

# THE FOURTH DECADE

1963

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and a coward.”[23] Forrestal suffered a nervous breakdown and eventually committed suicide.

Like many in the previous administration, Eisenhower faced problems in reigning in the national security state. Long before he spoke of the “military-industrial complex,” Eisenhower warned America and the world that “humanity was hanging from a cross of iron.” He stated that “every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired,” represented “a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed.”[24]

Into this arena entered John Kennedy, at first arguing that the U.S. faced a bogus “missile gap” in its competition with the Soviets, but soon arguing against the plans of the Joint Chiefs and the CIA for massive military incursions into Southeast Asia and the Caribbean. The body of John Kennedy, and all evidence related to his murder, was commandeered and represented to the public by the military and the intelligence agencies. Over these many years, intelligence satraps—who also represent corporate America—in the mass media, have presented the official stories of the assassination. They are the same people and organizations who advocate for the new supranational corporate state that guarantees the immiseration of millions.

There is nothing arcane about the murder of John F. Kennedy. It is no more cabalistic than the political-economic system we have come to accept. Only if we choose to shed our denial about the assassination’s historical context—and refuse to immerse ourselves in further endless ruminations about oddball plotters and Dealey Plaza minutiae—can we come to terms with the assassination’s meaning to our present circumstances.

#### Notes

1. Richard Reeves, President Kennedy: Profile of Power (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), pp.303-305. I am grateful to Vincent Salandria and Ray Marcus for continuing to insist on the importance of this book.
2. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. Robert Kennedy and His Times (New York: Ballantine books, 1978), p. 665.
3. *Ibid.*, 532.
4. “The Murder of John F. Kennedy: A Revisionist History,” The Passionate Eye, CBC Newsworld, Nov. 22 and 29, 1998. I am grateful to Joe Martines for bringing this film to my attention.
5. One of these documents is published in Steve Jones and Barbara LaMonica, “New Evidence in the Assassination of JFK,” privately printed, Philadelphia, PA, 1998.
6. Schlesinger, pp. 664-665.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 529.
8. Ernest R. May and Philip D. Zelikow, eds., The Kennedy Tapes: Inside the White House During the Cuban Missile Crisis (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 34.
9. Jeremy Isaacs and Taylor Downing, Cold War: An Illustrated History, 1945-1991 (New York: Little, Brown & Co. 1998), p. 212.
10. *Ibid.* p. 232.
11. Reeves, pp. 401-402.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 222.
13. *Ibid.* p. 306
14. *Ibid.* p. 182.
15. *Ibid.* p. 103.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.* p. 104.
18. Francis X. Winters, The Year of the Hare: America in Vietnam, January 25, 1963-February 15, 1964 (Atlanta: University of Georgia Press, 1997), pp. 115-116. Winters firmly subscribes to the notion that Kennedy planned to withdraw all American forces from Vietnam after the 1964 elections.
19. Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali, “One Hell of a Gamble”: Khrushchev, Castro, and Kennedy 1958-1964 (New York: Norton, 1997), pp. 344-346.
20. Carl Bernstein, “The CIA and the Media,” Rolling Stone, October 20, 1977, pp. 55-67.
21. John M. Crewsdon, “CIA: Secret Shaper of Public Opinion,” New York Times, Dec. 27, 1977, p. 1.
22. See Michael J. Hogan, A Cross of Iron: Harry S. Truman and the Origins of the National Security State 1945-1954 (Cambridge,UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
23. *Ibid.* pp. 184-186.
24. *Ibid.* p. 417



Two best-selling books caught President Kennedy's attention during the spring of 1962, both of them concerned with military matters. *Seven Days in May* by two Washington newspaper men, Fletcher Knebel and Charles Bailey, was a fictional thriller about an attempted military coup against an American president. *The Guns of August*, by Barbara Tuchman, was a serious piece of work that touched on one of Kennedy's persistent worries: war by miscalculation. It chronicled the way kings and prime ministers, marshals and generals, had stumbled into World War I in August of 1914. In speeches and conversation, he repeated an exchange in the book between two German leaders talking about the war: "How did it all happen?" and the answer, "Ah, if one only knew."

"Could it happen here?" asked Red Fay, who had read *Seven Days in May*, as he and the President were cruising off Hyannis Port.

"It's possible," Kennedy said. "But the conditions would have to be just right. If the country had a young President, and he had a Bay of Pigs, there would be a certain uneasiness. Maybe the military would do a little criticizing behind his back. Then if there were another Bay of Pigs, the reaction of the country would be, 'Is he too young and inexperienced?' The military would almost feel that it was their patriotic obligation to stand ready to preserve the integrity of the nation and only God knows just what segment of Democracy they would be defending. . . ."

"Then, if there were a third Bay of Pigs it could happen," said the President. His friend looked shocked and Kennedy added: "It won't happen on my watch."

Back on shore, Kennedy called in one of his military aides, General Chester Clifton. Quoting from the book, the real President asked about the man with "the Football," the nuclear strike codes. "The book says one of those men sits outside my bedroom door all night. Is that true?" "No," Clifton replied. "He's downstairs in the office area. . . . He'll be upstairs—we've timed it many times—he can make it even if he has to run up the stairs and not use the elevator—in a minute and a half. If he knocks at your door some night and comes in and opens the valise, pay attention. . . ."

After he read *The Guns of August*, the President called up his Secretary of the Army, Elvis Stahr, Jr., and asked him to come over to the White House. He handed the Secretary a copy of the book. "I want you to read this," he said. "And I want every officer in the Army to read it." Stahr had the book placed in every one of the officers' day rooms on U.S. military bases around the world. Commanders were informed that the Commander-in-Chief wanted them and their men to read it.

John Kennedy distrusted the military, at least its commanders. Part of it was the perception of the lieutenant seeing the big brass giving orders to men they did not know in places and situations they did not understand. He felt something like that about the Joint Chiefs of Staff, persuaded they had misled him, even betrayed him, in the weeks leading up to the Bay of Pigs. Most of the Chiefs seemed narrow or stupid to him.

"You can't beat brains," he said of those he listened to most on national security affairs. Robert McNamara, McGeorge Bundy, and Maxwell Taylor were the men he entrusted with one of his fundamental goals: gaining civilian control over the military. Taylor was the only active or former senior officer with regular access to the Oval Office. One of his qualifications was that most other senior officers disliked him, which was a big part of the reason that Taylor, a former Army Chief of Staff, had never become Chairman of the Joint Chiefs.

The generals and admirals did not think much of Kennedy's ideas, either. One of them, retired Admiral Arleigh Burke, could now say anything he wanted to, and was doing just that.

"America and the West in general have a guilt complex about power," he had told a Daughters of the American Revolution convention late in April 1962. "It frustrates our every use of power. In Cuba, Suez, in Korea, currently in Laos, we half use it in a compromise between dream and reality. . . . In a schizoid manner we have balanced a Department of Defense with a Committee on Disarmament, ballistic missiles with the position that war is unthinkable. Basically, we oscillate between an unpalatable reality and an act of faith. . . . No one really knows what we will do because we ourselves do not know."

"God, 31-Knot Burke! To think I used to admire these people," Kennedy said. He not only wanted a new kind of military strategy, he had a vision, a rather romantic one, of new kinds of soldiers: Green Berets and intellectual Colonel Hillandales. Max Taylor was the model. Kennedy liked to make the point that his chief military adviser spoke French and German and Spanish. The official White House line, repeated often to reporters, was that if you asked Taylor about a problem in the Middle East, he wanted to know how Xerxes had handled it.



## THE BULLETPROOF BUBBLE-TOP

by  
Carleton W. Sterling

Whatever happened to the bulletproof bubble-top under which President Dwight Eisenhower rode and through which he could be seen by crowds along the route of his motorcades? I recall the see-through hood, which shielded the President in the limousine's back seat, as dome-shaped with an opening to the front. That opening would have been at least partially shielded from the front by the vehicle's front windshield. So the President under the bubble-top hood was reasonably protected on all sides from lone-nut gunmen.

The bubble-top disappeared from the media after President John Kennedy's assassination in Dallas, where the protective shield was not in place on the car in which JFK was killed. I have no direct knowledge of the tensile-strength of the see-through shield. I use the term "bulletproof" because that is the term I had heard applied to the bubble-top when I saw it on national network news in the 1950's. I don't have documentation on what was reported in the media about the protective bubble-top before the Dallas ambush, but others may know whether my recollection is valid.

I assumed that the shield used for President Eisenhower was the same available for President Kennedy, so I was surprised to read in the literature on the assassination that the bubble-top was not bulletproof. Both my recollection and the logic of presidential security arrangements argue otherwise. At first, I thought this dismissal of the protective shield was a matter of semantics because it could not be bulletproof in the strictest sense. "Bulletproof" and "armor-piercing" are relative terms. When I was in U.S. Army basic training, I was introduced to the G. I. "steel pot" helmet, which is not bulletproof. But it is heavy enough that one would not want to wear it if it didn't

offer substantial protection. A shot from a military rifle could penetrate the steel helmet, but the helmet might stop a sufficiently spent projectile and would tend to deflect a missile that did not strike it straight-on. (The deflection of angular shots allows you to skip stones on water.) The helmet's dome-shape made its surface self-braced against incoming projectiles. Even a penetrating bullet would tend to be deflected in the direction of the curve of the shield into which it angled. Because the steel helmet is held out a couple of inches from the wearer's head by a helmet liner, the angle of deflection might be just enough that the penetrating missile would pass around rather than through the target's head. The size of the angle of deflection would depend on the missile's force and angle of strike. The bubble-top had a similar shape, with the added advantage that the protective dome was set further out from the presumed target so that the angle of deflection from the missile's original path would divert it further from the intended hit. And because the bubble-top shield rested on a limousine rather than the President's head, it could be very heavy. So whatever the material composition of the bubble-top, its architecture was a good design for a shield against bullets.

My pre-1963 understanding was that the presidential bubble-top was made out of a tough-as-steel form of glass or plastic. The "popemobile," later deployed by Vatican security after the near assassination of Pope John Paul II, was see-through "bulletproof" sides of such material. Because the popemobile was designed to allow the pope to ride standing up, the dome-shape was impractical, and the shield's sides are rather flat but presumably thick. The popemobile exists because the Vatican needed to balance security with the pope's wish to be seen by throngs of unscreened spectators along motorcade routes. Wouldn't these considerations also apply to the President of the United States?

Surely the bubble-top that was left off the President's car in Dallas on the morning of Nov. 22, 1963, should have been made of more than flimsy plastic. Protecting the President from gunmen should have been on the minds of the Secret Service at least by the Eisenhower administration because, during the immediately preceding Truman administration, there had

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been a shoot-out on the grounds of the White House and a shooting attack in the Capitol Building with gunmen claiming to seek Puerto Rican independence. In 1933, a gunman fired into the open car in which President-elect Franklin Roosevelt was riding and mortally wounded the Mayor of Chicago. And the Secret Service's bodyguard role evolved through the history of post-Civil War presidential assassinations, with the shooting deaths of Abraham Lincoln in 1865, James Garfield in 1881 and William McKinley in 1901. Former President Theodore Roosevelt was shot nonfatally while campaigning for a third term in 1912, and Huey Long's presidential ambitions were ended when he was shot dead in 1935. There's a pattern of experience here prior to 1963, and the idea of shooting from an upper-floor window at the President riding in a motorcade had occurred as a story premise for a film that I recall being aired on television in the summer of 1963.

