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to: Ruth Elliff

from:

03

The following OS3 records are attached:

WH 76

It contains information on:

Joseph Raymond Merola

APPROVED FOR RELEASE 1993  
CIA HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM

WH 76

**Office Memorandum • UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT**

TO : Chief, Contact Division

DATE: 2/11/61

FROM : Support

SUBJECT: Chief, Naval Office

MEMORANDUM OF VISIT TO: Joseph Raymond MEROLA  
2019 North Bay Road  
Miami Beach, Florida

1. For several months I have been contacted on occasion by Joseph Merola, notorious smuggler, gunrunner and general. He has expressed interest in offering his assistance in connection with the Cuban situation. Because of his background I have always evaded. However, on 6 Feb 61 he called saying he had some information concerning a Brazilian Senator, a close friend and confidante of "Che" Guevara, that we should know about.

2. I contacted the FBI to check on Merola's background and was advised that while he has a long record, he undoubtedly could speak authoritatively concerning international affairs; interest in his ability to smuggle and other contraband. As a consequence I visited Merola at his palatial home in Miami Beach.

3. Merola informed me that he is currently "at liberty" on two counts: a) A two-year probation in connection with his conviction on a charge of bringing the son-in-law of Fulgencio Batista, General Miranda, to the US in a clandestine fashion following the Castro takeover, and b) an appeal being taken against a conviction involving a theft of guns from a National Guard armory. Merola was given five years but his appeal is expected to drag on indefinitely.

4. When queried about the Brazilian Senator, Merola said that he has not yet received details, but that Sam Kay, one of his associates in the Latin American contraband business, told him that the Senator was interested in developing a project whereby large quantities of whiskey would be smuggled into Brazil. He said that the Senator had visited Cuba following Castro's victory and had been the special guest of "Che" Guevara. No other details were made available at the time of the interview of Merola.

5. It is my opinion that the principal reason for Merola contacting us was to ascertain if we would lobby on his behalf with the Federal Court to rescind the travel restriction currently imposed on him so that Merola could go to Brazil to work out details of the whiskey smuggling. I informed him that there would be no possibility of us being of assistance in the matter.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

*Jack*  
*WH/4/FE*  
*2/11-2/11*  
*[Signature]*

09649

APPROVED FOR RELEASE 1993  
CIA HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM

**Office Memorandum • UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT**

TO : Chief, Contact Division  
ATTN : Support

DATE: 8 Feb

FROM : Chief, Miami Office

00

11

SUBJECT: Memorandum of Visit to: Joseph Raymond MEROLA  
2018 North Bay Road  
Miami Beach, Florida

1. For several months I have been contacted on occasion by Joseph Merola, notorious smuggler, gunrunner and general contractor. He has expressed interest in offering his assistance in connection with the Cuban situation. Because of his background I have always been cautious. However, on 6 Feb 61 he called saying he had some information concerning a Brazilian Senator, a close friend and confidante of "Che" Guevara. I felt we should know about this.

2. I contacted the FBI to check on Merola's background. It was determined that while he has a long record, he undoubtedly could speak concerning international affairs; interest in his ability to smuggle other contraband. As a consequence, I visited Merola at his palatial home in Miami Beach.

3. Merola informed me that he is currently "at liberty" on two convictions: a) A two-year probation in connection with his conviction on a charge of bringing the son-in-law of Fulgencio Batista, General Miranda, to the United States in a clandestine fashion following the Castro victory, and b) an appeal being taken against a conviction involving a theft of guns from a National Guard armory. Merola was given five years but his appeal is expected to drag on indefinitely.

4. When queried about the Brazilian Senator, Merola said that he has not yet received details, but that Sam Kay, one of his associates in the Latin American contraband business, told him that the Senator was interested in developing a project whereby large quantities of whiskey would be smuggled into Brazil. He said that the Senator had visited Cuba following Castro's victory and had been the special guest of "Che" Guevara. No other details were made available at the time of the interview of Merola.

