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The Phone Call That Never Was

RALEIGH SPECTATOR, 17 JUL 80

Evidence in new book brings mystery to Raleigh

Conspiracy by Anthony Summers; New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co.; illus., 640 pp

"It is certainly possible that a renegade element in U.S. intelligence manipulated Oswald — whatever his role on Nov. 22, 1963. That same element may have activated pawns in the anti-Castro movement and the Mafia to murder the President."

BY GROVER B. PROCTOR, JR.

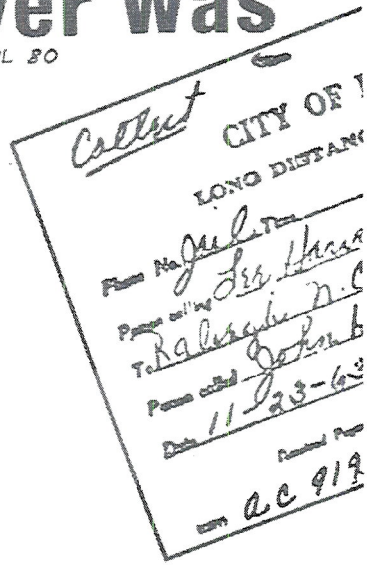
That this statement, a quote from BBC television producer Anthony Summers' new book *Conspiracy*, could appear on the cover of a volume published by one of the nation's largest and most reputable firms demonstrates how far attitudes concerning the investigation into the assassination of John F. Kennedy have come. That it represents not the research and findings of the stereotypical conspiracy "nut," but a major governmental investigative body, indicates how major a re-think has occurred concerning the case in the last few years.

Ever since the House Assassinations Committee exploded the myth of the lone assassin last year, there has been a need for a volume that would tie together all of the myriad facts uncovered in that investigation into one comprehensible narrative. In doing this, Summers has, to my mind, produced the finest, most authoritative, and best researched piece of investigative journalism ever published on the Kennedy murder.

With obvious diligence and discipline, Summers has waded through the morass of imponderable evidence, evaluated, collated, and sorted it all out, collected reams of his own interview transcripts, and written the "state of the art" document on assassination research. It is, however, so eminently readable that Norman Mailer compared it to a John Le Carré novel.

The responsible and cautious weighing of well-documented evidence

Editor's note: *Spectator* reviewer Grover Proctor, Jr., has for years studied the assassination of John F. Kennedy. As an amateur expert on that black day in Dallas, Mr. Proctor has spoken to civic groups and has written several articles on the subject. When it was discovered that a new book on the assassination has been received by the academic and scientific community as



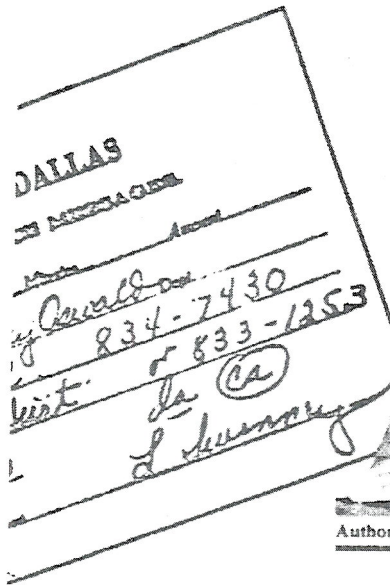
and the inescapable logic of its presentation are the hallmarks of this book. With the detachment that comes not only from his journalistic skills but also from his British "outsider's" viewpoint, Summers bows to no sacred cows. If he feels the evidence does not warrant a given conclusion, be it one held traditionally by conspiracy minded assassinologists or by Warren Commission advocates, he will attack it with an impressive arsenal of reasoning and fact. It is, in short, a compelling document.

The Today Show

No book dealing with perhaps the most controversial subject of this century could appear without touching off sparks of its own. For Summers, it began a few weeks ago when he was interviewed on NBC's *Today Show* about the book. The fireworks concerned Summers' reporting of one of the key mysteries of the case as uncovered by the House Assassinations Committee.

