



The Story That Will Not Die

BY ALTON SLAGLE

TWELVE YEARS AGO next Saturday, in a sun-drenched plaza in Dallas, a sniper's bullet ended the life of John Fitzgerald Kennedy, 36th President of the United States. A commission appointed by Kennedy's Texas-born successor, Lyndon Baines Johnson, assessed blame and named, posthumously, a scurrily, psychopathic loner named Lee Harvey Oswald as the gunman. All evidence pointed to the conclusions of the Warren Commission. Or did it?

Today, more than a decade after that awful weekend, there are cries for another, perhaps clear look at the tragedy. Many Americans were never satisfied with findings of the commission headed by Chief Justice of U.S. Earl Warren, and now, in the sobering era after Watergate, with even the activities of the sacrosanct FBI and CIA increasingly questioned, with the revelation that illegal, unethical dealings in high places are a disturbing fact, there exists in the minds of many persons the gnawing fear that the true story of the death of JFK has not been told. It is a story that will not die.

"The assassination of John Fitzgerald Kennedy . . . was a cruel and shocking act of violence directed against a man, a family, a nation, and

against all mankind," begins the huge Warren Commission report. The study, based on hundreds of interviews and investigations by the nation's best law enforcement agencies, including the FBI and the CIA, went on to recount, in 27 volumes of conclusions, testimony and exhibits, a detailed examination of every aspect of the assassination, and the murder two days later of Oswald by Jack Ruby, a deranged, two-bit Dallas strip joint operator.

But many argue that the Warren Commission approached its sad task backward, beginning with Oswald, the obvious pick as the assassin, and straggled the events around him, rather than studying all possibilities — including the unthinkable one: conspiracy.

This fear has not abated in the 12 years since the event. To the contrary, today there is a renewed wave of interest that has produced two new books — to add to the 40-plus already written — along with a spate of magazine and newspaper articles and a full calendar for an outfit called the Assassination Information Bureau in Cambridge, Mass.

That organization, founded nearly three years ago by a small group dissatisfied with the Warren findings, will participate Saturday with similar associations in nationwide rallies aimed

Despite any real evidence to support it, the belief in a conspiracy behind John F. Kennedy's assassination continues to grow

at getting the government to begin a second investigation of the tragedy.

"It's going to become necessary for the government to respond," said Michael Tee, 26-year-old member of the full-time, six-man staff of the AIB (there are about twice that number of part-time volunteers). "An honest effort by the government to get at the truth could only be beneficial in helping to restore confidence that has been lost by people dissatisfied with the official conclusion".

Officially, the bureau is not accusing the Warren Commission of an overt coverup of events surrounding the assassination. But its members, Tee contended, "started with a verdict prefixed in their mind and then simply took whatever evidence they could use to support that verdict. They were not interested in starting an impartial investigation by taking the facts and seeing where they led, as any first-year police officer would do."

A Destroyed Document

Nor is the AIB, as are some other critics, accusing the FBI and CIA of such a coverup, even in the face of recent knowledge that an FBI agent in Dallas destroyed, as unimportant, a warning note delivered to the agency a few days before the assassination. (The note, destroyed a few hours after Kennedy died, concerned charges of FBI and local police harassment of Oswald's wife, Marina. Kennedy was not mentioned.)

Tee did accuse the FBI of trying to save face by suppressing evidence "that might prove to be embarrassing" to its prestige.

And the Warren Commission, never set up to conduct its own investigation, was, he reasoned, "completely the creature of the people who were doing its information-gathering — the FBI and the CIA — who were making their decisions on the basis of what was best for their agencies and not necessarily with a regard for the truth."

Others are not so kind. In a new book, "They've Killed The President!" (Bantam Books, 408 pages, \$2.50), journalist Robert Sam Anson writes: "The time is gone when the Warren Commission was able to muster belief, if only because any other scenario of events seems so wildly improbable. Conspiracy . . . no longer seems so alien.

