

# Evening Sun

## 'Crime of the Century' may never be solved



**T**HE assassination of President John F. Kennedy was a defining event for America. The shots that rang out in Dallas 30 years ago Monday not only changed the course of history; eventually they changed the way Americans view their institutions of government.

Ten months after Kennedy's murder, Chief Justice Earl Warren hand-delivered a bound copy of the government's report on the assassination to President Johnson. The so-called Warren Report concluded that JFK was killed by a lone gunman with vague pro-communist sympathies, a conclusion which was immediately touted by the government and media as both comprehensive and definitive.

But over the past three decades, the Warren Report's credibility has fallen into tatters. Recent polls show that seven of 10 Americans do not believe they have been told the truth about the assassination and believe JFK was the victim of a conspiracy. As we approach the 30th anniversary of the tragedy, Americans are still searching for an honest explanation, one that will restore the integrity of government and faith in our system of law and justice.

The public interest in the Kennedy assassination is still intense, a fact that has not been lost on book publishers. But will any of these works bring us closer to the truth about the who, how and why of Dallas? If the overwhelming body of Kennedy assassination literature is prologue, don't hold your breath. Only a few of the thousand or more books have stood the test of time.

What distinguishes the legitimate works is their common approach to the assassination. They avoid theories about what really happened. They also recognize that before any real search for the truth can be undertaken, it is necessary to expose the grave defects of the Warren Report. These cannot be explained away as bureaucratic bungling. They are the product of distortion, suppression and falsification of the evidence.

Almost all of the Kennedy assassination literature has set out to solve the mystery by attempting to piece together the crime, a sort of "Murder, She Wrote" approach. But all of these writers face a virtually insuperable problem: Since the government never intended to investigate the crime, the trail has grown colder with every passing day. The prospects of a lone researcher, no matter how conscientious and impartial, solving the "Crime of the Century" are not encouraging.

In late 1991, director Oliver Stone fired up public interest in the assassination with his controversial film, "JFK." Borrowing heavily from a discredited book by former New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison, the film was a murky mass of fact. But it made for socko box office — and set in motion a groundswell of public pressure to open

were released in August.

It is encouraging that these long-classified documents are finally making their way to scholars, journalists and the public. However, it could be a mistake to expect definitive proof about what really happened in Dallas because, from the very outset, the government decided that an open investigation was not in the national interest. On the other hand, the JFK files should make it possible for responsible researchers to make some final judgments about many of the hotly disputed issues in the Kennedy case.

As more is known about the files' contents, here's a trio of vexing questions begging for answers:

□ To date the FBI has not released the results of its crucial ballistic evidence. A fair and impartial evaluation of these records, assuming they have not been corrupted, can determine with unassailable scientific accuracy whether one or more shooters were present in Dealey Plaza on Nov. 22, 1963.

□ Was the alleged assassin ever connected in some low-level capacity with any American intelligence agency? This question may never be answered. But the release of Lee Harvey Oswald's military records will reveal that the Warren Report's depiction of Oswald is a gross distortion. Oswald was a formidable and complex young man, not the demented loner who so desperately craved recognition that he shot the president. While formally undereducated, Oswald mastered the Russian language while in the Marines and was regarded highly by the officers and enlisted men who served with him. One of his favorite books was George Orwell's "Animal Farm," hardly the first choice of a Soviet sympathizer.

□ The FBI, CIA and Secret Service never took issue publicly with the Warren Report's conclusions. The JFK files should reveal that none of these agencies ever accepted as remotely possible the so-called "single bullet" theory, the claim made in the Warren Commission's reconstruction of the shooting that is absolutely essential to the government's conclusion that Kennedy was killed by a lone assassin. In short, these agencies recognized that the JFK assassination was a sophisticated and compartmentalized one probably carried out by trained professionals.

As we move beyond this 30th anniversary of John F. Kennedy's murder, the released files will enable responsible assassination scholars to expose the fraud the Warren Report perpetrated on the American people. To prove what really happened in Dallas is a different problem and almost certainly at this late date incapable of solution. The Kennedy assassination will probably remain a black hole in our national history, a testament to the corruption of the truth by trusted public figures in the highest reaches of government.

Gerald D. McKnight is a professor of

Gerald D. McKnight

180

72

72

62

66