Antonio Veciano, a leader in the militant Cuban refugee movement of the Sixties, told House investigators that for 13 years his CIA contact was a man who called himself "Maurice Bishop," and that in August or September of 1963, he met with Bishop and a man he later recognized as Lee Harvey Oswald. In attempting to find the real identity of "Bishop," the Committee issued a composite drawing based on descriptions provided by Veciano.

the authoritative guide, and that a previously disregarded slip of paper connecting Lee Harvey Oswald to Raleigh was a part of the research in the book, we asked Mr. Proctor to review it, contact his other sources, including the author, and pull together for our readers the sense of the book and whatever information is available on "The Raleigh Connection."



Author Anthony Summers

A former CIA case officer from Miami provided the Committee with the name of a CIA headquarters officer that he was "almost positive" used the name of Maurice Bishop, a man who, according to Tom Brokaw of *The Today Show*, bears a "remarkable physical similarity" to the composite sketch.

Summers notes in the book the identity of this CIA officer, along with the officer's denial and Veciano's refusal to identify him as Bishop. To be fair, Summers also quoted the House Report that said it "suspected Veciano was lying when he denied" the man was Bishop, and that the nature of the now-retired CIA officer's denial "aroused the Committee's suspicion." Finally, Summers states flatly, "There is no evidence that the retired officer... had any part in a conspiracy to murder the President."

Confronted with Summers on *The Today Show*, the man investigated by the House Committee as being Bishop, former CIA Western Hemisphere Division Chief David Phillips, put on a hardly-believable demonstration of barely controlled rage and venom. Shouting a great deal of the time, Phillips said, "Welcome to America, Mr. Summers. I accuse you of assassination!... You've written a book that... cajoles the reader to believe that I was somehow involved in the Kennedy assassination!"

Summers handled himself quite well, pointing out that he reported others' findings, and did not accuse either in his book nor that morning on television. At the end, Phillips, his face contorted with rage, turned to Summers and reportedly said, "You and I will meet again!" In an interview with me, Summers said it was "disquieting, whatever the truth about a Phillips/Bishop connection, that Phillips had five years ago been Chief of the CIA Western Hemisphere Division." He described

Phillips' behavior on television as "not normal."

"The Raleigh Connection"

As jolting as this confrontation was for millions of television viewers, it is perhaps paled in significance for *Spectator* readers by an alleged incident reported in three paragraphs in Summers' book, in which Lee Harvey Oswald, whose movements and statements inside the Dallas jail up to the time of his murder are a huge mystery, reportedly attempted to place a call from the jail phone to Area Code 919; and as stated in the book, "it was personal to somebody called 'Herty' or 'Hertig.'" Did he? The answer may not be a simple yes or no.

On the night of November 23, 1963, two telephone operators were working the switchboard that controlled, among other Dallas municipal offices, the jail. One of the ladies, Mrs. Alvetta A. Troon made a statement to assassination researcher Bernard Fensterwald some five years after the assassination, but then refused to sign it on advice from her lawyer, according to Fensterwald.

The following is a condensation of that statement prepared with the gracious help of Dallas researcher Mary Ferrell, as summarized by this reviewer:

Mrs. Troon arrived for work at the switchboard between 10:15 and 10:35 that evening, and was told by her fellow worker, Mrs. Louise Swinney, that their supervisor had asked them to assist law enforcement officials to listen to a call that Lee Harvey Oswald would be making soon. Two men, that Mrs. Troon thinks might have been Secret Service agents, subsequently came into the switchboard area and were put in an adjacent room where they could monitor the expected call.

At about 10:45, the call from the jail came through, and both ladies rushed to take it. Mrs. Swinney handled the call, as it turned out, wrote down the information on the number Oswald wished to reach, and notified the two men of the call. Quoting from Mrs. Troon's statement:

(Continued on page 9)

(Continued from page 5)

"I was dumbfounded at what happened next. Mrs. Swinney opened the key to Oswald and told him, 'I'm sorry, the number doesn't answer.' She then unplugged and disconnected Oswald without ever really trying to put the call through. A few moments later, Mrs. Swinney tore the page off her notation pad and threw it into the wastepaper basket."