"There is at this moment a body of facts and scientific evidence, much of it newly disclosed, which when analyzed by reasonable men presents overwhelming evidence of conspiracy," Anson continues. The "new information, he says, reveals "that Oswald did have numerous links to the intelligence community; that

there was an Oswald look-alike, that the FBI and CIA did withhold and destroy vital evidence."

Anson, who asks the reader to judge for himself if he feels there is enough evidence of a conspiracy, says that his aim is "to establish a few core facts," nonetheless throughout the pages of his book builds a strong case for conspiracy, through innuendo and suggestion. His arguments, as are many others, are based in large part on the Zapruder film, a rather fuzzy 22-second 8-mm. color movie strip, the only known pictorial record of the moment Kennedy was shot. It was made by Abraham Zapruder, a Dallas dressmaker on hand to watch the President's motorcade, and shows Kennedy slumping forward in the rear seat of his open limousine, then suddenly jerking back violently, blood gushing about his face.

Even a Lecture Circuit

The AIB also makes use of the film, featuring it in an \$800 illustrated lecture that its members are prepared to present anywhere in the country where interest warrants — the money being the main source of income for the bureau.

The film was the main attraction at a bureau-sponsored rally attended by around 1,000 assassination researchers and buffs in Boston earlier this year in a preliminary effort to spark a nationwide movement to reopen the inquiry.

The rally, as do most of this nature, attracted both the serious believer in the conspiracy theory and the kook. One woman who has spent eight years gathering and cross-indexing 90 notebooks of information on Oswald is convinced that Sirhan Sirhan, now in prison for the

1963 assassination of Robert Kennedy, "was smuggled into the country by the same CIA network as Marina Oswald (Oswald's Russian-born wife) under cover of the Greek Orthodox Church." Her views on assassination matters include this rather classic non sequitur: "J. Edgar Hoover was murdered. He ingested apple pie and there were Cubans in his house." She neglected to mention that the man who headed the FBI for its first 48 years died quietly in 1972 at the age of 77, but she promised to "stake my reputation" on her theory.

Another person in attendance at the rally contended that the Chicago plane crash which claimed the life of Mrs. E. Howard Hunt Jr. had been caused by the CIA. He insisted that a National Security Council memo dated Nov. 27, 1960 which fluttered from the plane,

landed on a bush and came into his possession, noted that: "For the good of the Republic, John F. Kennedy should be removed." Kennedy was not inaugurated President until 1961. Hunt, a former CIA agent, was the mastermind of the Watergate break-in.

Most serious proponents of a new investigation would rather do without the flaky folk. But the AIB's Tee explained, "Most people can tell what's reasonable from what isn't." He described the kook element's interest in the matter as "an unfortunate result of the fact that there's so much official silence" on the subject.

It's an Era of Suspicion

Why all the new interest in the Kennedy killing?

"I think it's a reflection of mistrust in the larger society," said Leonard Berkowitz, a University of Wisconsin psychologist who has conducted studies of violence, and audience reaction to such violent crimes as assassination.

"People are looking for easy explanations of very complex events that don't seem to make sense. I think what they're doing is seeing plots as the easiest explanation of the Kennedy assassination. It's also compatible with the general feeling of mistrust.

"I've been impressed with the number of students today who see plots all over the place," Berkowitz added. "There are a number of people who believe that Walter Reuther was assassinated. (The president of the United Automobile Workers died with his wife and four others in a plane crash on May 9, 1970, in the northern Michigan woods.) I've been told that the plane was sabotaged.

"I think this is all a reflection of the same semi-paranoia, the tendency to see evil forces around, and to believe that these evil forces are making all of these bad things happen."

'Work of a Cabal'

Commenting on the Kennedy assassination in the Nov. 10 issue of People magazine, comedian-turned-social-activist-and-lecturer Dick Gregory blames a cabal "of rich, rich aristocrats on the East Coast" for the assassination of the Kennedy brothers and for virtually every other recent tragedy and near tragedy involving U.S. leaders.