So I am skeptical of the official story that the bubble-top offered zero protection from gunfire. But the Warren Report tells us:

*The limousine used by President Kennedy in Dallas was a convertible with a detachable, rigid plastic "bubble" top which was neither bullet-proof nor bullet resistant. The last Presidential vehicle with any protection against small-arms fire left the White House in 1953. It was not then replaced because the state of the art did not permit the development of a bulletproof top of sufficient light weight to permit its removal on those occasions when the President wished to ride in an open car. The Secret Service believed that it was very doubtful that any President would ride regularly in a vehicle with a fixed top, even though transparent. Since the assassination, the Secret Service, with the assistance of other Federal agencies and of private industry, has developed a vehicle for the better protection of the President. (1)*

This passage astounds me. On its face, a White House car had been armored against small-arms fire, but it was abandoned the year Eisenhower came into office. Was presidential security lowered during the Eisenhower years when I thought it was increased by

the introduction of the bubble-top? The Secret Service apparently knew that a transparent shield could be bulletproofed but the shield's weight would preclude easy removal and remounting. We are supposed to believe that protection of the President from gunfire was sacrificed for easy handling. Strange priorities!

I suspect that the truth was bent for political expediency. Declaring the bubble-top useless against gunfire serves to deflect closer attention to why the shield was not in place when President Kennedy was shot. But the Warren Report passage cited above raises the issue of why the Secret Service would forgo an available transparent shield to protect the President in motorcades. Obviously, President Kennedy's security failed in Dallas. But did presidential protection succumb to a general laxity with respect to motorcades, or did the Dallas ambush involve particular security lapses? This sensitive security issue is touched on in post-assassination discussions between FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover and President Lyndon Johnson. We now have access to at least some of the Johnson-Hoover exchanges from the Johnson White House tape recordings, edited with commentary by Michael Beschloss. I quote from the 1:40 p.m. Nov. 29, 1963, meeting of President Johnson and the FBI Director :

*LBJ: Well what was this picture that this fellow sold for \$23,000. [The Zaprunder film as if Johnson didn't know.]*

*Hoover: That was a picture taken of the parade and showing Mrs. Kennedy climbing out of the back seat. You see, there was no Secret Service man standing on the back of the car. Usually the presidential car in the past has had steps on the back, next to the bumpers, and there's usually been one [security man] on either side standing on these steps... [ellipsis in text] Whether the President asked that that not be done, we don't know. And the bubble-top was not up. [Here the editor footnotes: The bubble-top was a clear plastic top that could have been attached to Kennedy's open Lincoln Continental. It was usually used to protect the passengers from rain while allowing onlookers a view of the President.] But the bubble-top wasn't*

*worth a damn anyway because it is made entirely of plastic, and much to my surprise, the Secret Service do not have any armored cars.*

(2)

Let's break from the transcript here for discussion: In an earlier article on the LBJ-Hoover exchanges about the ambush of Kennedy and the framing of Oswald, I argued that Johnson and Hoover were dealing with information that would discredit the official story of the assassination. Specifically, Johnson and Hoover understood that the presidential party was fired on from the front in Dealey Plaza and that the CIA was supplying false information linking the alleged assassin to Moscow and Havana), and so they had to speak circumspectly even in "private" conversations. (3) To get at what Johnson and Hoover knew as opposed to what they said, I suggest reading between the lines by analyzing contradictions in the official record.

Beschloss, in editing the Johnson tapes, apparently takes the transcriptions at face value, and so assures us that the bubble-top was only a weather guard. He doesn't say where he learned this; but it is implied in the Warren Commission's "skies had cleared over Dallas" account of motorcade preparations, in which presidential aide Kenneth O'Donnell is quoted instructing the Secret Servicemen, "if the weather is clear and it is not raining, have that bubble-top off.." (4) And logically, if the shield had no security value, it must have been a weather guard. However, the bubble-top wasn't designed for foul weather. Although the bubble-top might serve as a see-through umbrella for the President and companions in the back seat, it left the front of the car open. So any serious rain would drench the Secret Servicemen in the front seat and any passengers in the jump seats or otherwise positioned in front of the shielded rear seat. A downpour would soak most of the car's upholstery and carpeting, and the President could get his feet wet. Although the Warren Report suggests that armor was sacrificed for convertibility, in fact, the bubble-top was designed to sit precisely along the limo's back rim (running from behind one rear door around back to the other rear door), where a regular convertible top would be folded down. So the bubble-top stood

in the way of pulling up a full top in case of rain. Did the Secret Service really reject a bulletproof bubble-top that was well-designed against gunmen in favor of a lightweight bubble-top that was a lemon for heavy-weather travel?

Note also that Hoover discusses the bubble-top in context of reporting security lapses. First, he notes the absence of security men on the back of the President's car in Dealey Plaza, then he notes the removal of the bubble-top, then he passes on the allegation, which he was unable to confirm a week after the assassination, that President Kennedy himself ordered his bodyguards off the back of the car, then he dismisses the bubble-top as just plastic, when he reports his surprise that the Secret Service didn't have armored cars while the FBI was so equipped. Why would the bubble-top come up at all in this context if it wasn't a security issue?

But if there is something fishy here, Johnson lets it pass, and the recorded conversation turns to Hoover advising LBJ that he really ought to have the protection of an armored car. Picking up the transcript where we left off.

*LBJ: Do you have a bulletproof car?*

*Hoover: Oh, yes, I do.*

*LBJ: Do you think I ought to have one?*

*Hoover: I think you most certainly should have one... [ellipsis in text] I have one here... [ellipsis in text] I have one here for myself and if we have any raids to make or have to surround a place where anybody is hidden in, we use the bulletproof car on that because you can bulletproof the entire car, including the glass, but it means that the top has to remain up ... [ellipsis in text]..*

In saying, "The top has to remain up," Hoover belabors the obvious point that a shield only works if it is in place. For his part, Johnson must have had some knowledge about the reality of bulletproofing cars in federal service and protecting the President and Vice President, but he refrains from sharing what he knew and when he knew it.

Let's return to the transcript for more puzzling statements by the FBI Director:

*Hoover: But I do think you ought to have a bul-*

*letproof car .... [ellipsis in text] I understand that the Secret Service has had two cars with metal plates underneath the car to take care of a hand grenade or bomb that might be thrown out and rolled along the street. Of course, we don't do those things in this country. In Europe, that is the way they assassinate the heads of state .... [ellipsis in text] They've been after General de Gaulle, you know, with that sort of thing. But in this country, all of our assassinations have been with guns .... [ellipsis in text] I was very much surprised when I learned that this bubble-top thing was not bulletproof in any respect and that the plastic - - - the top to it was down. Of course, the President had insisted upon that so that he could stand up and wave to the crowd. Now it seems to me that the president ought to always be in a bulletproof car. It certainly would prevent anything like this ever happening again .... [ellipsis in text]*

So Hoover harped on his wonderment that the car was not armored and the bubble-top was not in place, but he added some details that diverge from what he and LBJ must have known.

Hoover attributed the removal of the bubble-top to JFK's desire to stand up in his car and wave to the crowd. As I recall the bubble-top, the President could stand up and wave with the shield in place. Because only the back seat was hooded, passengers could stand in the otherwise open car anywhere in front of the rear seat. The design of the shield let passengers get in and out of the vehicle without bending over and twisting around as with a full-top car. This would be a convenience for Kennedy, with his crippled back, because he could stand erect to move within the car and sit down normally to place himself under the shield. Because of his bum back, Kennedy likely didn't want to stand much when the car was in motion, and all the pictures I have seen of the motorcade in Dallas show JFK seated when the car was in motion. So Hoover's statement about why the bubble-top was not in place is false and both Hoover and Johnson must have known this false "stand up and wave" story served to explain the removal of the bubble shield by blaming Kennedy himself, just as it is suggested he

ordered his bodyguards from their shielding positions on the back bumper of his car.

Another oddity is that, while Hoover reported that the Secret Service did not have bulletproof cars, it did armor the undercarriages of two cars to protect against explosions from below. This leads Hoover into some more counterfactual statements, starting with, "We don't do those things in this country." In fact, bombings have been politically significant in the United States. Seven policemen and four civilians were killed by a bomb in the 1886 Haymarket Square riot in Chicago, and this and other bombings blamed on labor agitators served to justify repressive countermeasures against organized labor. Being politically attuned, Hoover and Johnson would have known that. They also were aware of the fire bombings of homes of civil rights workers in the 1960's; and in the fall of 1963, the FBI was investigating the bombing that killed four little girls and injured two dozen other people at an black activist church in Birmingham, Alabama, two months before the Dallas ambush. The Birmingham church bombing atrocity, which is still officially "unsolved," had to have been very much on the minds of Hoover and Johnson because of the suspected link to a white supremacist who a police informant reported predicting the JFK assassination before the fact and recorded talking about Oswald's role as a patsy after the fact. (5)

Hoover's statement that bombs were the way heads of states were assassinated in Europe also flew in the face of what Johnson and Hoover would have known. Because it ignited the world wars of their lifetimes, Johnson and Hoover would not have forgotten the 1914 shooting deaths of Archduke Francis Ferdinand and his wife while they were riding in an open carriage in Sarajevo. Francis Ferdinand was heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne at the time of his assassination and so, strictly speaking, was never a head of state. But can the reader think of any European head of state killed by a bomb? There were some attempts. I can think of Guy Fawkes' failed Gunpowder Plot to blow up King James I and the British Parliament in 1605; Hoover mentions plots against French President Charles de Gaulle, some of which could have involved bombs or landmines. However loose

Hoover was with the facts, he was aware that all American presidential assassinations were done by gunfire and so his discussion points to an unstated key issue: If the Secret Service rejected armoring any of its cars against bullets during the bubble-top years, why armor any against the "foreign" bomb threat? I think that Hoover's review of the security issues in the JFK assassination identified loose threads that LBJ didn't want pulled for fear of unraveling politically expedient fabrications.

If the Secret Service armored some undercarriages as Hoover reported, the Warren Report omits that intriguing fact. I think the Secret Service did underplate two cars prior to the fatal trip to Dallas in response to the revealed threat of right wing bombers. This makes sense if the undercarriages were the Achilles' heel of cars already armored above. Although this bomb proofing may have been prudent, it may also have contributed to undermining the protection of the President in Dealey Plaza by alerting the President's bodyguards to the possibility of a bomb attack that misdirected their response to the actual shooting attack.

George Michael Evica, Jerry Rose, myself, and others have written about the evidence that a decoy explosion from the front led off the Dealey Plaza ambush. (6) Evica's survey of witness testimony argued that the initial "shot" in Dealey Plaza was too loud and flashy for gunfire. I have argued that an opening explosion from the front provided a number of tactical advantages for the ambush team, including impeding JFK's motorcade in Dealey Plaza. (7) Because slowing the President's car would facilitate a shooting ambush, political expediency required the Warren Report to deny witness reports that the President's car was braked in response to a frontal assault in Dealey Plaza, (8) The Warren Report conclusion that JFK's car did not slow under attack rests on the Zapruder film, the removal of up to 10 feet of frames from which could appreciably affect the Warren Report's estimate of the "average" speed of JFK's death car based on that film. (9) Yes, I'm being sarcastic here. I don't endorse the validity of a Secret Serviceman's testimony that he edited out Z-film frames that Jackie Kennedy had no desire to ever see again. I cite the issue only to warn researchers not to

swallow whole what the Z-film may seem to show.

I understand why those who accept that JFK's car was braked under fire suspect the motives of Secret Service Agent William Greer, the President's driver, because acceleration would have given the shooters less time to find their target. (10) But given the prior warning of a bomb threat and the opening of the ambush of the motorcade with a blast from the right front, Agent Greer had cause to brake the car before going under the railroad bridge, where he could see that security had been breached with civilians on the overpass who could easily toss a bomb into the open car. There is no evidence that the civilians on the railroad bridge were armed, but grenades are easy to conceal and gasoline bombs can look like soda bottles. So seeing that the overpass was not secured, Secret Servicemen Greer and Roy Kellerman in the driver's seat of JFK's car might reasonably fear exposing the President, his companions and themselves to a bomb thrower if they tried to run the unsecured passage under the bridge.