5. It is my opinion that the principal reason for Merola contacting us was to ascertain if we would intervene with the Federal Court to rescind the 50-mile travel restriction currently imposed on him so that Merola could go to Brazil to work out details of the whiskey smuggling. I informed him that there would be no possibility of our offering assistance in the matter.

**CONFIDENTIAL**

*Final  
WH/4/FE  
ES - 2/2*

**WH 296**

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APPROVED FOR RELEASE 1993  
CIA HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

Office Memorandum • UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

TO : Chief, Contact Division  
ATTN : Support

DATE: 8 Feb 61

FROM : Chief, Miami Office

00-AL  
(min)

SUBJECT: Memorandum of Visit to: Joseph Raymond MEROLA  
2018 North Bay Road  
Miami Beach, Florida

1. For several months I have been contacted on occasion by telephone by Joseph Merola, notorious smuggler, gunrunner and general no-gooder who has expressed interest in offering his assistance in connection with the Cuban situation. Because of his background I have always evaded him. However, on 6 Feb 61 he called saying he had some information concerning a Brazilian Senator, a close friend and confidante of "Che" Guevara. We felt we should know about this.

2. I contacted the FBI to check on Merola's background and found that while he has a long record, he undoubtedly could speak authoritatively concerning international affairs; interest in his ability to smuggle other contraband. As a consequence, I visited Merola at his place in Miami Beach.

3. Merola informed me that he is currently "at liberty" on two conditions: a) A two-year probation in connection with his conviction on a charge of bringing the son-in-law of Fulgencio Batista, General Miranda, to the United States in a clandestine fashion following the Castro victory, and b) an appeal taken against a conviction involving a theft of guns from a National Armory. Merola was given five years but his appeal is expected to drag on indefinitely.

4. When queried about the Brazilian Senator, Merola said that he had not yet received details, but that Sam Kay, one of his associates in the Latin American contraband business, told him that the Senator was interested in developing a project whereby large quantities of whiskey would be smuggled to Brazil. He said that the Senator had visited Cuba following Castro's victory and had been the special guest of "Che" Guevara. No other details were made available at the time of the interview of Merola.

5. It is my opinion that the principal reason for Merola contacting us was to ascertain if we would intervene with the Federal Court to rescind the 100-mile travel restriction currently imposed on him so that Merola could go to Brazil to work out details of the whiskey smuggling. I informed him that there would be no possibility of our being of assistance in the matter.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

Final  
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APPROVED FOR RELEASE 1993  
CIA HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

Office Memorandum • UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

TO : Chief, Contact Division  
ATTN : Support  
FROM : Chief, Miami Office

DATE: 8 Feb 1961

00-AL 179212  
(MIR)

SUBJECT: Memorandum of Visit to: Joseph Raymond MEROLA  
2018 North Bay Road  
Miami Beach, Florida

1. For several months I have been contacted on or off by Joseph Merola, notorious smuggler, gunrunner and gambler. He has expressed interest in offering his assistance in the Cuban situation. Because of his background I have always been suspicious. However, on 6 Feb 61 he called saying he had some information concerning a Brazilian Senator, a close friend and confidante of "Che" Guevara. I felt we should know about.

2. I contacted the FBI to check on Merola's background. While he has a long record, he undoubtedly could speak concerning international affairs; interest in his ability to handle other contraband. As a consequence, I visited Merola at his Miami Beach.

3. Merola informed me that he is currently "at liberty" because of:  
a) A two-year probation in connection with his conviction on bringing the son-in-law of Fulgencio Batista, General Miranda, to the United States in a clandestine fashion following the Castro victory, and b) an appeal against a conviction involving a theft of guns from a Navy Armory. Merola was given five years but his appeal is expected to be indefinitely.

4. When queried about the Brazilian Senator, Merola said he had not yet received details, but that Sam Kay, one of his associates in the American contraband business, told him that the Senator was interested in developing a project whereby large quantities of whiskey would be smuggled from Brazil. He said that the Senator had visited Cuba following Castro's victory and had been the special guest of "Che" Guevara. No other details were available at the time of the interview of Merola.

