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Panel May Face Possibility of Coup in JFK's Slaying

By JIM MARRS
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The new House Committee on Assassinations may find itself faced with the distinct possibility that a coup d'etat occurred in 1963 — with the complicity of U. S. government officials.

That disturbing possibility — that the sudden and violent change in government leadership which took place with the slaying of John F. Kennedy was allowed to happen — is based on suspicions which would have been unthinkable in 1963, and on evidence which was not available then.

This conclusion stems from information which casts serious doubts on the credibility of then-President Lyndon B. Johnson's hand-picked Commission on the Assassination of President John F. Kennedy — the Warren Commission. That information — published in bits and pieces during the last 13 years — indicates that the commission was wrong when it concluded that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone in killing Kennedy.

And if that conclusion is wrong, the only other reasonable conclusion is that there was a cover-up — a cover-up involving elements of the Dallas police

department, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Central Intelligence Agency and other government agencies.

Analysis

That conclusion is based on two main factors:

- One, that the assassination itself was not planned, but rather allowed to happen.
- Two, after the slaying of the president, information which might show that more than one person was involved was either withheld or ignored.

First there was the Warren Commission report itself.

On Sept. 27, 1964, the commission released a 1,000-page report and 26 volumes of documents and testimony based on 25,000 interviews. Considering this mass of information, plus the fact that it contained no index, it was impossible for newsmen and researchers to study adequately the entire compilation of data.

HENCE, VIRTUALLY ALL news was taken from the report itself, the commission's version of what appeared in the 26 volumes.

And even the report has not been ac-

(Indicate page, name of newspaper, city and state.)

Fort Worth
1 Star Telegram
Fort Worth, Texas

Date: 12/1/76
Edition: Evening
Author:
Editor: Jack Butler
Title:

Character:
or
Classification:
Submitting Office: Dallas
 Being Investigated

62-109060-4

NOT RECORDED
167 DEC 27 1976

62-109060

84 DEC 28 1976

cepted at face value by all the American people. Even before 1970, national polls were reporting that as many as 80 per cent of the public disbelieved the commission's conclusions.

What the commission had going for it, says Robert Sam Anson, special events producer for WNET Public Television in New York, is not what it said but rather the distinguished members who said it.

From recently declassified minutes of the commission's executive sessions, it appears its mission was more political than investigatory. Earl Warren, former chief justice of the U. S. Supreme Court,

told the commission he took the job because President Johnson convinced him the country could be led into war if rumors of a conspiracy were not squelched.

Serving with Warren were Sen. John Sherman Cooper, R-Ky, who later was appointed as the first U.S. ambassador to East Germany by President Richard Nixon; Sen. Richard Russell, D-Ga., who began to express doubts about Oswald's role in the assassination in 1970 and died in 1971; Rep. Hale Boggs, D-La., who also expressed doubts about the commission shortly before he died in a plane crash in 1972; Rep. Gerald R. Ford, who was questioned during his vice presidential confirmation hearings about a book he wrote using classified commission documents; Allen Dulles, former director of the CIA, and John J. McCloy, former president of the World Bank and board chairman of Chase Manhattan Bank.

These men based their decisions entirely on information supplied by government agencies — primarily the FBI and CIA — which at that time were highly regarded but which some critics now contend withheld information.

SEVERAL COMMISSION critics say the main fault of its report lies not in the conclusions, which were the only conclusions to be drawn from the available evidence, but rather from the evidence itself.

The commission concluded that the first shot fired in Dealey Plaza passed through Kennedy's neck, then struck Texas Gov. John Connally, causing extensive damage when it shattered a rib.

This was challenged by Connally and

his wife, Nellie, in the automobile beside him. Connally, both in the commission report and in subsequent interviews, said he heard the first shot, recognized it as coming from a rifle and immediately feared an assassination attempt. He said he turned to the right and, unable to catch sight of Kennedy, began turning back to the left when he was struck in the back.

Since a bullet travels faster than the speed of sound, he could not have heard the sound of the shot which wounded him before he was struck.

The Connallys' statements are supported by the Abraham Zapruder film of the assassination, which shows Kennedy wounded while Connally is still smiling to the crowd.