But keeping the President back from the clear and present danger on the railroad bridge made him a sitting duck for gunmen firing from hidden positions. And once the brakes were applied on the President's heavy car, a quick getaway from Dealey Plaza would be foreclosed. With no protective shield around the President, the only remaining defense once the shooting started was for those Secret Servicemen assigned to protect the President with their own bodies to run forward from their positions on the running boards of the security car five or ten feet behind the President. That would explain Greer looking back over his shoulder as seen in versions of the Zapruder film which some researchers see as incriminating Greer. In fact, he had every reason to expect help from behind to protect the President once he stopped the car. And if he hadn't stopped the car, he would not have been in a good position to turn around without fear of ramming the car just ahead of him.

Because stopping JFK's motorcade in Dealey Plaza can not be plausibly blamed on the designated patsy or any leftist enemies of the President, those seeking to scapegoat an apparent leftist had reason to fabricate a cover for the naked truth. Hoover's reference



to preparation for a bomb attack may have been his oblique way of telling LBJ that he understood more than he was saying openly about the handling of presidential security. And if the authorities could not be forthright about the entrapment of JFK's car, they could not be truthful about the lifting of the protective shield at a time the Secret Service knew of rightist plots to ambush the President outside Washington. After all, "cover your posterior," or words to that effect, is the mantra of national security service.

Agent Greer obviously was a key witness on the braking issue, but he was in a weak position to explain his actions under fire given the official story that the only threat to the President was from a lone-nut firing from behind the President's car and that JFK's car didn't slow during the attack. Consider Walt Brown's report on his interviewing of Greer in the 1960s, which is devoid of juicy quotes and resorts to paraphrasing. Concern about the situation on the bridge is mentioned, and without admitting braking, Greer defends himself for the slowness of acceleration on Elm Street, pointing out that the President's car was stuck in a "parade." Apparently relying on Greer's account, Brown writes of the drag on acceleration exerted by "the weight of the heavily armored vehicle, such heavy armor plating being virtually meaningless since the vehicle was a convertible with the top off." (11) Contrast the reference to heavy armor with Hoover's report that the car was not armored except for the undercarriage. If Hoover's report were strictly true, then logically Greer would have complained of the heavy underplating that was useless against the bullets that killed Kennedy. Instead, he stressed that the car's top was off, the point Hoover had harped on.

Furthermore, Brown reported, "Agent Kellerman also told me of the very serious concern by both Ken O'Donnell and [Texas Gov.] John Connally as to the removal of the bubble-top on the limousine." (12) My own analysis suggests that this "serious concern" could not have been about a bad turn in the weather or the President wanting to wave to the crowd from a standing position. O'Donnell and Connally must have thought the bubble-top was a security shield if Brown's representation is correct. But someone is bearing false

witness because Brown's account of what Kellerman said about O'Donnell's "serious concern" is inconsistent with the orders to remove the bubble-top that the Warren Report attributed to O'Donnell, as I quoted above. I know that the Warren Report was governed by political expediency while Brown had no apparent reason to misrepresent his sources on this.

I have relied on inferential logic about the bulletproofing of the bubble-top because we can't directly measure its strength. The JFK death car itself was rebuilt, eliminating evidence of how it stood up to the test of the Dealey Plaza gunfire. We know that the car's front windshield took a hit because that was witnessed at Parkland Hospital minutes after the shooting. Of course, if the windshield were struck by an unspent missile without penetrating then it would confirm bulletproofing on JFK's car. So for the official position to be true, the windshield could only have been struck by mostly spent fragments(s) as the apologists for the authorities claim. In the 1998 reissue of Livingstone and Groden's High Treason, an appendix of commission exhibits includes official pictures of the damaged windshield. (13) The picture shows a few long cracks, one running about the full width of the shield, suggesting a hard glass surface that absorbed the shock of impact throughout its entire area up to its bracing frame. There are a couple of intersecting cracks with one circled as the apparent point of impact. An enlargement of the area, with a ruler for scale, shows a gouge of about 1/16-inch diameter, suggesting a strike by a missile with a small rounded head. Yet there is no apparent hole of full penetration. Taken at face value, the shield took a forceful hit in a concentrated area and cracked throughout but did not allow full penetration at the point of impact. What more could one expect from a bulletproof shield? Yet, if the windshield was bullet resistant, then the official story that the President's car was not at all armored against bullets is a lie.

Of course we can't take the physical evidence as necessarily real evidence. Brown cites the Secret Servicemen collecting replacement windshields after the ambush and agents Greer and Kellerman testifying to the Warren Commission that the commission exhibit windshield appeared different than what they saw in



the White House garage November 23. Given the pattern of tainted and switched evidence in the investigation of the Dallas ambush, it's naive to swallow the "hard evidence" as reliable. Nevertheless, it is fair enough to give some thought to the implications of what the authorities present as physical evidence. (14)

The best evidence may be what existed before the authorities had cause to corrupt it. It was known before the JFK assassination that the President's car had a clear protective shield. As a teenager during the Eisenhower administration, I knew that through the news media, which means that a lot of people who date back to the JFK assassination once knew about the bulletproof bubble-top but may have forgotten and perhaps were encouraged to dismiss what they had known. Johnson and Hoover must have understood that denying that the bubble-top was armored was necessary to deflect embarrassing questions about who lowered presidential security in Dallas and why. Notice that after Johnson took over as President, official blame for official faults that may have facilitated President Kennedy's murder fell heavily on Kennedy himself, his family or loyal aides and guards. For sure, Lee Harvey Oswald did not strip the President's car of its armor.

#### Notes

- (1) The Warren Commission Report (St. Martin's Press reprint of 1964 U.S. Government Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President John F. Kennedy), p. 452.
- (2) Michael R. Beschloss, editor, Taking Charge: The Johnson White House Tapes, 1963-1964 (Simon & Schuster, 1997), pp. 56-57. The passages quoted here follow those I discussed in my earlier analysis of the Johnson tapes, "Johnson and Hoover Talked," TFD, July, 1998, pp. 7-12, so first Johnson and Hoover discussed the flaws in the frameup of Oswald and the need for any inquiry to reassure the public, and then they finished their conference with a discussion of presidential protection (as though it would take a week to get around to that topic).
- (3) Sterling, "Johnson and Hoover Talked,"
- (4) Warren Commission Report, pp. 43-44.
- (5) The House Committee investigation of the assassination picked up on the possible Birmingham-Miami-Dallas links of Joseph Milteer. I was first aware of the Secret Service's pre-assassination knowledge of the Milteer threat from Robert Blakey's 1981 Plot to Kill the President. G. Robert Blakey and Richard N. Billings, Fatal Hour (Berkley, 1992 paperback edition of 1981 hardback), pp. 7-8, I recall that at the time of the 32nd assassination anniversary at least one U.S. news wire service carried the story about the Secret Service getting information on Milteer the day after the JFK assassination. Some rank-and-file journalists recognized the news worthiness of the story, but it got little or no play in the major media outlets. Media darling Gerald Posner had previously assured us that Milteer was not at all connected with the Dealey Plaza ambush, aside from boasting about it to a wired informant, and that the lookalike photo image taken at the ambush was not him, according to the same photo analysts who confirmed the authenticity of the faked backyard photos of a gun-toting Lee Oswald. Negative template aside, the federal authorities certainly had grounds for concern about white supremacist bombers in the fall of 1963. Gerald Posner, Case Closed (Random House, 1993), Appendix B, p. 498. For more recent discussion see: Vince Palamara, "Anatomy of a Threat", Deep Politics Quarterly, July, 1998, p. 8-10; Jerry D. Rose, "Wake Up Christians! Milteer After the Assassination", TFD, June 1997, pp. 3-6.
- (6) George Michael Evica, "The Surrounding Silence: The Terrible First Sound in Dealey Plaza", 1993. My copy of this persuasive accounting of Dealey Plaza witnesses identifying a parade-stopping initial blast on the grassy knoll is a typescript sent me by Ray Gallagher; Jerry D. Rose, "Dance of the Railroad Men," TFD, Nov. 1995, p. 4-7.
- (7) Sterling, "The Dealey Plaza Ambush," pp. 19-20.
- (8) The Warren Report, pp. 3-4, 49-50, Appendix 12, p. 641.



- (9) Harrison Edward Livingstone and Robert J. Groden, High Treason (Carroll & Graf, 1998), Appendix 1998, pp. 420, fn. 486. Notice that in this reissue with new material, the authors are no longer listed alphabetically, which obscured who was the senior author in earlier editions.
- (10) Harrison E. Livingstone, Killing of Kennedy and the Hoax of the Century (Carroll & Graf, 1995), p. 154.
- (11) Walt Brown, Treachery in Dallas (Carroll & Graf, 1995), pp. 50-51.
- (12) Brown, 48. Warren Report, pp. 43-44.
- (13) Livingstone and Groden, Addendum, three pages preceding p. 563.
- (14) Brown, 55.

#### AFTERWORD

At the time I composed the "Bubble-top" manuscript, I had not yet read Vince Palamara's "In Their Own Words" article and only a small fraction of the "ton" of other research he has produced. Subsequently Palamara read my manuscript and supplied me with supportive and corrective comments, which merit consideration. Supporting my contention that the "Bubble-top" had security value even if it wasn't strictly "bulletproof," Palamara cites Secret Service Agent Sam Kinney, who was involved in physically removing the top the morning of the assassination, affirming that the plexiglass top "may deflect a bullet." Agent Robert Lily also believed that it "might deflect a bullet." Palamara's Secret Service sources also affirm that removing the shield was not done at Kennedy's behest.

Palamara notes that I conflated the "Eisenhower bubble-top" available when Kennedy was inaugurated in 1961 with the Lincoln Continental that carried him to his death in Dallas in 1963. I nevertheless presume that the newer model represented an upgrade and should not have been less secure. Palamara also reports that the top to the Lincoln had seven pieces and, when fully assembled, canopied the entire car; so, assuming the joints sealed well, the car was fit for bad weather travel. He does support my inference that weather was not the controlling factor in deployment of the top because photographs document that

the top or portions of it were deployed under sunny skies. I was deceived by the official record into thinking that the placement of the bubbletop involved a binary decision, the top was either on or off the car. But Palamara documents that the separate pieces permitted different configurations of the shield. So the back passenger seat only could be shielded from the back and sides like my recollection of the Eisenhower bubble-top. But that was only one of the configurations photographed. Those in charge of security logically should have considered how to take advantage of the multiflex capabilities of the car's top. Deployment of the back portion of the shield alone would provide at least some protection from lone-nut gunman firing from the rear or sides of the President. A full-canopy configuration would have prevented anyone on an overpass from dropping a bomb into the President's car. President Johnson's handpicked commission report pretended that weather was the only consideration in deploying the bubble-top.

I infer that either the security planning of JFK's motorcade through Dallas was recklessly incompetent or security was compromised by diverting the motorcade off a safer route and into the snaking turn into Dealey Plaza that slowed the motorcade to a crawl and confronted it with the unsecured railroad bridge and its potentially hostile crowd above the topless Lincoln. Whatever the truth, the incoming administration and its media allies had a vested interest in quashing any speculations that Lyndon Johnson owed his ascendancy to the outcome of a power struggle within the national security system.\*

\*See Vincent M. Palamara, "The Secret Service: In Their Own Words," Kennedy Assassination Chronicles, Vol. 4, Issue 1, 1998, pp. 18-23. See also Palamara, The Third Alternative, (JFK Lancer Productions & Publications, 32 NE 5<sup>th</sup> St., Grand Prairie, TX 75050, 1998)



## HANK KILLAM

by  
John J. Johnson

Hank Killam, aka Henry Thomas Killam, Thomas Henry Killam, and Red Killam, met a mysterious death on March 17, 1964 at the age of 45. He apparently fell, jumped, or was pushed through a plate glass window in the early hours of the morning in Pensacola, Florida. Police listed the death as a probable suicide, but the coroner, Dr. A. H Northup, called the death accidental, stating that he died of "a long, three-inch deep laceration over the lower left side of the neck. Apparently sustained deep laceration in throat when he fell through a plate glass window." Dr. Northup's notes showed no other cuts on the body other than the throat laceration. The Pensacola Journal in its Wednesday morning issue of 2/22/67 carried a story entitled "Brother Wants Body Exhumed: Did Mystery Death Here Link to JFK?"

