

JFK: The 30th Anniversary and Beyond

By GERALD McKNIGHT, Ph.D.

The assassination of John F. Kennedy was a defining event for America. The shots that rang out in Dallas on November 22, 1963, may have changed the course of history and certainly changed the way many 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 investigative report on the assassination to President Lyndon B. 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 the press as both comprehensive and definitive.

Over the past three decades, the Warren Report's credibility has fallen into tatters. Recent polls reveal that 7 out of 10 Americans do not believe they have been told the truth about the assassination and hold to the view that JFK was the victim of a conspiracy. Americans are still searching for an honest explanation, one that will restore the integrity of our government and our 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 the major commercial publishing houses. We can only suspend judgment on this new crop of "Who Killed JFK?" books. 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 establishes these works as legitimate is their common approach to the assassination: they all consciously avoid theorization about what really happened. They also recognized that before any real search for the truth could be undertaken it was first necessary to expose the grave defects in the Warren Report that could not be explained away by bureaucratic bungling alone, but were the product of distortion, suppression and falsification of the evidence. Almost all of the Kennedy assassination literature to date has set out to solve the mystery by attempting to piece together the crime. Since the

View Point

The JFK files should reveal that none of these agencies ever accepted as remotely possible the so-called "single bullet" theory.

government never intended to investigate the crime, the trail of assassins has grown colder with every day that passes. The prospects of the lone researcher solving "The Crime of the Century" are not encouraging.

In late 1991 director Oliver Stone fired up public interest with his searing 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 and fantasy; but it made for socko box office—and set in motion a groundswell of public pressure that all government files pertaining to the assassination be opened. Legislation to this effect was signed into law last year and some 900,000 pages 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 would 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:

- The FBI has never released the results of its crucial ballistic evidence of the "Magic Bullet." A fair and impartial

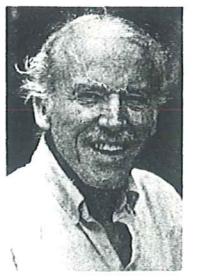
evaluation of these records, assuming they have not been corrupted, can determine with unassailable scientific accuracy whether one or more shooters were present in Dealey Plaza November 22.

- Was the alleged assassin ever connected in some low-level capacity with any American intelligence agency? This question may never be resolved. But the release of Lee Harvey Oswald's military records will reveal that the Warren Report's depiction of Oswald is a gross distortion of the truth. Oswald was a formidable and complex young man and not the demented loner who so desperately craved recognition that he shot the President. While formally under-educated, Oswald mastered the Russian language while in the Marines and was regarded highly by the officers and enlisted men who served with him.

- The FBI, CIA and Secret Service never took public issue 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 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 the 30th anniversary of John F. Kennedy's murder, the released files will enable responsible assassination scholars to thoroughly and uncontestedly expose the fraud the Warren Report perpetrated upon the American people. To prove what happened in Dallas is a different problem and almost certainly at this late date incapable of solution.

The Kennedy assassination will remain a sinister black hole in our national history: a testament to the corruption of the truth by trusted public figures serving in the highest reaches of the government. ■



Gerald D. McKnight, Ph.D., professor of history, holds a doctorate from the University of Maryland. His teaching interests include 20th century American history, political assassinations of the '60s, the Vietnam War and nuclear weapons.