

JFK Probe: Some Loud Reports But There's No Smoking Gun

By JOSEPH VOLZ

Washington (News Bureau)—Sensational "new revelations" of a reported all-encompassing Kennedy assassination conspiracy involving not only Lee Harvey Oswald, but also his killer, Jack Ruby, several Texas oilmen and at least one veteran of the Cuban Bay of Pigs debacle are providing the shaky House Assassinations Committee with big headlines these days.

But a review of the Warren Commission's 1964 report into the slaying of President Kennedy in Dallas

An Analysis

on Nov. 22, 1963, indicates that most of the "new revelations" are simply new interpretations of old stories.

The commission, headed by the late Chief Justice Earl Warren, concluded that Oswald had acted alone when he shot Kennedy. Although that conclusion has been hotly debated ever since — and although the commission was responsible for some sins of omission

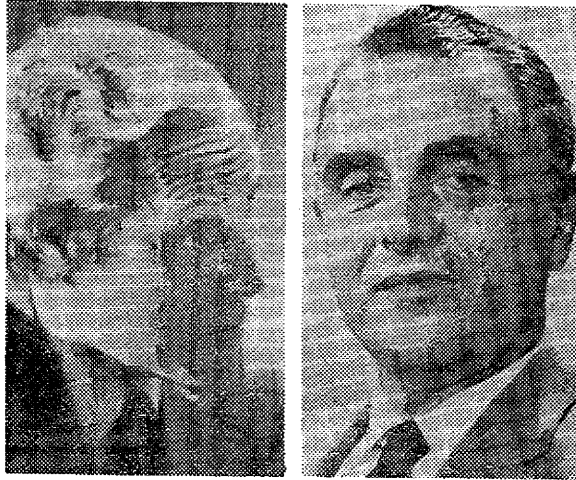
— there has been no strong evidence over the years to disprove its report.

The latest conspiracy theory surfaced two weeks ago and came from Willem Oltmans, a Dutch television reporter. According to Oltmans, he befriended a Soviet emigre geologist, George de Mohrenschildt, in Dallas a few years after Kennedy's assassination, and de Mohrenschildt eventually admitted that he had been part of a conspiracy to kill Kennedy that involved the late H. L. Hunt, the right-wing oil billionaire, Oswald and some others.

Oltmans also contended that the FBI and the CIA were somehow involved, and that at least one Cuban — whom he did not identify — had shot at Kennedy that day in Dallas.

Even before Oltmans appeared before a closed session of the House Assassinations Committee to tell his story under oath, one influential committee investigator described the witness to colleagues as "full of..."

But committee members, driven by dissension and under orders from congressional leaders to come up with something significant or go out of business March 31, were anxious to hear from Oltmans. And



Willem Oltmans and George de Mohrenschildt

they were not terribly upset if selected bits of his eye-popping testimony were reported in newspapers.

Oltmans, who is writing a magazine article on his revelations, was glad to oblige fellow reporters with accounts of his testimony. The interview requests came thick and fast when de Mohrenschildt, who had only recently been released from a 51-day stay at a mental hospital, committed suicide last Tuesday at the Palm Beach, Fla., home of a daughter.

Subsequently, it was reported that de Mohrenschildt, 65, who came to this country in 1921 — saying

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he was czarist nobility—had tried to commit suicide three previous times. He also had been in a mental hospital several times. Oltmans said that de Mohrenschildt had been writing a book and would, on occasion, admit that he had "made up" portions of the story.

De Mohrenschildt and his wife were interviewed by Warren Commission investigators because they were "close friends" of Oswald and Oswald's Soviet-born wife, Marina. De Mohrenschildt proved a garrulous witness during his two days of interrogation. In its report, the commission quoted neighbors as describing him as "eccentric," and concluded that he knew nothing of the assassination.

Oltmans' story contained virtually every major conspiracy theory advanced over the last 13 years with one exception—the involvement of the Mafia.