When Jim Garrison started his investigation into the assassination of President Kennedy in New Orleans, Hank Killam's brother Earl asked that the body be exhumed since Hank had made a statements before his death which indicated that federal agents were harassing him and plotters were seeking to kill him. Hank finally left Texas and went to Pensacola, FL, then Tampa, and back to Pensacola to live with his mother. It is reported that "Agents" browbeat his wife Wanda into telling them where he was. The FBI denied that any of its agents from the Jacksonville Division interviewed Hank. [1] There is no report by the Secret Service.

An FBI report of 2/28/67 from Dallas to Washigton states:

*Files of Dallas office reveal Wanda Joyce Killam was interviewed on one occasion at Dallas, Texas by FBI agents and that her husband Henry Thomas Killam was reported as residing at eight one four Newport Ace., Tampa, Florida. Henry Thomas Killam interviewed on one oc-*

*casion only that being at above address in Tampa, Florida by an FBI agent.*

*Agents properly identified themselves on each of above two interviews.*

*No indication Wanda Joyce Killam ever reported to Dallas FBI office that her husband was in Pensacola, Fla.*

The FBI had indeed interviewed Hank Killam. An FBI report states:

*On January 22, 1964 [2 months after the assassination], Henry Thomas Killan [sic], 8114 Newport Avenue, Tampa, Florida, employed Wheels, Inc., Tampa, advised AS John R. Brett he had been in Jack Ruby's club in Dallas approximately three times and did not know Ruby well. He said he considered Ruby to be a violent man, basing this on two incidents, one being when his wife, an employee of Ruby, fed some pizza to Ruby's dog and Ruby became so enraged that Mrs Killan [sic] was afraid he was going to attack her.*

*On another occasion Killan [sic] overheard a bartender telling Ruby about some customers heckling the emcee, and Ruby asked the bartender why he did not hit them in the head. Killan [sic] stated he had no information on Ruby's background or associates, that he did not know Lee Oswald, and knew of no connection between Ruby and Oswald. [2]*

Two days before his death, Hank told Earl that his nerves were frazzled and that "I'm a dead man. But I've run as far as I'm going to run." When his death was ruled a suicide, his brother Earl remarked, "Did you ever hear of a man committing suicide by jumping through a plate glass window?"

An FBI Airtel of 4/8/77 contains a letter from a person in Dallas, TX with the person's name deleted:

*Dear Sir, I am [name and address deleted] I am writing you this letter concerning the late President Kennedy.*

*I lived in Pensacola, Fla. at the time of his death. I had never been in Dallas, never heard of Jack Ruby or Candy Bar until this happened.*

*I knew this man and his wife who later were divorced.*

---

John J. Johnson  
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*The story is this man was a real hoodlum, anything for a fast dollar.*

*What I am going to tell you about this man is no prank. I am honest in what I am writing you. I don't drink or take drugs. I am a reliable citizen. And this has been on my mind ever since this happen [sic]. I think it should be known true or not. So I'm going to tell you just the way I got the story.*

*This man's home was in Pensacola, Fla. His family lives there. His name was Henry Kellam known to his friends as Red Kellam. At the time of President Kennedy's death Henry Kellam was living in Dallas, Texas. A week or so later after this he arrives back in Pensacola. His family called his ex-wife to come to their home. Red Henry Kellam was there when she went to see what they wanted.*

*This Henry was really messed up. He kept repeating over and over. They are after me they are going to kill me because I helped kill President Kennedy. So his family kept him locked in the house for more than a week. Then one night a week later he managed to get out. While everyone was sleeping he managed to get to the main street in downtown Pensacola. The bars closed at 2:30 am. I imagine he was trying to get to the bar where his ex-wife was. So at 2:30 am. They found him dead on the corner of Intendencia and Palafax Street. There was a gift shop there on that corner. They stuffed alligators in the window.*

*So they said he had jumped through this plate glass window. But when the police found him he was hanging on a parking meter and died. Now this man was about 6 ft. 3 in., and weighed around 240 pounds. Don't you think if a man of his size jumped through a plate glass window he would have had cuts and scratches. But only his throat was cut and his diamond ring was missing which was never found. But really he had such bad background. Nobody cared enough to really find out what happened so they ruled it suicide and forgot all about it.*

*He has one brother in Fla. His name is Jack*

*Kellam. He was a car salesman. He lived with his mother but I am pretty sure she has passed on for she was so old and sick when I moved to Dallas. This Henry Kellam's ex-wife was married again when I moved. She married Larry Woods. He played in the band at this night club on Palafax St. The name of the place was Trader Johns. And her mother's name was Myrtle Hendrick. She lived in Myrtle Grove there in Pensacola. I am sure they would probably deny any of this. But from my heart this is the true story I got from his ex-wife. And now you can decide what you think. But knowing this I am sure if there was a dollar in for him he was willing.*

*All my friends ask me not to write you this letter but being a citizen it is my duty. And believe me what I have written you I believe every word of this was true.*

*Now my conscience and my heart is clear this I wanted to write you this for so long.*

*Thank you, [name deleted] Dallas, Texas 75232*

The Warren Commission had investigated Hank Killam's connection to the assassination and found it very tenuous:

*One conceivable association was through John Carter, a boarder at 1026 North Beckley Avenue while Oswald lived there. Carter was friendly with Wanda Joyce Killam, who had known Jack Ruby since shortly after he moved to Dallas in 1947 [about 15 years] and worked for him from July 1963 to early November 1963. Mrs Killam, who volunteered the information about Carter's residence during an interview with an agent of the FBI, had stated that she did not think Carter knew Ruby. Carter stated that he had not heard of Ruby until Oswald was shot, had talked briefly with Oswald only once or twice, and had never heard Oswald mention Ruby or the Carousel Club. [3]*

Wanda Killam's husband Hank worked with Carter as a house painter. Wanda worked in Jack Ruby's Carousel Club as a cigarette sales girl and as a stripper. Apparently it was Hank's marriage to Wanda in Dallas that caused federal agents to pursue him with



questions about his wife's activities, his knowledge of Oswald, Ruby, and the assassination. He wrote his mother-in-law Mrs. E. V. Davis in Dallas that he was under constant harassment in Tampa and had lost one job after another because of questioning by federal officials. Actually Killam claimed that the men never showed any identification.

Killam tired of the constant surveillance, harassment, and interrogation. He fled to Pensacola where he immediately ran into trouble with the parole board. He had been arrested for breaking and entering and grand larceny and was under a threat of a 10 year prison sentence.

Killam apparently knew something of importance concerning the assassination. His brother Earl said Hank would not tell him more because "I don't want you involved." He had also hinted to a friend that his troubles stemmed from something "he knew about that thing in Dallas." The friend, who wanted to remain anonymous, stated that Killam had warned him "I want you to watch it and not let them stick a knife in your back."

Killam met his death after answering a 4 AM phone call, getting dressed, and then driving off in someone else's car. Shortly afterwards, two city employees heard what they thought was a trash truck picking up beer and whiskey bottles. When they turned their truck they noticed a man staggering from the window of a department store. He was found dead amidst shattered glass from a department store window. Police arrived at 4:29 AM and found the 6' 3" 210 pound Killam lying on the sidewalk bleeding profusely. The police report stated: "Because of the presence of blood approximately 4 feet inside the show window, it is my opinion expired jumped through window and then crawled back to the sidewalk."

The police officer who wrote the report, S. N. Reeves, had seen Killam earlier that night. "He was walking up and down in front of his residence." Reeves said Killam seemed "depressed" and thought someone was "trying to kill him." Reeves remembered that the man "had been afraid, but I don't believe he ever said exactly why." Reeves report also said that Killam's mother was going to sit by his door because he had a psychiatric problem for some time,

and had an appointment with the psychiatrist at 1 PM on the day of his death. [4]

Was Hank Killam simply psychotic? Smyth R. Gill, an investigator of the County Solicitor's office was interviewed by the FBI:

*Mr. Gill stated he had previously known the deceased Henry Thomas Killam, white male, born 9/20/22, Pensacola, Fla, for a number of years, and related that on 5/12/58, the deceased was arrested by local authorities on charges of B & E [breaking and entering] and GL [grand larceny]. On 10/23/58 deceased entered pleas of guilty to charges and was placed on 7 years probation. Shortly after being placed on probation, deceased absconded; however, turned himself in to local authorities on or about 12/6/63.*

*Mr. Gill continued that after deceased turned himself in, deceased was continued on probation. Gill said after this the deceased's mother, Mary Jane Killam, 316 W. Romana St, Pensacola, called him on numerous occasions and requested aid in placing deceased in mental institution as he was "hearing voices on radio" that did not exist, "imagining people were following him" and also seeing "snakes." Deceased's mother also told him that deceased was taking some kind of pills.*

*Gill said he visited deceased and his mother on numerous occasions, accompanied by Florida Probation Officer John R. Skinner. On one occasion he obtained samples of the pills being taken by deceased and had them analyzed and determined that they were barbiturate and amphetamine tablets. As a result, arrangements were made to have deceased committed to Escambia General Hospital for treatment and which commitment was scheduled for same day that Killam died, 3/17/64.*

*Gill stated that he is of the opinion that during a hallucination, the deceased either fell or jumped into the store window which resulted in his death by being cut by broken glass. [5]*

Killam is reported to have brought complete files of the Kennedy assassination with him when he moved

to Florida. Why had federal officials shown such an inordinate interest in this man, hounding him from Dallas to Pensacola, to Tampa, and back to Pensacola, causing him to lose one job after another?

#### Notes

1. FBI Airtel, 2/23/67 SAC Jacksonville to Director
2. FBI 44-1639
3. Warren Report, p. 363
4. "Widow Wants to Know: 'Club-Girl' May Seek Killam Death Probe," The Pensacola Journal, 2-23-67
5. FBI Airtel, 22367 From SAC, Jacksonville to Director

## THE WINNIPEG AIRPORT INCIDENT REVISITED

by  
*Peter R. Whitmey*

Ever since I first became aware of the "Winnipeg Airport Incident" while reading COUP D'ETAT IN AMERICA twelve years ago, (providing a brief and somewhat misleading reference, but which led me to other sources), I have attempted to collect as many of the primary and secondary documents as possible. After writing my first article on the subject ("The Man Who Heard Too Much", Nov. 1990, TTD), based on secondary material as well as numerous interviews, I was pleased to learn from researcher Bill Adams that he had been able to obtain some relevant material from the "Boxley file" through AARC. Included was "Commission No. 645" - the six-page detailed report provided to the Warren Commission by the FBI (dated March 6, 1964), which had been prepared by the Minneapolis office, based on an interview with Winnipeg resident Richard Giesbrecht, conducted by SA Merle Nelson from the FBI's Grand Forks, ND office.

I also received some documents (but not all) through a FOIPA application, in several stages, which began arriving a year after writing to the FBI. Included amongst them were teletypes sent to FBI offices in Kansas City, Las Vegas and Dallas dated March 2 and 3, 1964, giving specific instructions to check out certain "leads," along with a detailed summary of the Winnipeg Airport Incident. However, when the official six-page report was distributed on March 6, the cover pages attached to it listed one new lead for the New York City office to check out in place of the previous Dallas lead. (I discussed partial results of these leads in my second article "The Winnipeg Airport Incidents" - TFD, Nov. 1995).

With the formation of the Assassination Record Review Board in 1992 and the subsequent creation of the NARA website ("Kennedy Assassination Records Collection"), I was finally able to do my own search

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for other possible documents related to the Winnipeg Airport Incident. When I first used the database, I entered the name "Richard Giesbrecht", which resulted in a listing of thirteen documents, all of which I had received through my earlier FOIPA application. However, I soon discovered other relevant summary pages that did not include the name "Giesbrecht".