In addition, many witnesses testified to the commission that the first shot missed both Kennedy and Connally.

Mrs. Donald Baker told the commission that the first shot struck the street. Royce G. Skelton also said he saw a bullet strike the pavement in front of the President's car. Motorcycle Policeman James Chaney, who probably was the

closest person to Kennedy outside the car's occupants, told the Houston Chronicle two days after the assassination that the first shot missed.

But, if separate shots struck Kennedy and Connally and the witnesses were correct in seeing a bullet hit the street, was there more than one gunman firing?

The commission maintained that Kennedy and Connally both were hit by one man firing from the sixth floor window of the Texas School Book Depository.

IN THE COMMISSION'S report, eight persons are quoted as saying that the shots came from the depository.

However, buried in the attendant 26 volumes of testimony, there are statements from at least 42 other persons who testified that shots came from places other than the depository.

Independent researchers, such as Penn Jones Jr. and attorney Mark Lane, say they have located dozens of additional witnesses never interviewed by the commission who also state the shots came from different locations.

In the case of Union Terminal Railroad employe S.M. Holland, the commission reports that he told of hearing a rifle report and of seeing a puff of smoke come from the wooden fence on top of the grassy knoll to the right front of the Presidential limousine. However, the commission discounted his testimony.

What the report failed to mention was that several other railroad workers standing with Holland on top of the Triple Underpass corroborated his story.

Richard C. Dodd and James L. Simmons were with Holland and in 1965, in a filmed interview with Lane, said they, too, heard a shot coming from the fence and saw smoke.

Dodd and Simmons said they joined other railroad workers, who also heard shots from the fence, in running to that spot. Behind the fence they said they found several cigarette butts and footprints indicating a man had stood there for some time.

Another railroad employe, J.C. Price, was on the roof of the Union Terminal dispatching tower just north of the Triple Underpass. Lane filmed Price in 1965. Price said he heard shots from the direction of the knoll and saw a man carrying something running "over behind that wooden fence, past the cars and over behind the Texas Depository Building."

Neither Price, Dodd nor Simmons was asked to testify before the Warren Commission.

Jean Hill, a witness who was standing directly across the street from the knoll, told the commission she saw a man in a brown overcoat and hat running from the knoll into the parking lot behind the wooden fence. Her testimony, which supports the testimony of the railroad employes, was not presented in the commission's report.

PHOTOGRAPHIC EVIDENCE also was hidden from public view.

The famed Zapruder film was bought immediately after the assassination by Time-Life Corp. and locked in a vault. Only a few selected still frames were published in Life magazine.

It was only in 1969, after the film was subpoenaed as evidence in the Clay Shaw trial in New Orleans, that copies began circulating.

Robert Groden, a freelance New York optics technician, spent almost 10 years studying and clarifying the Zapruder film. Last in March he was responsible for the first television airing of the film on ABC's Goodnight America program.

Groden claims "photo-enhanced" copies of the film show that Kennedy and Connally were struck by separate bullets, that Kennedy was struck by four separate shots and that, contrary to his testimony before the Warren Commission, Presidential limousine driver William Greer looked back twice at Kennedy, slowed the car and did not speed up until seconds later.

Orville Nix also made a film of the entire assassination. In Mark Lane's film, "Rush To Judgment," Nix also said he thought shots came from "behind a

fence between the School Book Depository and the railroad tracks." Nix said at the time he talked to Forest Sorrels of the Dallas Secret Service office and that Sorrels also said shots came from the fence. Sorrels later denied this.

In the interview, Nix said he gave his film to the FBI in December 1963 and much later was given back a copy. Asked if he thought the copy he got back was identical with his original, Nix replied, "I would say no . . . some of the frames were missing . . . some were ruined."

Mary Moorman took two Polaroid pictures just before and during the fatal shots. From her position, the background of her photos would have included both the depository and the grassy knoll. She told the commission that her film ended up in the hands of the Secret Service. No one else has seen what her pictures contain, she said in the interview with Lane.