After Mrs. Swinney left work at approximately 11:00 p.m., Mrs. Troon says she retrieved the slip of paper, and copied the information from it onto a telephone slip commonly used by the operators to record calls, so that she could keep it as a "souvenir."

That slip, which would turn up seven years later in a Freedom of Information suit brought by Chicago researcher Sherman H. Skolnick (a civil action filed in Federal District Court in Chicago, April 6, 1970, No. 70C 790) contains some startling things. It purports to show a collect call attempted from the jail by Lee Harvey Oswald to a John Hurt Area Code 919-834-7430 and it gives another telephone number in the 919 Area Code, 833-1253. The first number has subsequently been identified as a number in the Raleigh exchange and is today listed in the

Raleigh Telephone Directory in the name of John D. Hurt. (The slip is reproduced in the Appendix of the 1975 book, *Coup d'Etat in America* by Canfield and Weberman and appears with this article.)

The second number on the slip has not been verified and a page by page examination of the 1963 Raleigh telephone and city directory by two tireless Raleigh researchers

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has determined that the number does not appear in the listings. Subsequent research has not, however, been able to determine if at that time the number was issued to a non-published subscriber.

The first number, however, presents much less of a mystery. I dialed the number and spoke with Mr. John Hurt at some length. (See excerpts from that interview on this page.) Hurt denied that he made or received a call to or from the Dallas jail or Lee Harvey Oswald, when asked if he knew of any reason why Lee Harvey Oswald would wish to call him, he said, "I do not. I never

"No knowledge whatsoever"

Excerpts from a telephone conversation between Grover Proctor and a man identifying himself as John Hurt who answered the phone at 834-7430 on July 9 of this year.

MR. PROCTOR: Do you know any reason why Oswald would have tried to call you?

MR. HURT: I do not. I never heard of the man before President Kennedy's death. I was a great Kennedyphile, and I would have been more inclined to kill him than anything else.

MR. PROCTOR: Oswald, you mean.

MR. HURT: Yes.

MR. PROCTOR: Did you place a call that day to the Dallas jail?

MR. HURT: No, I did not, and he didn't place a call to me either. I don't know how I ever got (unintelligible)

MR. PROCTOR: Do you have any explanation as to why your name ...

MR. HURT: None whatever.

MR. PROCTOR: Do you have the telephone number 833-1253 (the second number on the slip) in any of your business associations?

MR. HURT: No.

MR. PROCTOR: Did you in 1963?

MR. HURT: No, I did not.

MR. PROCTOR: That was the other name listed on the telephone slip beside your name.

MR. HURT: I didn't know. My number has been the same for, oh I'd say forty years. . . .

MR. PROCTOR: In speaking with another investigator that called you about six years ago, you indicated at that time that during World War II you were in the Counterintelligence Division. Is that correct?

MR. HURT: That's correct.

MR. PROCTOR: You left that, and went into investigative work after the war.

MR. HURT: I was in insurance claims adjusting work, and I worked for a year for the state as a (unintelligible).

MR. PROCTOR: Were you ever involved as an agent in the Defense Department's Industrial Security Command?

MR. HURT: No, I was not.

MR. PROCTOR: So, once again, you have no knowledge of any call made from your number or to your number that day?

MR. HURT: No knowledge whatsoever. ■

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nears of the man before President Kennedy's death." Mr. Hurt professed to having been a "great Kennedyphile," and said he "would have been more inclined to kill Oswald than anything else. Asked if he had any explanation as to why his name and telephone number should turn up this way, he said, "None whatever."

I also asked him if he had any

me that he was with war, but denied being anything claims adjuster after the war, or received any calls.

knowledge of the second phone number on the slip, and he said he had never had that number in his use. "My number has been the same for, oh, I'd say forty years."