One of the most important, given its proximity to the events of Feb. 13, 1964 is a seven-page, handwritten letter from Mr. Giesbrecht's lawyer, Harry Backlin (who had represented him and his brother in business dealings for several years) to Mr. John H. Morris, the U.S. Consulate General in Winnipeg, dated Feb. 18, 1964. The letter was headed "Absolutely Personal" and began:

*"Further to our recent telephone conversation in which I set forth certain personal and confidential information concerning the Oswald case. I am writing this memorandum because I do not wish the information herein contained to get into too many hands. I have your undertaking that this information shall be dealt with in the strictest of confidence."*

Backlin pointed out that "...Before passing the information on to you, I checked out the man and firmly believe that what he has divulged to me is fact." (As it turned out, the FBI ended up concluding that Giesbrecht had an overactive imagination.) The remainder of the letter outlines the comments which Mr. Giesbrecht had overheard and noted in writing (he tore up his notes while driving home, but his brother assisted him in rewriting them that evening.) Here are some excerpts:

*"On the afternoon of Feb. 13th my client, a salesman, had an appointment to meet a customer at the new International Airport. My client arrived early and sat in the cocktail lounge to have a drink. After finishing his drink he walked around the new building.. then returned to the same table.. Immediately behind him were seated two men who were not there previously.. he could over hear them talking about the Oswald case. One of the men was wondering 'how much Oswald really knew' and 'how much does she know.' [This was undoubtedly a*

*reference to Marina, who had testified before the Warren Commission on Feb. 4; her photo was on the cover of the most recent issue of TIME.] A name was mentioned - sounding like 'Isaacs' -who was apparently 'seen on film after the landing.' [the FBI later wrote "Love Field" next to this comment in the six-page report.] Further conversation could be heard in bits and pieces, such as ...' if Oswald is found guilty the bureau will not stop investigation.' They talked about 'merchandise coming from Nevada.. too risky in the past months. We'll have to close shop temporarily.' My client couldn't hear everything too clearly about the next matter but it related (to) the subject of 'mercury.'"*

Reference was made in Backlin's detailed letter to a planned "sales meeting", the first "since November", to be held "in a place sounding like Townhouse in Kansas City". Mention was made of the names "Kellogg" and "Broadway", which turned out to be the main streets in downtown Wichita, KA where the Townhouse Motor Hotel was located. It would appear that the proposed meeting was slated for March 18, and a "banquet room" had been reserved for the unidentified group in the name of a "textile firm."

Backlin's client (not identified by name in the letter) recalled reference being made to "...the name of a person sounding like 'Hoffman' or 'Hauckman' [Troy Houghton of the Minutemen perhaps?] in conjunction again with this man 'Isaacs'". Isaacs was to be relieved and the car destroyed [the FBI report identified it as a 1958 Dodge]. One of the men could clearly be over heard saying 'Isaacs, a man with such a good record should get involved with a psyco (sic) ... like Oswald.'" This comment would suggest that "Isaacs" had become a liability to the group because of his connection to Oswald, and implies that the two men were primarily concerned with "guilt by association" in the assassination of JFK.

Backlin goes on to describe a third man who was sitting in front of Giesbrecht, "staring at him" while he was taking notes. Giesbrecht got the impression the man was "trying to get the attention of the other two because the conversation switched to an aeroplane standing outside the building". As

Geisbrecht got up and left the cocktail lounge (which also included a restaurant), the "third man got up and followed him." When Giesbrecht headed for the stairs that led to an RCMP office on the main floor, the "third man" was standing there, so instead he headed for a phone and spoke to a "Mr. Pollack of the RCMP, but hung up when he saw the man start walking towards him." However, he was able to leave the building "without the man bothering him."

After leaving the airport, Giesbrecht noticed a friend at a bus stop and picked him up on his way downtown (he was later identified as "David Rock" in the cover pages of the FBI's report, who is apparently deceased). Backlin had been "unable to contact this man to confirm that my client spoke to him about 'something very important' and what he would do if he had something like that to contend with." However, Backlin had been able to "confirm that Mr. Pollack spoke to my client and he confirmed the conversation." He also learned from Giesbrecht that after speaking to his wife, she had suggested that he contact Backlin (Mrs. Giesbrecht is still alive, but has always refused to speak to me about the incident. I had spoken to Mr. Giesbrecht three times in 1987 although he pretended to be a relative, but a year later he asked me not to contact him again. This was likely because of pressure from his wife, who had not wanted her husband to "go public" in the first place).

Backlin indicated that his client "seems to be able to describe these men with some degree of accuracy. He has never seen them before or since", although no descriptions are provided in the letter (however, the FBI's report did include a description of each of the three men, one of whom Giesbrecht identified three years later as being David Ferrie, after his picture appeared on the front page of the WINNIPEG TRIBUNE, a day after his death in New Orleans. Giesbrecht also told the FBI that the man speaking to "Ferrie" might have been named "Romaniuk").

It would appear that Backlin met with his client on Feb. 11, only a day after the incident at the airport, in that he states that he had spoken to Giesbrecht "...a number of times since Friday," although he had "not had the opportunity of re-examining my client." However, he emphasized again that he was "...sure that

the facts related are not of his imagination." He also pointed out that his client did not "...wish his name disclosed but will give his story to the proper authorities only if it is made a condition that his name be kept absolutely confidential. He is quite fearful of what may happen and his wife does not want him to become involved too deeply."

As it turned out, Giesbrecht became frustrated at not being contacted by the Warren Commission after his FBI interview (on Feb. 27 at the Marlborough Hotel in downtown Winnipeg), and contacted the station manager at the Pembina, ND television station in early April (whom the FBI subsequently interviewed). When a proposed interview fell through, Giesbrecht spoke to a radio station announcer in Winnipeg, who encouraged Giesbrecht to speak to a reporter at the WINNIPEG FREE PRESS (Don Newman, now a distinguished Ottawa television reporter for CBC-NewsWorld). His account was a front-page story in the May 2, 1964 issue, although his name was not revealed. A copy was later sent to SA Merle Nelson at the Grand Forks, ND office by RCMP Constable D. P. Wershler, who still lives in Winnipeg.

In the meanwhile, the Minneapolis office of the FBI, who were in charge of the investigation, had sent out teletypes summarizing Nelson's interview to the Dallas, Kansas City, and Las Vegas offices (as well as Headquarters) on March 2, and 3 1964, along with three "leads": 1) Dallas was to check "indices to determine whether the name of "Isaacs" has ever appeared in the Oswald or Kennedy investigation; 2) K.C. was to check out the reference to the "Townhouse" and a possible meeting to be held on March 18;

3) Las Vegas was to check out the reference to a shop or building in "Mercury, Nevada" that might have closed recently.

As I have previously reported, SA Carl Freeman of the Las Vegas office reported back on March 4 that Mercury, Nevada was actually an "atomic testing site" and that there was no evidence of any business or shop closing or planning to close, nor was there any "identifiable information with the last name of ROMANIUK. ." in either the AEC's files or those of the FBI and Sheriff's offices in Las Vegas.

In my second article "The Winnipeg Airport Inci-



dents," I had stated that I had no idea whether or not the Kansas City or Wichita offices followed up on the "Townhouse" lead, since I had not received any document in this regard as a result of my FOIPA request. However, by inputting "Townhouse Motor Hotel" during a search of the NARA website, I discovered that there was, indeed, a four-page report, dated April 9, 1964. Initially, the FBI in Kansas City made inquiries with the Townhouse Motor Hotel on Seventh and State Streets in Kansas City, Kansas, as well as the Coates House Hotel on Tenth and Broadway in Kansas City, Missouri to no avail. In addition, the report included the results of a further investigation conducted by the Wichita, Kansas office, after discovering that there was a Townhouse Motel on the corners of Kellogg and Broadway. As in the case of K.C., there was no reservation for a textile group scheduled on or about March 18, nor for anyone by the name "Romaniuk", according to both the hotel and the Wichita Chamber of Commerce. There was no indication, however, as to whether such a meeting might have been canceled prior to March 18, at which time the FBI believed the Townhouse was in Kansas City.

The initial lead related to the name "Isaacs," directed to the Dallas FBI office, had intriguing results. Back on Dec. 21, 1963, almost two months before Giesbrecht's allegations surfaced, the Dallas office had sent a teletype to the San Francisco office (44-1639-3139) with the following directions:

*"Note pad obtained from Ruby when arrested contained name Chuck Isaacs. Investigation reveals wife of Charles R. Isaacs, ticket agent, American Airlines, formerly assigned Dallas, now assigned San Francisco, made costumes for Ruby's dancers.*

*San Francisco locate Isaacs and obtain all info. re: associates and activities of Ruby & relationship if any between Ruby & Oswald."*

On Dec. 23, 1963 the San Francisco FBI office sent a teletype to Dallas with the following directions:

*"American Airlines advise Isaacs presently on vacation in the Dallas, Tex., area and will not return until after the first of the year.*

*Dallas interview Isaacs as set out in retel."*

At the bottom of the teletype is a handwritten nota-

tion indicating that the instructions had been "covered" and that a teletype had been sent to "...SF, 1/2/64 for interviewing Isaacs & wife." On a faded copy of the teletype, the two agents involved are listed in the handwriting of one of them, namely Clements and Sayers, with the notation "Cc pulled for DL lead."

As stated above, the Dallas office contacted the San Francisco office again by teletype on Jan. 2, 1964, advising them of the following results:

*"Remytel December twenty-one, sixty-three and urtel December twenty-three, sixty-three concerning interview of Chuck Isaacs and wife. Dallas unable to locate Isaacs. Since Isaacs returning to San Francisco after first of year, San Francisco handle interview of Isaacs and wife re Ruby and Oswald.. JWS."*

On Jan. 6, 1964 the San Francisco office sent "25 copies each of an FD-302 reflecting interviews with Charles R. Isaacs and Mrs. Charles R. Isaacs" to the Dallas office, along with an Airtel, advising Dallas, if not already done so, to "...locate and interview BRECK WALL and JOE PETERSON, producers of shows in the Dallas area, who are acquainted with Ruby. They may possibly be located through JOE REICHMAN, an orchestra leader at the Century Room, Adolphus Hotel, Dallas, Texas." These names had been derived from the interviews with the Isaacs.

As for the interviews with Mr. and Mrs. Isaacs, it was revealed by both that Ruby had given Mrs. Isaacs a "bogus check" about three years ago for some costume work she had done, and when confronted with the check, Ruby had subsequently paid her in cash. There was no comment as to why Chuck Isaacs' name, place of employment, and home phone number (as of 1961) were in Ruby's notebook, which was the initial reason for locating him. When I spoke to Isaacs' former wife (who lives in San Antonio under a different last name) in 1991, she was sure that it was her name that appeared in Ruby's notebook (it wasn't, as displayed in the Warren volumes - Armstrong Exhibit, No. 5309-A).

It could be that Isaacs was more involved with Ruby than he was willing to admit to either his wife or the FBI. I find it puzzling why the FBI did not find out the reason for Ruby having listed Isaacs in his notebook -

a notebook which was referred to by Burt Griffin during his interview with Curtis Laverne Crafard on April 9, 1964 (Crafard has since reverted back to the correct spelling of his last name which is "C-R-A-F-O-R-D"). What is even more puzzling is the fact that the Dallas FBI did not reinterview Charles Isaacs (or have the San Francisco office do so). Instead, a teletype was sent to the New York office on March 3, 1964, most of which is a summary of Giesbrecht's allegations, along with instructions for the New York office to re-interview social worker Martin Isaacs, whose name and business address were listed in Oswald's notebook. He had been interviewed by the FBI on Dec. 17. The Dallas office asked New York to obtain from Isaacs "...his whereabouts on November twenty-two last, and.. any information to help resolve identities and conversations in retel." Copies were sent to the K.C., Las Vegas and Minneapolis offices.