5. It is my opinion that the principal reason for Merola's contact with me was to ascertain if we would intervene with the Federal Court to relax the 25-mile travel restriction currently imposed on him so that Merola could travel to Brazil to work out details of the whiskey smuggling. I informed him that there would be no possibility of our being of assistance in the matter.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

Final  
WH/4/1/61  
DS-21

WH/2/9/61

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APPROVED FOR RELEASE 1993  
CIA HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM

**Office Memorandum • UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT**

TO : Chief, Contact Division  
ATTN : Support

DATE: 8 February 1961

FROM : Chief, Miami Office

00-A(s) - 3179212  
(MIMI - 1418)

SUBJECT: Memorandum of Visit to: Joseph Raymond MEROLA  
2018 North Bay Road  
Miami Beach, Florida

1. For several months I have been contacted on occasion by tel by Joseph Merola, notorious smuggler, gunrunner and general no- has expressed interest in offering his assistance in connection Cuban situation. Because of his background I have always evad However, on 6 Feb 61 he called saying he had some information Brazilian Senator, a close friend and confidante of "Che" Gue felt we should know about.

2. I contacted the FBI to check on Merola's background that while he has a long record, he undoubtedly could speak out concerning international affairs; interest in his ability to smu other contraband. As a consequence, I visited Merola at his palatis Miami Beach.

3. Merola informed me that he is currently "at liberty" on two a) A two-year probation in connection with his conviction on a charg bringing the son-in-law of Fulgencio Batista, General Miranda, to th a clandestine fashion following the Castro victory, and b) an appeal t taken against a conviction involving a theft of guns from a National ( Armory. Merola was given five years but his appeal is expected to dr indefinitely.

4. When queried about the Brazilian Senator, Merola said t' yet received details, but that Sam Kay, one of his associates in American contraband business, told him that the Senator was int' developing a project whereby large quantities of whiskey would Brazil. He said that the Senator had visited Cuba following and had been the special guest of "Che" Guevara. No other de available at the time of the interview of Merola.

5. It is my opinion that the principal reason for Mer was to ascertain if we would intervene with the Federal Cou. 25-mile travel restriction currently imposed on him so that Brazil to work out details of the whiskey smuggling. I inf would be no possibility of us being of assistance in the m

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*[Handwritten signature]*

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8 Feb 61

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6. Merola then stated that he had been actively engaged in gunrunning in behalf of Fidel Castro during the revolt against Batista. He stated that following Castro's victory he had gone to Havana, and had been received warmly by Fidel Castro and Camilo Cienfuegos. He furnished some details concerning these contacts, as well as his contact with Colonel "Johnnie" Abbas, head of the Dominican secret police also a contact of his, which are being forwarded in report form.

7. Merola also indicated that he is very well acquainted with Antonio de Varona, head of the FRD, and felt that he would be able to provide definite assistance to the Frente should he be called upon. He has a 63-foot boat available which he would not be adverse to "lending" to his friends.

8. He also mentioned that he realizes that we are not in a position to be "persuasive" with Castro agents in Miami, or with firms making clandestine shipments to Cuba via the British West Indies, Mexico or Canada. Merola expressed the opinion that he might be able to be of considerable assistance in "discussions" with individuals or corporations re their desisting from lending aid to Castro.

9. We expressed appreciation for his offer of assistance but stated that it was very unlikely that we would request any help; however, we would be glad to hear details of any Latin American intrigue which comes to his attention, and which could be of any significance.

10. No further contact is contemplated, but for the record the following is submitted:

Full Name: Joseph Raymond Merola  
DOB: 9 October 1925  
POB: Turtle Creek, Pennsylvania

He served in the US Marine Corps from 1941 to 1945, Serial 329620

*JFG*  
JUSTIN F. GLEICHAUF

JFG/amb

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