Gregory says the cabal controls the CIA and is undertaking "a clandestine overthrow" of the government.

Gregory's stated beliefs might be extreme, said Berkowitz, but "to an extreme degree I think he's reflecting trends that are in the thoughts of many

people." Such trends, he said, would lead naturally to such feelings as a mistrust of organizations such as the FBI.

"Unfortunately," he added, "there is a certain amount of validity to that mistrust," a mistrust, he said, that appeared to start in the Johnson presidential years, and indicated "an appraisal of Johnson as a good manipulator."

"It really reflects a lack of confidence in the general society, and especially in the political institutions of society," said the psychologist. "I think that really is the thing — the mistrust fueled by Johnson, by Nixon and everything surrounding his activities." And, because President Ford is "basically an honest man, but not the kind of leader people can lean on and rely on, they still have misgivings, general anxieties, vague feelings that the world is out of kilter. I think what these notions of plots reflect is that anxiety and uncertainty."

The American political system, Berkowitz continued, always has enjoyed a far greater trust among its people than that in other Western countries.

"What might be happening is that our level of trust is now declining to that existing in other nations," he said.

Whether this is happening or not, it does appear a fact that suspicion of many previously inviolable American institutions — the presidency, the Congress, law enforcement and intelligence-gathering organizations among them — is growing rapidly. And with that growth, persons who previously would not have entertained the thought that such a high body as the Warren Commission could err find it easier to question its performance.

Congressional Probe

Whether this will result in a new Kennedy assassination study is problematical. Most Americans still seem content to accept the Warren findings. There are, however, moves for a new congressional look at the matter, and included in the movers are members of both the House and Senate.

Among them is Rep. Henry B. Gonzalez (D-Tex.), who has more reason than most persons to have an interest in the matter. Along with then-Texas Gov. John Connally, Vice President Johnson and other officials, Gonzalez was riding in the fatal motorcade.

In Dallas, the motorcade passed a seven-story orange brick warehouse and office building called the Texas School Book Depository. Riding in Johnson's car, agent Rufus Youngblood noticed the clock atop the building showed 12:30, the scheduled arrival time at the Trade Mart.

Moving about 11 miles an hour, the presidential car started the gradual descent toward the underpass. In a dusty sixth-floor corner window of the School Book Depository, Lee Harvey Oswald raised an Italian-made bolt-action rifle and peered through a telescopic sight.

Shots rang out in rapid succession—three, the commission report said later. Kennedy's hands moved to his neck. He stiffened and lurched forward. A bullet had entered the base of his neck just to the right of the spine, traveling down

and exiting from the front of the neck. Connally started to turn left and suddenly felt a blow on his back. A bullet entered just below his right armpit, passed through his chest, through his right wrist, which had been on his lap, and wounded his left thigh. The impact appeared to spin him to the right, and Nellie Connally pulled her husband down into her lap.

Another bullet struck Kennedy in the head, ripping open his skull. Agent Clinton Hill, riding on the left running board of the followup car, raced toward the limousine.

Hill, with the help of Mrs. Kennedy, who had crawled onto the trunk, pulled himself inside, and shielded the couple. Mrs. Kennedy cradled the dying President's body as the car sped to Parkland Hospital, four miles away.

A Rapid-Fire Tragedy

The subsequent events happened in rapid-fire succession: Oswald, trapped in a movie theater after, it is generally held, he shot to death Dallas patrolman J. D. Tippit, an 11-year police veteran, during a street encounter (he was officially charged with the murder); the discovery of the sniper's lair; the investigation, including the questioning of Oswald's wife, Marina, and his mother, Marguerite, who later was to have a brief career on the lecture circuit defending her son, whom she had once placed in an orphanage; then on Nov. 24, the sudden, astounding murder before a live television audience, of Oswald by Jack Ruby, a 52-year-old police hanger-on who stopped by the basement of the city jail as Oswald was being transferred to safer quarters and shot him.