Author Summers has told me privately that some researchers believe the call in question to have been incoming to the jail, not an attempt by Oswald to call out. One of the most distinguished of today's assassination researchers, Paul Hoch, explained to me an alternative theory of his concerning the events of November 23.

Hoch believes that Hurt, or someone using his name and telephone number, called the Dallas jail prior to 10:15 p.m. on that date, requesting to speak to Oswald. He theorizes that whoever took the call, possibly Mrs. Swinney, scribbled down some information, decided it was a crank call, and threw away the slip. Later, when Oswald made the

One fact uncovered by Skolnick in sworn statements in his lawsuit that were not heard in open court is that the Secret Service took a sudden interest in someone named Hurt on November 23, 1963. In a statement from former agent Abraham Bolden, who was duty officer for the Secret Service's Chicago office that weekend, he claims that the Dallas Secret Service office called him late on the 23rd and asked for a rundown on any phonetic spelling of "Hurt" or "Heard." Obviously, something happened in Dallas that day to cause such a far-flung investigation all the way to Chicago. Whether this was because of Oswald's interest in a party named "Hurt" or because of a crank call into the Dallas jail still remains a mystery.

appear disenchanted, poor, American youths who had become turned off and wanted to see what communism was all about." Marchetti confirmed the existence of the base to me privately, and intimated that if there were a call to North Carolina from Oswald, who seemingly was identical to the above description of disenchantment, then that call might well have been to someone connected with that base. He was able to offer no further information that might connect the two.

Quo Vadis?

Like most avenues in the Kennedy assassination, even when you are convinced you are going in the right direction, making good progress, and nearing the end of the street, you are confronted with countless other directions that must be explored.

call that Mrs. Troon overheard, Hoch says it was to the New York attorney John Abt, whom Oswald wanted to represent him. We know from testimony from Secret Service Inspector Kelley that Oswald expressed interest in getting help by reaching Abt by telephone.

Hoch's theory is based on the assumption that when Mrs. Troon went exploring for the slip of paper that Mrs. Swinney discarded after the 10:45 call, she came up with the earlier, incorrect slip that related to the "crank call." When I asked Hoch how he explained the fact that there were two telephone numbers on the slip if indeed it were an incoming call, Hoch said he could not explain it. Neither, by the way, could Bernard Fensterwald when I posed the same question to him after he told me he also believes Mrs. Troon to have been mistaken. Mrs. Swinney has, to date, refused to confirm, deny or comment on Mrs. Troon's statement.

Chicago researcher Sherman Skolnick, who heads up a group called the Citizens' Committee to Clean Up the Courts, does not agree with Hoch and Fensterwald. Skolnick has a theory that Hurt, a U.S. Army Counterintelligence Special Agent from the Second World War "was Oswald's ticket to verify that he (Oswald) was a lower-level intelligence operative."

Hurt confirmed to me that he was with counterintelligence during the war, but denied being anything other than an insurance claims adjuster after the war, or that he had made or received any calls.

One further piece of this puzzle needs a brief examination, since Summers mentions the coincidence Victor Marchetti, the former CIA official whose book *The CIA and the Cult of Intelligence* was the first book

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in U.S. history to be subject to pre-publication censorship, claims that the Office of Naval Intelligence operated in Nag's Head, N.C., a training base for intelligence candidates to be sent to the Soviet Union. Says Marchetti, it was for "young men who were made to

As Bernard Fensterwald said to me in our interview, this is just one of the thousands of stories and leads that must be checked out before the "truth," in whatever form, can be known. Anthony Summers, whose book is a wellspring of information and a fascinating melding of the various theories and facts, lays claim to only two desires for *Conspiracy*: First, he hopes it will shake up the American press out of their lethargy toward tackling the investigation, and second, on an editorial level, he hopes to spur the Justice Department into continuing with the case, as the House Assassinations Committee urged it to do. The success of these efforts can only be helped by the high level of scholarship and research Summers gives us in this book. ■