

CONSPIRACY

Young radicals, soldiers at a U.S. Army office in Germany, set up a political conspiracy called CUSA. In 1962, three of the Inner Circle posed in civvies: "Security Chief" Larry Jones (at left), Treasurer Norman Baker and Director Larrie Schmidt, 28, who tells what they tried to do.



A PLOT THAT FLOPPED

AT MUNICH, GERMANY, in June, 1962, a tense young noncom typed out the six-page timetable for his plot to take control of politics in his homeland. He was Larrie Schmidt, specialist fourth-class U.S. Army. He had trained a small, disciplined band of soldier-conspirators to follow him stateside and do, he hoped, "whatever is necessary to accomplish our goal."

Schmidt's weapon was CUSA, code for Conservatism-USA, a secret organization he had put together under the noses of the military-security people. In fact, he signed up four zealots inside the Military Police and the Counter Intelligence Corps. His CUSA agents, in constant training for their mission, often used Army machinery for their own ends. When a corporal from U.S. Army, Europe, headquarters beat up a CUSA man, Schmidt claims, "the long arm of CUSA influence reached up to Heidelberg, got him busted and shipped out."

The young radicals reveled in their elaborate scheme. Once, afraid a high officer might investigate them, Schmidt had an aide seduce the officer's secretary. The grateful lady told her CUSA lover all her boss found out: nothing.

So the Munich-made timetable bristled with conspirator confidence. Starting that fall, when Director Schmidt would get his discharge, CUSA's schedule ran through logical-looking steps: Set up secret Conservatism-USA headquarters in Dallas; infiltrate 200 Right-Wing

outfits all over the U.S. and weld them into CUSA; infiltrate nonpolitical groups like the Jaycees; take grass-roots control of both political parties; nominate only true-believer Conservatives for public office. These tall chores would be financed not only by moneyed Rightists, but by CUSA's own business empire-to-be, AMBUS (code for American Businesses, Inc.). Schmidt had faith then, still has, that CUSA could build to the final item on his docket:

"20 Jan 1969: A conservative president is sitting in the White House. Congress is ruled by conservatives. OUR JOB IS DONE. What happens after 20 Jan 1969? Well, frankly, in our position, whatever the hell we want to happen at that time. We aren't thinking too much about then. After all, we'll be in control. . . ."

Schmidt arrived in Dallas on schedule. For a year, he cut quite a gray-flannel figure among Right-Wing groups, from the National Indignation Convention to Young Americans for Freedom and the John Birch Society. He was still going strong right up to the day John F. Kennedy was shot. Schmidt had prepared for the Kennedy visit with a full-page ad to run in the Dallas *Morning News*. You may remember that black-bordered "Welcome" with its hints that the President of the United States was soft on communism. To Schmidt, the ad was a public-relations device to promote himself—and newly arrived CUSA agent Bernard Weissman, who

BY PATRICIA SWANK

signed the ad—among the Conservatives.

"By having Bernie sign it instead of myself, we launched him in Dallas politics," Schmidt tells me. Always planning ahead, he hoped that Weissman's name would provoke anti-Semitic attacks (it did), which he could use to prove that the Right has no monopoly on bigotry. The only thing wrong with the ad scheme, he now feels, was that it coincided with a different scheme worked out by another young man, Lee Harvey Oswald.

Still, the furor over the ad helped, Schmidt thinks. "to increase my influence and widen my power base." He got a job with a Dallas ad agency that handles Conservative political campaigns, worked there as a paid staffer for Dallas Congressman Bruce Alger, Senate aspirant Robert Morris and candidates for lesser offices. All lost, but not Schmidt. He did fine until the Warren Commission uncovered part of the CUSA plot. "People who thought they had been using us," he explains, "found that we had been using them."

"It's such a shame," mourns Schmidt. "It could have worked."

Perhaps not, but his drive and zeal for power are not inhibited by the restraints many of us take for granted. "We expected a showdown between the Communists and Nazis on the one hand and CUSA on the other," he says. "On that day, I know that I would have the strength—if called on—to take a gun and shoot down. say, Gus Hall, the Communist, or George Lincoln Rockwell, the Nazi, because I believe they are traitors. We are at war, and you fight. Don't misunderstand, I'm no Oswald or Ruby. I have never harmed anyone. I'm a sane, rational, patriotic, law-abiding citizen."

