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Ex-cook charged in Smokin' Joe slayings

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Inquirer Staff Writer

A former short-order cook at Smokin' Joe's Corner was arrested yesterday and charged with murder in the deaths of three people during a holdup Thursday at the restaurant, owned in part by former heavy-weight boxing champion Joe Frazier.

Ralph Trent Stokes, 19, of the 5400 block of Morse Street, Wynnefield, was identified by detectives as the gunman in the shooting deaths of two employees and a mail carrier inside the restaurant, at 51st Street

and City Avenue in the Wynnefield section of Philadelphia.

Police sources said that one of the three victims, restaurant co-manager Mary Louise Figueroa, had recognized one of the two holdup men and had called his name. The sources said that during the holdup, Mrs. Figueroa told a co-worker, "I shouldn't have called him Trent" — Stokes middle name.

Detectives said Stokes had worked at the restaurant for about eight months.

Police said last night that they had

the identity of the second suspect and that they were seeking him. Two men were seen fleeing the scene after the killings, police said.

Slain during the early-afternoon robbery were Mrs. Figueroa, 38, of the 200 block of Merion Road, Merion Station, Montgomery County; kitchen helper Eugene Jefferson, 35, of the 200 block of North Vogdes Street, and mail carrier Peter Santangelo, 28, of the 1600 block of North 77th Street.

Their bodies were discovered at 1:30 p.m. Thursday by Mrs. Figueroa's

husband, George, 38, the other co-manager of the restaurant, as he arrived for work. Police said that all three victims were shot in the head with a .38-caliber handgun and that only one of the robbers did the shooting.

About \$3,000 was taken in the robbery, police said.

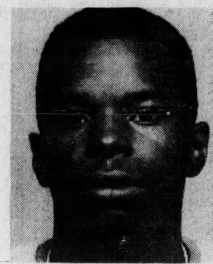
The employees' bodies were inside a walk-in freezer in the kitchen, police said. Santangelo, who police said probably walked in on the holdup while delivering mail, was found several feet from the restaurant's

main entrance on 51st Street.

Two other employees of the restaurant, which bears Frazier's boxing-ring nickname, were found dazed but unharmed inside the large freezer. The two, Pierre Blassingame and Renard Mills, both 22, told police that their lives had been spared because the gunman's revolver misfired.

During the robbery, police said, Mrs. Figueroa apparently recognized the voice of one of the two masked holdup men.

Stokes was arrested on a warrant at (See ARREST on 9-A)



Ralph Trent Stokes
Was questioned after deaths of 3

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