HOWEVER, THESE EXAMPLES could be dismissed as hasty or sloppy work on the part of government investigators. But then there is the treatment of some witnesses during the commission's investigation.

Richard Carr, a construction worker, was on the sixth floor of the Dallas County Courthouse at the time of the assassination. Carr told author Gary Shaw he saw a heavy-set man wearing a hat, tan sportcoat and horn-rimmed glasses on the sixth floor of the depository at the time of the shooting. He also said he saw that man and another run from the depository and get into a Rambler station wagon.

Carr gave Shaw this account of his interview by the FBI shortly after the assassination:

"The FBI came to my house — there were two of them — they said they heard I witnessed the assassination and I said I did. They told me, 'If you didn't see Lee Harvey Oswald in the school book depository with a rifle, you didn't witness it.' I said, 'Well, the man I saw on television that they tell me is Lee Harvey Oswald was not in the window of the school book depository. That's not the same man.'

"He (an FBI agent) said I had better keep my mouth shut. He didn't ask me what I saw, he told me what I saw," Carr said.

Dallas Deputy Sheriff Roger Craig told the commission he saw Lee Harvey Oswald run from the depository minutes after the shooting and get into a station wagon driven by another man.

Craig also said he confronted Oswald in the office of Dallas Police Capt. Will Fritz and that when asked about the station wagon, Oswald replied it belonged to a friend of his and " . . . don't bring her into this."

That talk with Oswald was denied by Fritz, who told the commission that it never took place and that Craig was never in his office.

HOWEVER, IN 1969, Dallas Police Chief Jesse Curry published his personal "JFK Assassination File." On page 72 there is a photograph entitled "The Homicide Bureau office under guard while Oswald was being interrogated." In that picture, Craig can be seen standing inside Fritz's office.

In 1975, Craig, who was named Officer of the Year in 1960 by the Dallas Traffic Commission, committed suicide after telling newsmen of attempts on his life.

Former Sen. U.S. Ralph Yarborough of Texas was interviewed on ABC's "Goodnight America" program on March 27, 1975.

Yarborough said two government agents came to see him about the assassination and " . . . they walked in like they were a couple of deputy sheriffs and I was a bank robber."

He said the two men tried to get him to sign a pre-written statement which ended with the words, "This is all I know about the assassination." Yarborough said he refused to sign it and in subsequent weeks, the agents began to "bug" him, saying, "You're holding this up . . ."

Yarborough said he finally wrote out his own statement and gave it to the government.

"To my surprise, when the volumes were finally printed and came out, I was surprised at how many people down at the White House didn't file their affidavits (until) after the date, after that of mine the 10th of July, waiting to see what I was going to say before they'd file theirs."

Commission critics say there is a pattern to such treatment with witnesses who gave testimony conflicting with the commission's one-gunman theory.

They also note with a certain amount of alarm the number of material witnesses who died after the assassination.

In the the three-year period after Kennedy's death, 18 such witnesses died — six by gunfire, three in motor accidents, two by suicide, one from a cut throat, one from a karate chop to the neck, three from heart attacks and two from other natural causes.

An actuary commissioned by the London Sunday Times concluded that on Nov. 22, 1963, the odds against those 18 people being dead by February 1967 were one hundred thousand trillion to one.

TODAY, KENNEDY assassination researchers place the number of persons who have some connection to the events of Nov. 22 and who have since died at more than 100.

The commission also failed to examine the connection between Oswald's slayer, Jack Ruby, and organized crime.

The Senate Intelligence Committee has reported interlocking relationships among Cuban exiles, elements of the CIA and the Mafia, all of which had the capability to kill the President.

The committee reported it uncovered joint plans between CIA operatives and Mafia figures to create assassination squads to kill Cuba's Fidel Castro.

Convicted Watergate burglar Frank Sturgis, active in anti-Castro activities at that time, told writer Michael Canfield he was approached to take part in a domestic assassination.

So there were enough puzzles surrounding the investigation of the Kennedy assassination to indicate there were others involved.

And if that was indeed the case, then there must have been other elements within the government that tacitly participated — through inaction — before the killing.