Schmidt may sound like a high-school boy cooking up a secret initiation, but he's dead serious. He once asked his Inner Circle to sign loyalty oaths to him "on pain of death." Two, he says, did.

Elaborate schemes are a habit of the Far Right. In *The Blue Book*, Robert Welch exhorts Birchers to wage total political war, through fronts and infiltration, against "the Communists" at home—who, says Mr. Welch, hold 50 to 70 percent control in the U.S. CUSA's Inner Circle never shared this estimate, and even planned to shift Rightist thought toward a more moderate base, but their methods were those of conspiracy.

What makes a young man like this? Larrie Henry Schmidt had no reason to trust the world into which he was born. At age nine, he learned that "Mom" and "Dad" were only an aunt and uncle about to be divorced. He next lived in the basement of his grandparent's home in Lincoln, Neb., with three unmarried "uncles." One was his real father, a neighbor later told him. Restless, bright, seeking an "identity of my own," he quit school, joined the Army.

He did two tours of duty in Germany. The first, 1955-57, thrust him among college graduates and into a new, exciting world of books, manners and music. He finished high school, went on to the University of Miami, Fla., in 1957, worked on the student weekly. About to become managing editor, but not pleased with the modest office he would inherit, he grandly launched a drive—eventually successful—for a new student-union building, even though one had recently been built. Then, after a disastrous love affair, he fled to California with his education half done. He soon went back to the Army. He was ready to remake himself and, if need be, the world. "If I could not fit into society, I would make society fit me." (Today, he is writ-

ing a novel. *The World-Changers*.)

He became assistant public-relations director of the U.S. Armed Forces Recreation Center at Munich. There, at a beer and brandy restaurant, the Lukullus, he broke into the world of political talk stirred up by the 1960 election. The books in vogue were Barry Goldwater's *Conscience of a Conservative*, Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged*, a super-individualist romance, and Philip Wylie's *Generation of Vipers*, a dated broadside against Moms.

Schmidt, once liberal, bundled these three elements into a philosophy of revolt. "We loved our parents," asserts a young man who never had a chance to. "We knew they were not ready for the Depression, and had embraced the welfare state because Franklin Roosevelt promised to take care of them. They sold their souls to the 'savior.' *Conscience* gave us a philosophy. *Atlas* gave us activism. We were a group of individualists who refused to lose our identity to a collectivist society."

Then came the "absolute crusher," the 1961 Bay of Pigs fiasco. "I was so disgusted with our Government and so humiliated," he recalls. "Our German friends teased us. I was visiting a girl in her apartment, and she got tired of listening. She said, 'If you don't like the damn world, why don't you change it?' And I said, 'By God, that's not a bad idea.' That's what really started CUSA!"

Over beer at the Lukullus, he lived up recruits. He teamed with Larry Jones, Signal Corps decoder, a muscular North Carolina extrovert. As CUSA grew, Jones became Schmidt's personal bodyguard and "chief of security." Schmidt signed up the civilian son of a major, even a bearded liberal as "insurance against CUSA going too far right." A company clerk in the MP's, Norman Baker, saw the need for money to play politics. He dreamed up AMBUS, through which the confident plotters expected to make money for CUSA. Baker also recruited Bernard Weissman, one of five Jews in CUSA.

The dream of images

With five Inner Circle and ten Outer Circle men, CUSA became a visible group known as The Clan. "Like the Hollywood Clan," explains Schmidt. They took care of their own, helped arrange promotions for each other. The Clan also sold influence, for a fee, to other GIs. If you wanted a three-day pass, CUSA might fix it—"85 to 225," says Schmidt, "whatever the traffic would bear." Need a loan? A GI could get one from CUSA's treasury, at a "nice" rate of interest. Schmidt, the press agent, ingratiated himself with publicity-minded commanders and visiting VIP's.