The New York FBI office sent an airtel to Headquarters on Mar. 4, 1964 with copies sent to Dallas, K.C., Las Vegas, and Minneapolis re: Richard Giesbrecht, indicating Mr. Isaacs, age 59 and an employee of the Dept. of Welfare for 30 years, had never been to Texas, and was working in his office on Nov. 22, 1963. He was not familiar with the names "Hoffman", "Haughtman" or "Romaniuk" and didn't recognize the descriptions of the men overheard and/or seen by Giesbrecht. He did not own a car, and knew nothing about a '58 Dodge or possibly Mercury car." He had never been to either Kansas City or Winnipeg. In regard to his connection to the Oswalds, Isaacs indicated he had been contacted by the U.S. State Dept and asked to assist in the relocation of the Oswalds to Texas when they arrived in New York from Russia.

Obviously, the very questions that were put to Martin Isaacs should also have been put to Charles R. Isaacs, especially since he had been an employee of American Airlines at Love Field, and possibly was the person seen on film footage "after the landing." Even if this was not on Nov. 22, 1963, it might have been earlier when JFK came to Dallas during his campaign for the presidency in 1960 (unless "the landing" refers to something else).

Bill Turner, a former FBI agent and RAMPARTS reporter, certainly recognized the possible connection

between the "Isaacs" reference in Winnipeg and the "Chuck Isaacs" in Ruby's notebook, as reflected in a memo he sent to Garrison on August 18, 1967. Turner suggested that "...ISAACS had some assignment in the assassination at the Dallas Love Field, but that he got too close to Kennedy, was in the news TV footage of the arrival, and therefore was considered hot by the conspirators and marked for elimination." Turner thought it would be "...extremely interesting to find out if ISAACS could be the man named in the news article and whether he is still alive and well in Dallas..." Ironically, he was now living in the Bay Area, as was Turner.

In Jan. 1968 Giesbrecht's story was referred to in the U.S. press for the first time, initially by Turner in his lengthy report for RAMPARTS about the Garrison case. However, instead of repeating the content of his earlier memo, Turner switched to the possible identity of "Harold R. Isaacs," listed in the title of CD 1080, one of numerous classified documents at the National Archives (listed in the appendix of FAREWELL AMERICA, which Turner was distributing to libraries and researchers).

Prior to Turner's article, Mary Ferrell had written her own memo to Garrison at the request of Tom Bethell, who had provided her the same classified CD titles (see his book THE ELECTRIC WINDMILL). Having become aware of the Winnipeg Airport Incident, Mary discovered a 1961-63 listing in the Dallas directory under the name "Harold R. Isaacs" (and presumably also noticed a list-for "Charles R. Isaacs") and made the following comment:

*"Tom requested that I write what I remembered of the Harold R. Isaacs investigation.. When I observed that Gen. Walker was 'investigated' in Boston by the F.B.I. on May 21, 1964, the thought occurred to me that Harold R. Isaacs, who was investigated by the F.B.I. in Boston on May 22, 1964, might also be from Dallas.."*

At the end of her memo, after making reference to telephone listings under Harold Isaacs' ex-wife and parents, with partial credit given to "Boxley" (actually William Wood) for locating Isaacs in the Houston area (which Wood later wrote about in a 1975 issue of the NATIONAL TATTLER), Mary made the

following oblique statement:

*"Please read the clipping from the Winnipeg paper re the conversation overheard in the airport concerning Oswald and Isaacs and the meeting in Kansas City. There is no connection between Chuck Isaacs (in Ruby's notebook) and our Harold R. Isaacs. I determined this in June. I can send you my reasoning on that point if you would like, but it is very conclusive."*

It would appear that Turner was persuaded to forget about Charles R. Isaacs, as a result of the efforts of Bethell, Boxley, and Ferrell, even though it was a far more solid lead than the one associated with CD 1080 (which turned out to be a reference to Prof. Harold R. Isaacs of M.I.T., who was the target of right-wing journalist Paul Scott, and who had attempted to link the professor to several "Cornrunists," including Marilyn Murrett, Oswald's globe-trotting cousin from New Orleans, although unaware they were related).

Shortly after the reference in RAMPARTS, Giesbrecht was profiled in the Jan. 28, 1968 issue of the NATIONAL ENQUIRER, which included an interview with Garrison's chief investigator, Louis Ivon. He revealed that the D.A.'s office "...was looking in Dallas for Chuck Isaacs and a Paul Hoffman..." After reading the article, a pilot for American Airlines, who had known Chuck Isaacs for several years in both Dallas and Tulsa (where Isaacs grew up), wrote to Garrison to let him know that Isaacs was now living in San Francisco. He described Isaacs as "...personable, alert, intelligent and somewhat of an operator." (In my conversation with the former pilot, he used the term "wheeler-dealer," and was surprised to learn that Isaacs was married while in Dallas; he was also certain that Chuck had moved after the assassination).

I also learned from my conversation with Isaacs' second wife (whom I located with the help of a former Dallas neighbor) that her daughter (now deceased) had showed the NATIONAL ENQUIRER article to her father, but he had not contacted Garrison himself (nor had he contacted the FBI about his wife's contact with Ruby and his own possible connection, as suggested by the entry in Ruby's notebook).

Given how thoroughly the FBI had checked out vari-

ous leads related to Giesbrecht's allegations, it is hard to believe that the Dallas office overlooked Charles R. Isaacs, since his name would have been in their files once Ruby's notebook was examined. The reference to a 1958 Dodge, which was to be destroyed, could also have connected events in Winnipeg with gunrunning activities in Dallas, involving the transfer of stolen weapons from a Dodge to a Thunderbird only days before the assassination (as described in OSWALD TALKED, with links to both Ruby and Oswald). Although the Thunderbird had been seized and the occupants arrested, the Dodge and its driver (possibly Isaacs himself) managed to flee the scene.

Although I was able to locate Charles R. Isaacs in 1992 (as well as his son), I did not receive a reply to my letter, and later learned that Mr. Isaacs was diagnosed with Alzheimer's, shortly after his third wife died, and that he was now in a rest home in Shreveport, LA. The FBI might very well be relieved.

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**(Editor's note:** the following is chapter 6 part 2 of the report of the Assassination Records Review Board (ARRB), submitted on September 30, 1998. It is reprinted here to indicate the scope of the Board's efforts on these evidential issues, as well as some of the superficiality of their approach to dealing with them. On the latter point, see especially the "ballistics" section in which the ARRB chooses, from the vast array of extremely important ballistics issues, to focus on the seemingly tangential matter of possible clothing fragments on CE 567, a bullet fragment. In fact, on the ballistics case as it officially stands, CE 567 could not contain fibers from JFK's clothing. It could not have come from CE 399, the bullet which pierced the bodies of Kennedy and Connally and emerged in near "pristine" condition. Nor, of course, could it have picked up such fibers from clothing if, as the official record would have it, CE 567 was a fragment of a bullet which had hit the President in the head.

## CLARIFYING THE FEDERAL RECORD ON THE ZAPRUDER FILM AND THE MEDICAL AND BALLISTICS EVIDENCE

### A. Introduction

Many students of the assassination believe that the medical evidence on the assassination of President Kennedy, in concert with the ballistics evidence and film recordings of the events in Dealey Plaza, is the most important documentation in the case, as indeed it would be in any homicide investigation. The Review Board believed that, in order to truly address the public's concerns relating to possible conspiracies and coverups relating to the assassination, it would need to gather some additional information on all three of these topics. The pages that follow detail the Review Board's efforts to develop additional information on these highly relevant and interesting topics.

### B. Medical Evidence [1]

The President John F. Kennedy Assassination Records Collection Act of 1992 (JFK Act) did not task the Assassination Records Review Board with the mission of investigating the assassination or of attempting to resolve any of the substantive issues surrounding it.

But the JFK Act did authorize the Review Board to pursue issues related to the documentary record, including the completeness of records and the destruction of records. In an informal discussion with the Review Board, Congressman Louis Stokes, former Chairman of the House Select Committee on Assassinations (HSCA), strongly encouraged the Review Board to do what it could to help resolve issues surrounding the documentary record of the autopsy. He advised the Board that the medical evidence is of particular importance and that he hoped that it would do all it could to complete the record. Despite being hampered by a 33 year old paper trail, the Review Board vigorously pursued additional records related to the medical evidence and the autopsy, commencing in 1996.

### 1. Medical Issues

One of the many tragedies related to the assassination of President Kennedy has been the incompleteness of the autopsy record and the suspicion caused by the shroud of secrecy that has surrounded the records that do exist. Although the professionals who participated in the creation and the handling of the medical evidence may well have had the best of intentions in not publicly disclosing information protecting the privacy and the sensibilities of the President's family the legacy of such secrecy ultimately has caused distrust and suspicion. There have been serious and legitimate reasons for questioning not only the completeness of the autopsy records of President Kennedy, but the lack of a prompt and complete analysis of the records by the Warren Commission.

Among the several shortcomings regarding the disposition of the autopsy records, the following points illustrate the problem. First, there has been confusion and uncertainty as to whether the principal autopsy prosector, Dr. James J. Humes, destroyed the original draft of the autopsy report, or if he destroyed notes taken at the time of the autopsy. Second, the autopsy measurements were frequently imprecise and sometimes inexplicably absent. Third, the prosectors were not shown the original autopsy photographs by the Warren Commission, nor were they asked enough detailed questions about the autopsy or the photographs. Fourth, the persons handling the autopsy records did

not create a complete and contemporaneous accounting of the number of photographs nor was a proper chain of custody established for all of the autopsy materials. Fifth, when Dr. Humes was shown some copies of autopsy photographs during his testimony before the HSCA, he made statements that were interpreted as suggesting that he had revised his original opinion significantly on the location of the entrance wound. These shortcomings should have been remedied shortly after the assassination while memories were fresh and records were more readily recoverable.

The first step taken by the Review Board in regard to the medical evidence was to arrange for the earliest possible release of all relevant information in the Warren Commission and HSCA files. Prior to the passage of the JFK Act, the files from the HSCA contained numerous medical records that had never been released to the public. After the JFK Act came into effect, but before the Review Board was created, the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) released many of these records. Once the Review Board staff was in place in fall of 1994, it attempted to identify all remaining records that appeared to be connected to the medical evidence and arranged for their prompt release. All of these records were sent to NARA by early 1995 without redactions and without postponements.

The Review Board queried several government entities about possible files related to the autopsy, including the Bethesda National Naval Medical Center, the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology, the Naval Photographic Center, the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence (for Church Committee Records), and the President John F. Kennedy Library. The Review Board also attempted to contact all former staff members of the House Select Committee on Assassinations. With the exception of the autopsy photographs and x-rays, which are exempt from public disclosure under the JFK Act, the Review Board arranged for the release of all governmental records related to the autopsy. There are no other restricted records related to the autopsy of which the Review Board is aware.

The Review Board's search for records thereupon

extended to conducting informal interviews of numerous witnesses, taking depositions under oath of the principal persons who created autopsy records, and arranging for the digitizing of the autopsy photographs.

There were many notable successes resulting from the Board's work, a few of which may briefly be mentioned here. With the generous and public-spirited cooperation of the Eastman Kodak Company, NARA, the FBI, and a representative of the Kennedy family, the Review Board was able to provide secure transportation to ship the autopsy photographs to Rochester, New York, to be digitized on the most advanced digital scanner in the world. The digitized images will be capable of further enhancement as technology and science advance. The digitizing should also provide assistance for those who wish to pursue the question of whether the autopsy photographs were altered. [2] The Review Board also was able to identify additional latent autopsy photographs on a roll of film that had (inaccurately) been described as "exposed to light and processed, but showing no recognizable image." Again with the generous cooperation of Kodak, the latent photographs were digitized and enhanced for further evaluation. These digitized records have already been transferred to the John F. Kennedy Assassination Records Collection (JFK Collection) at NARA. Access to these materials is controlled by a representative of the Kennedy family.