Chief Justice Warren resisted at first attempts by President Johnson to name him to head a commission to study the assassination, and answer "as quickly as possible" the questions of a stunned and outraged public. But he did accept the task, and his panel was then selected: Sens. Richard B. Russell

so with fervor. In his book, Anson quotes a poll taken last summer (Cambridge Survey Research) as saying that "Americans who disbelieve the Warren Commission now number four in five."

While this would appear to be a sizable overstatement, there is no doubt that many Americans would like to see a new study made of the whole ghastly matter.

Rep. Gonzalez has sponsored a House resolution that would establish a select committee to study not only the JFK assassination, but those of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr. and the attempt on the life of George Wallace, an attempt that left the Alabama governor and presidential aspirant paralyzed from the waist down.

A recent convert to the cause is Sen. Richard Schweicker (R-Pa.), who has been named, along with Sen. Gary Hart (D-Colo.) to head an informal subcommittee to look at the CIA and FBI investigations of the JFK assassination. They thus have subpoena power, authority to grant immunity to witnesses and access to documents that had been previously classified and locked away. Schweicker, who has begun prowling around these papers, contends that "quite a body" of information was not made available to the Warren Commission, and that a coverup existed "to the extent that the CIA didn't level with the commission," partly because of Dulles' inclusion on that panel.

Question Remains: Why?

Schweicker is not proposing any particular theories; he just wants to get at any facts that were overlooked, not made available, or that have come to light since the commission report. His interest was sparked when he began sitting with the Senate committee that has been studying U.S. intelligence activities. A lot is known about the facts of the Kennedy case, he contends, but no one has answered one important question: Why?

Schweicker wants an answer. "We remain hopeful," he said.

One of the more bizarre theories is included in another new book on the subject, Hugh C. McDonald's ghost-written "Appointment in Dallas: the Final Solution to the Assassination of JFK" (The Hugh McDonald Publishing Corp., 210 pages, \$1.95). McDonald, retired chief of detectives of the Los Angeles County sheriff's office, professes to have interviewed a "mechanic," a hired assassin he refers to only as Saul, who, he contends, fired the fatal bullets while an unknowing Oswald was used as a dupe by a powerful, unnamed cabal.

If a lot of people are dissatisfied with the findings to date in the whole matter, the Kennedy family is not among them. The star-crossed Kennedys have persistently supported the Warren findings, and continue to do so.

Continued speculation, Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) told The News last week, "is painful for members of my family." Kennedy seemed to soften his stand slightly, however, when he added: "Our feeling is that if there is sufficient evidence to reexamine the circumstances concerning the death of President