But the House committee itself was working on that angle and staged a media spectacular of a hearing, starring Santo Trafficante of Tampa, the Mafia boss of Florida. The hearing room was packed when Trafficante, asked whether he knew about a Kennedy assassination plot in advance, took the Fifth Amendment and refused to answer.

Afterward, the committee's chairman, Rep. Louis Stokes (D-Ohio), admitted that he had known in advance that the mob boss would not talk.

The Senate Intelligence Committee had previously uncovered several well-documented assassination plots, some involving Trafficante, but these had been against Cuban Premier Fidel Castro, not Kennedy. The Senate panel found that Trafficante, who knew his way around the Cuban underworld and had been a big gambling impresario in Havana until Castro came to power, had cooperated with the CIA on a series of abortive plots to kill Castro.

The House committee is not looking into plots against Castro, and despite the existence of an FBI memo that Trafficante once bragged about "getting" Kennedy, there is no serious evidence that he knew anything more than what newspapers reported on Kennedy's assassination.

The Trafficante episode appeared to prove that the committee, operating under its third chairman in six months, was and is under great pressure to come up with something, anything, to demonstrate to the House leadership that it deserves to stay in business.

In an executive session the day after Trafficante's heavily publicized appearance, Rep. Robert W. Edgar (D-Pa), a new member, suggested that "we try something like what we did yesterday ... I think we did more yesterday, even without getting factual information, simply because it focused again on the fact that we are looking into the issue." Edgar's assessment was right. The House voted last week to keep the committee alive for another two years.

But the panel, which drew the ire of the House originally when it came up with a proposed two-year budget of \$13 million, faces another test in a few weeks when it tries to win approval for a \$2.7 million budget for this year.

House leaders, including Rep. James J. Delaney (D-Queens), chairman of the

Rules Committee, had wanted to see evidence of some promising leads before voting to keep the panel. Just what evidence they saw is not clear, but there are some leads that Robert Tannenbaum, the former New York prosecutor who heads the Assassinations Committee's Kennedy task force, described to panel members in executive session last month:

• A nurse at Parkland Hospital in Dallas, where Kennedy was taken after he was shot, said that "four or five" bullet fragments were removed from Texas Gov. John B. Connally, who was wounded while riding with Kennedy. If the fragments weigh more than one bullet, it could mean that four, not three, bullets were fired at Kennedy and this could mean that more than one man was involved.

Thirteen years ago, the Warren Commission reported that "two or three" fragments were taken from Connally's wrist and that they could have flaked off from an almost-whole bullet that had passed through Connally's body and was found on a hospital stretch near the governor. In any event, Tannenbaum does not know where the fragments are.

• A Dallas woman who knew Jack Ruby has talked to committee investigators after having been missing for several years, Tannenbaum said. He did not identify her, but said that she had "found religion." This woman said that Ruby had introduced her to a man he identified as "Lee Harvey Oswald of the CIA" two weeks before the assassination. She conceded that she did not know what the initials CIA stood for.

Several persons told the Warren Commission that they had seen Oswald and Ruby together in Ruby's Dallas strip joint before the assassination. William Crowe, who was master of ceremonies at the club, said that there was "a possibility" that Oswald had been there. But after extensive interviews, the commission concluded that the witnesses were "persons of erratic memory and dubious mental stability."

The King Probe

While the Kennedy assassination investigation is proceeding by fits and starts, the House committee's other investigation of the April 4, 1968 slaying of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., seems to be making more progress. James Earl Ray, convicted slayer of the civil rights leader, has agreed to cooperate with investigators.

The chances of finding a conspiracy in the King case look slightly more promising. The Justice Department said in a lengthy report in January that an investigation "failed to reveal any connection between any alleged conspirators and James Earl Ray," but conceded there were unanswered questions about the case.

The most serious question is where did Ray, who had escaped from a Missouri prison, get the \$9,000 to \$10,000 he says he spent during his flight to Canada and Europe after King's murder in Memphis? Ray, who has been trying to overturn his murder conviction for the last eight years, told CBS-TV, which beat committee investigators to his Tennessee prison cell, that a mysterious Latin named Raoul had given him the money. He does not know where Raoul went, and neither does anyone else.