On another front, through staff efforts, the Review Board was able to locate a new witness, Ms. Sandra Spencer, who worked at the Naval Photographic Center in 1963. She was interviewed by phone and then brought to Washington where her deposition was taken under oath in the presence of the autopsy photographs. Ms. Spencer testified that she developed postmortem photographs of President Kennedy in November 1963, and that these photographs were different from those in the National Archives since 1966. In another deposition under oath, Dr. Humes, one of the three autopsy prosecutors, acknowledged under questioning in testimony that appears to differ from what he told the Warren Commission that he had destroyed both his notes taken at the autopsy and the first draft of the autopsy report. Autopsy prosecutor Dr. "J" Thornton Boswell, in an effort to clarify the

imprecision in the autopsy materials, marked on an anatomically correct plastic skull his best recollection of the nature of the wounds on the President's cranium. The autopsy photographer, Mr. John Stringer, in detailed testimony, explained the photographic procedures he followed at the autopsy and he raised some questions about whether the supplemental brain photographs that he took are those that are now in NARA. His former assistant, Mr. Floyd Riebe, who had earlier told several researchers that the autopsy photographs had been altered based upon his examination of photographs that have been circulating in the public domain, reevaluated his earlier opinion when shown the actual photographs at NARA.

Perhaps the most challenging aspect of the Review Board's work on the medical evidence was the preparation and taking of the depositions of the principal persons with knowledge about the autopsy and autopsy records. Although conducting such work was not required by the JFK Act, the Review Board sought to obtain as much information as possible regarding the documentary record. Accordingly, it identified all of the still living persons who were involved in the creation of autopsy records and brought virtually all of them to NARA. For the first time, in the presence of the original color transparencies and sometimes first generation black and white prints, the witnesses were asked questions about the authenticity of the photographs, the completeness of the autopsy records, the apparent gaps in the records, and any additional information in their possession regarding the medical evidence. The witnesses came from as far away as Switzerland (Dr. Pierre Finck) and as close as Maryland (Dr. "J" Thornton Boswell). In conducting the depositions, the Review Board staff sought to approach the questioning in a professional manner and without prejudging the evidence or the witnesses.

Near the end of its tenure, the Review Board also took the joint deposition of five of the Dallas physicians who treated the President's wounds at Parkland Memorial Hospital on November 22, 1963.

There were three closely related problems that seriously impeded the Review Board's efforts to complete the documentary record surrounding the autopsy: a cold paper trail, faded memories, and the unreliability

of eyewitness testimony. An example of the cold paper trail comes from Admiral George Burkley, who was President Kennedy's military physician and the only medical doctor who was present both during emergency treatment at Parkland Memorial Hospital and at the autopsy at Bethesda Naval Hospital. In the late 1970s, at the time of the HSCA's investigation, Dr. Burkley, through his attorney, suggested to the HSCA that he might have some additional information about the autopsy. Because Dr. Burkley is now deceased, the Review Board sought additional information both from his former lawyer's firm, and from Dr. Burkley's family. The Burkley family said it did not possess any papers or documents related to the assassination, and declined to sign a waiver of attorney-client privilege that would have permitted the Review Board access to the files of Mr. Illig (also now deceased), Burkley's former attorney.

Memories fade over time. A very important figure in the chain of custody on the autopsy materials, and the living person who perhaps more than any other would have been able to resolve some of the lingering questions related to the disposition of the original autopsy materials, is Robert Bouck of the Secret Service. At the time he was interviewed he was quite elderly and little able to remember the important details. Similarly, the records show that Carl Belcher, formerly of the Department of Justice, played an important role in preparing the inventory of autopsy records. He was, however, unable to identify or illuminate the records that, on their face, appear to have been written by him.

Finally, a significant problem that is well known to trial lawyers, judges, and psychologists, is the unreliability of eyewitness testimony. Witnesses frequently, and inaccurately, believe that they have a vivid recollection of events. Psychologists and scholars have long since demonstrated the serious unreliability of peoples' recollections of what they hear and see. One illustration of this was an interview statement made by one of the treating physicians at Parkland. He explained that he was in Trauma Room Number 1 with the President. He recounted how he observed the First Lady wearing a white dress. Of course, she was wearing a pink suit, a fact known to



most Americans. The inaccuracy of his recollection probably says little about the quality of the doctor's memory, but it is revealing of how the memory works and how cautious one must be when attempting to evaluate eyewitness testimony.

The deposition transcripts and other medical evidence that were released by the Review Board should be evaluated cautiously by the public. Often the witnesses contradict not only each other, but sometimes themselves. For events that transpired almost 35 years ago, all persons are likely to have failures of memory. It would be more prudent to weigh all of the evidence, with due concern for human error, rather than take single statements as "proof" for one theory or another.

### **C. Zapruder Film**

In the spring of 1996, the Review Board began to consider how it might answer questions about chain of custody, or provenance, of selected film records, or enhance or better preserve selected film records.

#### **1. Ownership of the Zapruder Film**

At the time that Congress passed the JFK Act, Abraham Zapruder's famous 8mm film depicting the death of President Kennedy was in the possession of NARA. The Zapruder film, which records the moments when President Kennedy was assassinated, is perhaps the single most important assassination record. In 1978, Abraham Zapruder's son, Henry G. Zapruder, deposited the original Zapruder film with the National Archives for safekeeping. Legal ownership of the film, however, was still retained by the Zapruder family. As the Zapruder family stated upon transmission of the film to the National Archives, "the Film will be held by the Archives solely for storage purposes and...the Archives has acquired no rights whatsoever to the Film." [3]

In March 1993, shortly after passage of the JFK Act, Henry Zapruder sought unsuccessfully to remove the original film from the National Archives. In October 1994, the Zapruder family, through its attorney, again sought return of the original film. NARA declined to return the original film, knowing that the JFK Act may have affected the legal ownership status of the film.

Thereafter, NARA, the Review Board, and the Department of Justice sought to clarify the status of the original film under the JFK Act, including whether the

U.S. government could legally acquire the original film and what the value of compensation to the Zapruder family would be under the takings clause of the Fifth Amendment. In addition, the U.S. government had numerous discussions with legal counsel for the Zapruder family regarding a legal "taking" of the film, the compensation to be accorded to the family, and copyright issues regarding the film.

In 1997, the Review Board deliberated, and ultimately asserted, its authority under the JFK Act to acquire legal ownership of the original Zapruder film. On April 2, 1997, the Review Board held a public hearing "to seek public comment and advice on what should be done with the camera original motion picture film of the assassination that was taken by Abraham Zapruder on November 22, 1963." The issue facing the Board was whether the Zapruder film was an "assassination record" that "should be in the JFK Collection at the Archives" and whether it "should...be Federal Government property rather than the property of private citizens." [5] The Review Board also had to consider how to acquire the film for the American people, whether through the exercise of a takings power or through negotiation with the Zapruder family.

At its April 1997 hearing, the Review Board heard testimony from six experts who addressed a variety of issues, including the constitutional and legal issues involved in effecting a "taking" of the film and the benefits in having U.S. government ownership of the original film. Following the Zapruder film hearing, the Review Board held an open meeting on April 24, 1997, and resolved to secure legal ownership of the original Zapruder film for the American people. The Board's "Statement of Policy and Intent with Regard to the Zapruder Film," adopted unanimously by the Board, resolved: (1) that the Zapruder film was an assassination record within the meaning of the JFK Act; (2) that the Board would attempt to ensure that the best available copy of the film be made available to the public at the lowest reasonable price; (3) that the Board would work cooperatively with the Zapruder family to produce the best possible copy for scholarly and research purposes, establish a base reference for the film through digitization, and to con-

duct all appropriate tests to evaluate authenticity and to elicit historical and evidentiary evidence; and (4) that the original film be transferred to the JFK Collection on August 1, 1998 and that the Review Board would work with Congress to resolve this issue.

In June 1998, Congressman Dan Burton, Chairman of the House Committee on Government Reform and Oversight, which oversees the work of the Review Board, wrote to the Department of Justice expressing Congressional support for the efforts of DOJ to carry out the "Board's commitment to ensuring that the original Zapruder film remains in the custody of the American people as the most important assassination record." [6] At the time of this Report, the Department of Justice was engaged in negotiations with the Zapruder family to resolve all outstanding issues relating to the legal transfer of the film from the family to the U.S. government, including the issue of compensation to be paid to the family for the film. The transfer of the original Zapruder film to the JFK Collection was effective August 1, 1998.

## **2. Staff Examinations of Films Designated as "In Camera" Original, and First Generation Copies, by NARA**

The Review Board determined that there should be an examination of the Zapruder films at NARA designated as the original and the two Secret Service copies (believed to be first generation copies) for the purpose of recording characteristics of the three films. (The Review Board subsequently determined that the LMH Company — the Zapruder family's company — possessed a third first generation copy of the Zapruder film.) The Review Board hoped that the recorded observations would serve to provide information to a public that would not be able to obtain physical access to these films, and second, would determine whether the film should be examined by photographic experts. Ultimately, the staff recommended, and the Review Board agreed, that it would approach Eastman Kodak to request that Kodak examine the Zapruder film.

## **3. Eastman Kodak's Pro Bono Work for the Review Board Related to the Zapruder Film (and Autopsy Photographs)**

The Review Board first met with the Eastman Kodak Company in June 1996 in Washington to discuss a

wide variety of possible research topics related to a host of potential film issues. At that time, Kodak stated that it would provide a limited amount of pro bono work for the Review Board. The Review Board continued discussions with Kodak laboratory officials based in Rochester, New York, and subsequently met with Kodak technical experts James Milch and Roland Zavada in Washington, D.C. At that meeting, the Review Board identified three major areas of interest, only one of which related to the Zapruder film: (1) the possible digitization and enhancement of the Zapruder film, as well as edge print analysis of the original and first generation copies, and study of the optical characteristics of the Zapruder camera in relation to perceived "anomalies" in the original film; (2) the possible enhancement and, if necessary, optical (i.e., film, not medical) analysis of autopsy images; and (3) a study of the provenance of film materials subpoenaed by the Review Board from Robert J. Groden for examination. Kodak laboratory experts Milch and Zavada viewed the original Zapruder film, a Secret Service first generation copy, and some of the Groden materials for the first time at NARA during their September 1996 visit to Washington.

Kodak subsequently offered to contribute up to \$20,000 of labor and materials to the Review Board in pro bono work the equivalent of roughly 35 days of effort. Kodak confirmed, at a meeting with the Review Board in August of 1997, that Zavada, a retired Kodak film chemist who was formerly Kodak's pre-eminent 8 mm film expert, was the consultant that Kodak had hired to: (1) attempt to write a "primer" explaining the optical and mechanical operating characteristics of Abraham Zapruder's 8 mm Bell and Howell home movie camera; (2) explain the relationship, if any, between the camera's operating characteristics and perceived "anomalies" in the original film; and (3) answer questions about the provenance of the original film and the first generation copies. ("Provenance" issues that Mr. Zavada took on included studying the chain of custody documents executed in November 1963 by Abraham Zapruder; conducting interviews of surviving personnel involved in the development of the original film, and the exposure and developing of the three first generation copies; and

studying manufacturer's edge print, processing lab edge print, and the physical characteristics of the optical printer believed to have been used to create the three first generation copies on November 22, 1963.)

In addition, in August 1997 James K. Toner, the Laboratory Head of Kodak's Imaging Science Resources Lab in Rochester, presented a methodology for making the best possible direct digitization of the original Zapruder film. Kodak also began to make arrangements with NARA and the Review Board for the digital preservation and enhancement of the autopsy images of President Kennedy, under the direct guidance of Toner.

In September 1997, Toner and Zavada visited Washington and, in addition to studying selected autopsy film and x-ray images at NARA, they also studied perceived anomalies in the intersprocket areas of the original Zapruder film, and the emulsion characteristics and edge print characteristics of what NARA presumed to be the camera original Zapruder film and the two Secret Service first generation copies. Following this visit, Zavada began writing his extensive report on Zapruder film issues, which expanded in scope as his research into camera optics and printer characteristics continued. This report was scheduled for completion by Kodak no later than September 30, 1998; six copies were scheduled for deposit at NARA in the JFK Collection.