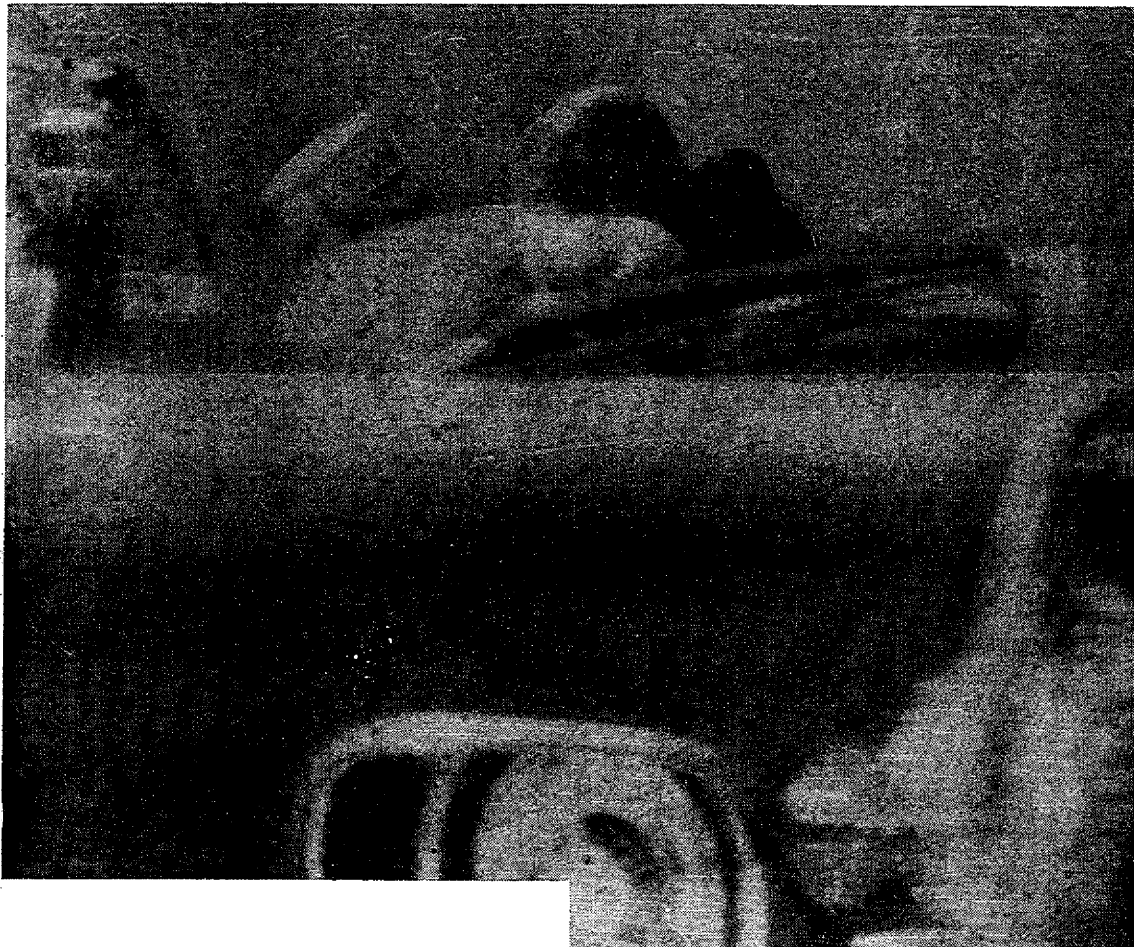
(D-Ga.) and John Sherman Cooper (R-Ky.), Reps. Hale Boggs (D-La.) and Gerald R. Ford (R-Mich.), along with Allen W. Dulles, retired head of the CIA, and John J. McCloy, foreign policy adviser to several presidents.

The commission began its work on Feb. 3, 1964, and submitted its report that Sept. 24. Its conclusion: Oswald, with hazy motives, acted alone to assassinate the President. There was no conspiracy, he had no help; Ruby, with equally hazy motives, shot Oswald apparently on impulse.

But the story does not end there. Conspiracy fever gripped many persons unable to accept the commission conclusions. Many still believe that the true story has yet to be told. Many, such as Robert Anson, a former Time magazine correspondent and now a producer at public television station WNET here, claim to have accepted the conspiracy theory only recently, but they have done

Kennedy and Robert Kennedy, this judgment would have to be made by the legal authorities responsible. I do not believe that their judgment should be influenced by any feelings or discomfort by any member of my family."

Schweicker and others are confident that a new inquiry is forthcoming. Whether such a study can alter what the history books already have recorded is another matter. It should be noted that many persons remain dissatisfied with the conclusions reached in the assassination in 1865 of another President, a man named Abraham Lincoln.



Two factors in the assassination of John F. Kennedy have fueled the conspiracy theory: no one saw Lee Oswald shoot him; Oswald's death at the hands of Jack Ruby defies logical explanation.