (14) "The Bizarre Deaths . . ." See FN No. 1.
- (15) Ibid.
- (16) Ibid.
- (17) See Anti-Castro Cuban section of the Staff Reports.
- (18) East Louisiana State Hospital, Jackson, La., records for Melba Christine Marcades AKA Rose Cheramie, (JFK Document No. 006097).
- (19) Ibid.
- (20) Ibid. Note: FBI records list Cheramie's (Marcades) birthdate as October 14, 1932, in Dallas, Tex. (See FBI file No. 166-1640 in JFK Document No. 012979).
- (21) Ibid.
- (22) Ibid.
- (23) Ibid.
- (24) Ibid.
- (25) Ibid.
- (26) Ibid.
- (27) Ibid.
- (28) Ibid.
- (29) Ibid.
- (30) Ibid.
- (31) HSCA Contact Report, July 5, 1978, Bob Buras (with Dr. Victor Weiss), (JFK Document No. 009699).
- (32) Ibid.
- (33) Ibid.
- (34) Ibid.
- (35) Ibid.
- (36) Ibid.
- (37) Ibid.
- (38) HSCA Contact Report, April 7, 1978, Bob Buras (with Mr. Francis Louis Fruge), p. 1 (JFK Document No. 014141).
- (39) HSCA Deposition of Francis Louis Fruge, April 18, 1978 (JFK Document No. 014570).
- (40) Id. at p. 4-5.
- (41) Id. at p. 5.
- (42) Ibid.
- (43) Id. at p. 6.
- (44) Ibid.
- (45) Id. at p. 8.
- (46) Ibid.
- (47) Id. at p. 9.

- (48) Id. at p. 13.
 (49) Ibid.
 (50) Ibid.
 (51) Id. at p. 12.
 (52) Ibid.
 (53) Id. at p. 13.
 (54) Id. at p. 14.
 (55) Ibid.
 (56) Ibid.
 (57) Ibid.
 (58) Ibid.
 (59) Ibid.
 (60) Ibid.
 (61) Ibid.
 (62) Id. at p. 15.
 (63) Id. at p. 17; East Louisiana State Hospital, Jackson, La., records for Melba Christine Marcades AKA Rose Cheramie (JFK Document No. 006097).
 (64) HSCA Deposition of Francis Louis Fruge, April 18, 1978, p. 20 (JFK Document No. 014570).
 (65) Id. at p. 22.
 (66) Ibid.
 (67) Id. at p. 18.
 (68) Id. at p. 22.
 (69) Id. at p. 23.
 (70) Ibid.
 (71) Ibid.
 (72) Id. at p. 19.
 (73) Ibid.
 (74) Ibid. Note: Fruge also indicated the Club was called the "Pink Door," although Ruby is not known to have ever had a club by this name. See also, Louisiana State Police Memo., April 4, 1967, from Lt. Francis Fruge, Parish of St. Landry, in JFK Document No. 013520).
 (75) Id. at p. 20.
 (76) Ibid.
 (77) Ibid.
 (78) Id. at p. 24.
 (79) Id. at p. 25.
 (80) Id. at p. 27-8.
 (81) Id. at p. 27.
 (82) Id. at p. 28. See also HSCA Contact Report, April 7, 1978, Bob Buras (with Francis Louis Fruge) (JFK Document No. 0141414).
 (83) Id. at p. 28.
 (84) Id. at p. 28, 30.
 (85) See Staff Report on Anti-Castro Cuban activity.
 (86) Ibid.
 (87) Ibid.
 (88) Ibid.
 (89) See Staff Report on Anti-Castro activity.
 (90) Ibid.
 (91) See Staff Memo., Rose Cheramie File, contact with Dennis Cronin, U.S. Customs (JFK Document No. 013520).
 (92) HSCA Contact Report, June 26, 1978, Marty Daly (with U.S. Customs), (JFK Document No. 009481).
 (93) See FBI file No. 166-1604 for Melba Christine Marcades, Vol. 1 of 1, (JFK Document No. 012979).
 (94) Id. at FBI 166-1604-3, February 11, 1966, Enclosure No. 1.
 (95) Id. at FBI 166-1604-2, December 14, 1965, Enclosure.
 (96) Ibid.
 (97) Ibid.
 (98) Id. at FBI 166-1604-1, November 23, 1965, p. 1.
 (99) Id. at p. 3.
 (100) Id. at p. 2.
 (101) Id. at p. 4.
 (102) Ibid.
 (103) Ibid.
 (104) East Louisiana State Hospital, Jackson, La., records for Melba Christine Marcades AKA Rose Cheramie (JFK Document No. 006097).