Kennedy had angered elements of what President Eisenhower had called the "military-industrial" complex which could have played a part in allowing an assassination to take place.

If is this allowing of a killing rather than a planning of one that changes governments, says Col. L. Fletcher Prouty, liaison officer between the Pentagon and the CIA during those years.

He offered what he termed the "greatest single clue to that assassination" in an article published in Gallery magazine in September 1975.

He said assassinations are set in motion not so much by a specific plan to kill as by efforts to remove or relax the protection around a target.

"NO ONE HAS TO direct an assassination — it happens," Prouty wrote. "The active role is played secretly by permitting it to happen."

"That was why President Kennedy was killed. He was not murdered by some lone gunman or by some limited conspiracy, but by the breakdown of the protective system that should have made an assassination impossible."

The Warren Commission itself raised some questions about the protection, or a lack of it, during Kennedy's tour of the Fort Worth-Dallas area.

It noted testimony about members of the Secret Service drinking in Fort Worth the night before the killing and about members of the news media being given details of Kennedy's motorcade route.

There were also other indications about a relaxing of protection.

And "once insiders knew that he (Kennedy) would not be protected, it was easy to pick the day and the place . . ." Prouty wrote. "All the conspirators had to do was let the right 'mechanics' (professional assassins) know where Kennedy would be and when and, most importantly, that the usual precautions would not have been made and that escape would be facilitated.

"This is the greatest single clue to the assassination," Prouty wrote. "Who had the power to call off or reduce the usual security precautions that are always in effect whenever a president travels? Castro did not kill Kennedy, nor did the CIA.

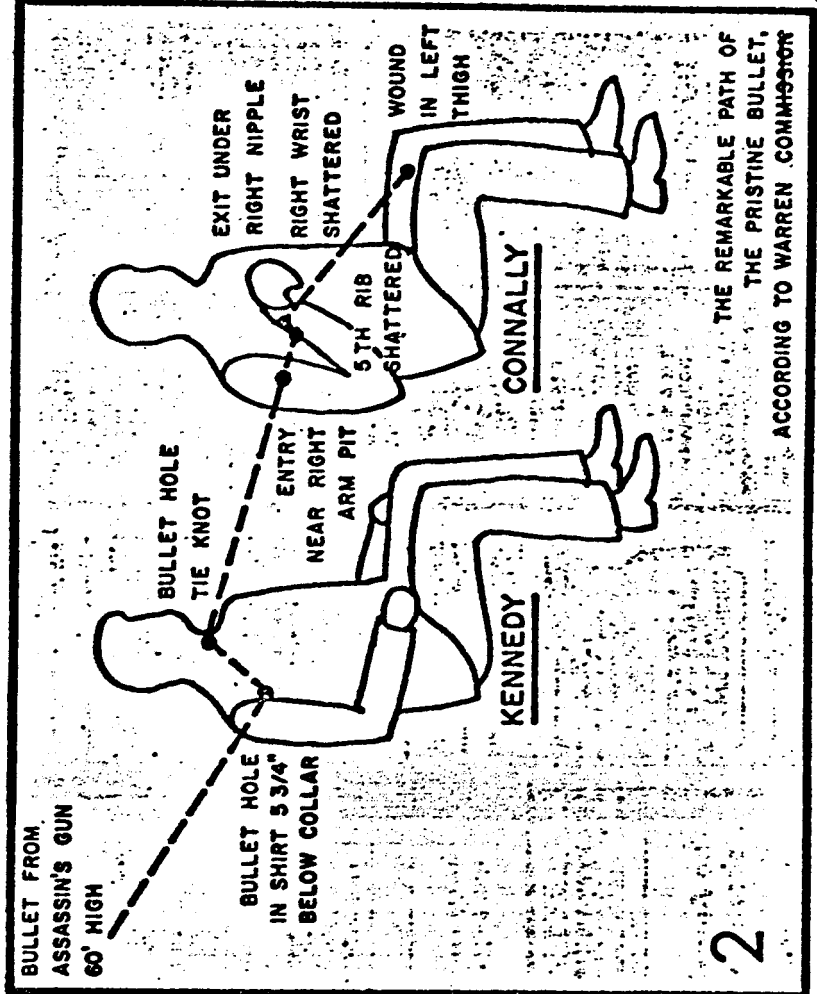
"The power source that arranged that murder was on the inside. It had the means to reduce normal security and permit the choice of a hazardous route. It also has had the continuing power to cover that crime for (13) years."