"We were great believers in something called The Image. We realized that the most powerful element in our society was Madison Avenue and what it stood for: that you can sell an American anything if you go about it right," declares Schmidt. "We practiced image building, improving our personalities, rehearsing how we would speak at the time of the big summit meeting." What summit? Why, the one on April 1, 1965, when Conservatism-USA would take over the Rightist organizations of America, destroy all that would not join.

Schmidt occasionally suspected he might be birthing a monster. "But I've always had great self-confidence that I could keep it all under control." The wild dream enraptured him. "We are five young men who are like old men," he wrote. "Five young men who pace the floor, brows furrowed, eyes anxious, too-old, too-soon lines beneath our

eyes. Five young men—ambitious, hungry, plotting their lives away to change the world. . . . Each day, things grow bigger, and each day, I must pull myself up to the task, present the proper image. I must play the role: Think like a man of action, act like a man of thought."

Where would they strike first? Clipping newspapers, CUSA settled on Dallas. First target: the Right-Wing National Indignation Convention, a local garage owner's noisy protest movement against U.S. training of Yugoslav pilots. Schmidt hit town in October, 1962, got a job with United Press International. His dreams soon smacked up against reality. NYC was well past its bloom; he would have to find another host organization for CUSA.

He went to the one Conservative he knew by reputation—Dr. Robert Morris, then head of Defenders of American Liberty. Morris, unaware of CUSA, held an at-home gathering of the faithful, let Schmidt make the pitch. "American boys are standing guard all over the world against communism, and what are you doing? If not nothing, certainly not enough!" This speech catapulted Schmidt into organizational activity as Southwestern executive-secretary of Young Americans for Freedom.

His Birch chapter vanished

He worked fiercely, raised money, put CUSA activism into YAF. But "those officers just didn't want to go as fast as I did. I was too advanced." He turned to other things. His brother Bob moved to Dallas, became ex-Gen. Edwin A. Walker's aide-de-camp, to spy on him. Larry Jones checked in from Munich. With him, Schmidt tried to activate AMBUS by promoting a private club. Fizzle. Jones vanished. Schmidt kept busy with new friends such as oilman Joe Grinnan, Birch coordinator.

In the fall of '63, Schmidt's name came into the public notice for the first time. He led 14 student pickets to protest a speech by UN Ambassador Adlai E. Stevenson. Schmidt's group behaved well, but some pickets spat at Stevenson, and one struck him. Schmidt, furious over press coverage, put out a statement. His reward was a deluge of angry phone calls and threats, but he endeared himself to the Rightists. Now, he might get CUSA going. He telephoned Bernie Weissman to urge him and William Burley, another CUSA vet back from Germany, to come to Dallas and help prepare the next step. It turned out to be the ad attacking Kennedy.

Burley and Weissman arrived in early November. Bircher Joe Grinnan raised the \$1,463 for the ad, principally from three businessmen whose identity Schmidt did not know until the Warren Report: Edgar R. Crissey, H. R. Bright and Nelson Bunker Hunt, son of H. L.

Schmidt was driving with Grinnan when the assassination news came over the radio. Grinnan crossed himself. "I said a silent prayer, that it wasn't true or wouldn't be serious," Schmidt recalls. "We knew there was going to be a tremendous witch-hunt. Normal procedure. I had a premonition that this was the end of CUSA."

It was. Schmidt's chapter of the Birch Society, all CUSA, suddenly had few members in town.

Now alone, Schmidt reflects: "Everything we wanted to do still needs to be done. We'd have worked to get the FBI authorized to round up the Communists—and the Nazis—and put them in detention camps. We're only paying lip service to freedom when we do nothing for the enslaved peoples of the world. If I had two good men and a little capital, even a few thousand dollars. . . ."

END



You are looking at a conspirator. This man wrote the advertisement "welcoming" John F. Kennedy to Dallas on November 22, 1963. He planned to do more for his country. He was the leader of a plot to take over the politics of the United States. Step by step, he and his trained cadre would build to the final date on his timetable: "20 Jan 1969: A conservative president is sitting in the White House." Three bullets ended the dream. For LOOK's story of the CUSA conspiracy, turn to A Plot That Flopped, page 28.

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