More than a decade later, perhaps the answers will finally begin to come out.

The House Select Committee on Assassinations could provide them.



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A MAGIC BULLET? — The Warren Commission's Exhibit 399, or what commission critics refer to as the "magic bullet," is at left. According to the commission, this slug passed through the bodies of President John F. Kennedy and former Texas Gov. John B. Connally, causing seven

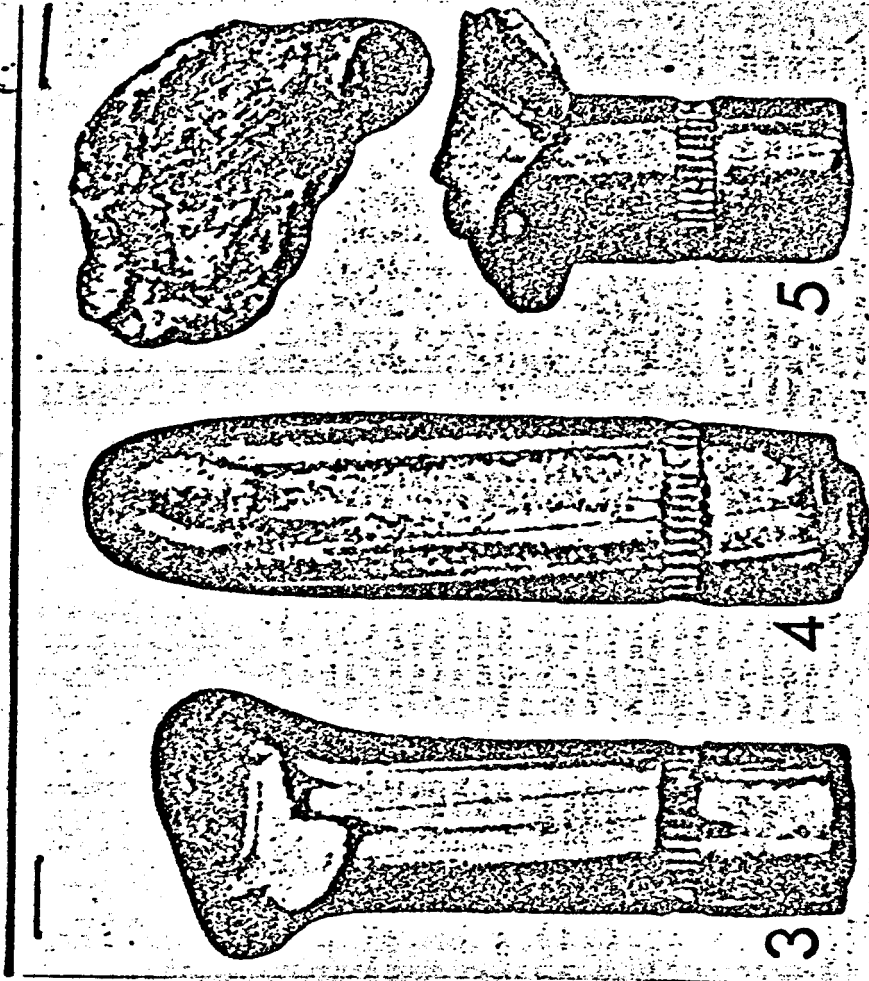


Diagram by J. GARY SHAW

wounds and shattering three bones before being found at Parkland Hospital where it fell from a stretcher. The diagram is the path of this bullet as explained by the Warren Commission. Although the commission said the bullet struck no bones in Kennedy, its explanation indicates the slug changed direction at least twice. At right are three bullets fired from the same rifle during tests by the FBI. No. 3 was fired into the wristbone of a cadaver, No. 4 into a tube of cotton for ballistics testing and No. 5 into a goat carcass.