Kodak ultimately spent approximately \$53,000 on work related to the digitization and enhancement of the President's autopsy images, and approximately \$11,000 on work related to Zapruder film issues, significantly exceeding its original estimate of donated labor and materials. The Review Board gratefully acknowledges the public service provided to the American people by the Eastman Kodak Company.

#### **4. The Review Board Staff's Study and Clarification of Paul Hoch's FOIA Lead "CIA Document 450"**

The Review Board staff located and interviewed two former employees of the CIA's National Photographic Interpretation Center (NPIC) and questioned them about "CIA Document 450," a 1970s Freedom Of Information Act release original document undated that indicates NPIC had a version of the Zapruder film,

made "internegatives" and "copies," conducted a "print test," and performed a shot and timing analysis based on interpretation of the film's content.

Both individuals indicated that the internegatives made were of single frames only, and the prints made (from these same internegatives) were of single frames only for briefing boards and that they never reproduced (or altered) the film as a motion picture. They identified portions of the document related to this activity magnification and reproduction of small motion picture frames as prints. To this extent, the document has been demystified. However, other questions, such as who conducted the shot and timing analysis, and who assembled the briefing boards, remain unanswered.

#### **D. Ballistics**

In April 1995, a member of the public wrote to Attorney General Janet Reno to advise her that Warren Commission Exhibit 567 (CE 567) a bullet fragment may have embedded in it tiny strands of fiber that the writer believed came from President Kennedy's shirt collar. In January 1996, John Keeney, Acting Assistant Attorney General, wrote to FBI Director Louis Freeh requesting that the FBI "initiate an inquiry into specific aspects of the assassination theory related to collected bullet fragments and residues now in the possession of the federal government."

The Review Board determined that the Firearms Examination Panel of the HSCA recommended analysis of CE 567 more than 19 years ago. For unknown reasons, the Panel's recommendation did not appear in the HSCA's March 1979 final report. The Review Board contacted former HSCA staff members to determine why this recommendation was deleted from the draft when the final HSCA report was published, but the former HSCA staff members and Firearms Panel members contacted were not able to provide a reason for the omission of the recommendation.

In March 1996, the Review Board, the FBI, the Department of Justice, and NARA began a series of meetings to discuss reexamination of the ballistics evidence. In June 1996, the FBI provided its report to the Review Board and stated that "a complete fiber analysis could be conducted on the fibrous debris adhering to CE 567 and the materials composing the shirt



and the tie [of President Kennedy]."

In August 1998, after lengthy consideration about whether the testing would be appropriate, NARA finally agreed to allow limited testing of CE 567 to complete the earlier recommendation of the HSCA's Firearms Panel. NARA also determined that the bullet fragment should be tested for "suspected biological tissue and/or organic material," the presence of which was noted by the HSCA in 1978 and the FBI in 1996.

In September 1998, testing began on CE 567 and, at the time of this writing (September 1998), was ongoing. NARA will issue its report on the results of the testing in October 1998.

#### Notes

1. Most of the section of this Report relating to medical evidence and medical issues was printed and distributed to the public in a Staff Report dated July 31, 1998 when the Review Board released its deposition transcripts and written reports of unsworn interviews relating to medical issues.
2. Although the Review Board does not offer opinions on the substantive issues related to the assassination, it believes that trained medical personnel will possibly be able to provide additional illuminating explanations regarding the autopsy after examining the enhanced images. It should be noted, however, that although the digitizing significantly enhanced the clarity of the images, many questions are likely to remain unanswered.
3. July 10, 1978 Letter from Henry G. Zapruder to James Moore, National Archives.
4. Transcript of Review Board Proceedings, Hearing on the Status and Disposition of the "Zapruder Film," April 2, 1997, at 5 (statements of Chairman Tunheim).
5. Id., at 11 (statements of General Counsel Gunn).
6. June 5, 1998 Letter from Chairman Burton to Frank W. Hunger, Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Division.



## THE ASSASSINATION OF JOHN F. KENNEDY AS COUP D'ETAT

by

*Christopher Sharrett*

This is in response to Ken Thompson's remarks (TFD, Jan. 1999) about my analysis of the Kennedy assassination as a state crime (TFD, Sept. 1998). My initial article was prompted by Thompson's earlier (TFD, May 1998) discussion of the assassination as a low-level plot involving possibly the Mafia and/or Cubans. Thompson has responded to only a few of my points, and these responses were, to my mind, rather disingenuous.

I never suggested that the Allende coup or the Holocaust were in any way connected to Dealey Plaza. My comments on the overthrow of Allende by the CIA were by way of responding to Thompson's various definitions of coup d'etat. The particular passage where I discussed Allende was preceded by the word "parenthetically." I stated that the Holocaust was useful to an understanding of the effectuation of power in the twentieth century, not that it was part of the Dallas conspiracy. I might underscore the importance of the Third Reich to an understanding of the current world by noting that during the Nazi era, state officials, including members of the military general staff, plotted the assassination of Hitler. One of these plots was nearly successful. Yet these conspiracies were not uncovered within this totalitarian state where everyday conduct was heavily monitored. Is it still difficult to believe that the citizens of the quiescent post-war United States would not learn all the facts of a political assassination (although this rather half-hearted cover-up has since come apart)? I raise this merely to highlight the full context of the assassination of Kennedy within the events of our age.

Thompson treats with a very light touch Truman's Washington Post article, published one month after the assassination (and not mentioned by anyone since) in which he expressed profound concern about the CIA's

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violation of its initial mandate. Neither does Thompson address Arthur Krock's New York Times article, published about a month before the assassination, detailing an "intra-administration war" directed at Kennedy from the CIA. These matters are not questions of nebulous "links" but of real, material conditions of the Kennedy Administration that any reasonable person must examine if interested in motivations within the state to remove Kennedy from office. Kennedy himself spoke to the importance of these matters. After reading the novel Seven Days in May in the wake of the Bay of Pigs, Kennedy confided to his friend Red Fay that after one or two more such episodes (and we know about the Missile Crisis—about which more in a moment—the Test Ban Treaty, and the American University speech), he could be perceived as weak and "soft on Communism" by others in state authority, and a coup d'état was conceivable.[1] Kennedy encouraged director John Frankenheimer to film the novel in order to further sensitize the public to the political dynamics of the period.

Thompson remarks that the leading and intimidation of witnesses during the investigation by governmental authorities may merely indicate "Hoover's neanderthal style of investigation." Is it fair to assume that all FBI agents are neanderthals? And many of the interrogations were obviously conducted not by neanderthals, but by sophisticated, erudite men learned and respectful of the law and not associated with J. Edgar Hoover. Thompson suggests that "emotions" could have motivated the prompt removal of Kennedy's body from the jurisdiction of the murder. Did emotionalism also motivate the removal and reconstruction of the presidential limousine, and subsequent destruction of forensic evidence? Thompson comments on a number of issues I did not address in my earlier piece and which hold little or no interest for me, such as the possible doctoring of the Zapruder film. He also conflates my remarks with those of other writers. While I did cite Peter Dale Scott at one point in my earlier piece, my article was not an attempt to advocate for him. I find many of Scott's insights important, but I do not subscribe to some aspects of his analyses nor to the "linkage" theory Thompson imputes to him.

Thompson also brings up issues that strike me as irrelevant to the discussion at hand, including a recent Texas Monthly article adumbrating various "conspiracy theories" related to the assassination. Is there a reason to discuss this piece? This is yet another example of the media's presentation of the research into the assassination as a gigantic hoagie sandwich proffered by "buffs." The article at no point attempts to illuminate something or provide the public with a coherent methodology for approaching this case. Instead, it poses the case as a mish-mash of confused postulations, most of which have rarely been asserted by anyone concerned with doing something other than muddying the waters. The prolonged standing ovation received by Vincent Salandria at the last COPA meeting (after he presented his paper on the assassination as a crime of the national security state) is a pretty good measure of what researchers actually think about this issue.

At the heart of Thompson's argument is the notion that the cover-up teaches us nothing, since "we cannot be sure what motivated the cover-up." I would argue to the contrary that we can today, as we could the day of the crime, know precisely what motivated the cover-up, although there is an on-going effort to complicate the important political utility of this aspect of the crime. Because the cover-up today stands exposed, there has been an effort to present it as "benign" (so described by James Hosty in the documentary The Men Who Killed Kennedy), constructed—in the best interests of the American people—to prevent a nuclear war and to protect certain agencies and individuals (including the Kennedys) from embarrassment. One phase of this narrative is represented in a book cited by Thompson, Gus Russo's Live by the Sword. The moralistic biblical admonition of this book's title offers its thesis: Kennedy got what he deserved. Thompson apparently takes seriously Russo's conception of the Kennedy brothers as the ultimate Cold Warriors, with RFK the instigator of plots against Fidel Castro that LBJ wanted to hide in the aftermath of the assassination in order to prevent a war with the Soviet Union. According to this narrative, LBJ believed that "Castro killed Kennedy in retaliation," an idea that has long had currency in the mass media. But this

discourse ignores a large part of the historical record. Marvin Watson, a Johnson staffer, told the Washington Post in 1977 that Johnson "thought there was a plot in connection with the assassination," and that "the CIA had had something to do with the plot." [2]

On the matter of RFK being the guilt-ridden instigator of the Castro plots, anguished that he had caused his brother's death due to his anti-Castro obsessions, we should note that Robert Kennedy exploded in front of assistants Peter Edelman and Adam Walinsky after he read a Jack Anderson column that put into play the idea of RFK as craftsman of the Castro assassination plots. RFK complained "I didn't start it...I stopped it. I found out that some people were going to try an attempt on Castro's life and turned it off." [3] A recent Canadian Broadcasting Company documentary on the Kennedy assassination includes taped remarks by RFK speaking very derisively of CIA covert operations specialist William Harvey. RFK termed Harvey's ideas "half-assed" and potentially very damaging to the United States [4]. Recently declassified CIA documents about its use of hoodlums to penetrate the Cuban Revolution and assassinate its leaders demonstrate that the Agency didn't brief RFK. [5] Gus Russo perpetuates the claim that RFK was convinced that Castro killed his brother, ignoring evidence that RFK contacted Jim Garrison (since RFK took seriously the notion of a domestic plot), and that he was concerned with the possibility that the CIA may have had involvement in the assassination [6]. Throughout Russo's book and similar contemporary narratives, the impression is conveyed that the Castro assassination plots and Operation Mongoose were Kennedy inventions. In 1961 John Kennedy had a conversation with New York Times journalist Tad Szulc, during which Kennedy asked Szulc's counsel about the moral and political implications of attempting to assassinate Fidel Castro. Szulc said he thought such a plan would be disastrous. Kennedy agreed, but said that he was "under extreme pressure" (Szulc felt the pressure was coming from intelligence officials) to okay such a plan. Szulc left the meeting with the impression that the Kennedy brothers were firmly opposed to assassination politics. As Arthur Schlesinger has noted, if Kennedy was in the process of creating a covert operation against

Castro, he would hardly have discussed this issue with a New York Times columnist. [7] On the matter of Operation Mongoose, the "boom and bang" that the Kennedys created in the wake of the Bag of Pigs seems largely to have been a means of protecting their credibility with the right. Gen. Edward Lansdale, who commanded Mongoose, "complained not long afterward that there had actually been no high-level decision for follow-on military intervention." [8]

It strikes me that the function of many current renderings of the Kennedy years is to present a picture of the era as ideologically seamless, with everyone from the Joint Chiefs to Allen Dulles to David Ferrie in lockstep behind the Kennedy brothers. This thinking has been touted by a few sectors of the left, who suggest that since the Kennedy brothers were members of the ruling class, no one in their number would want to kill them. This thinking does a huge public disservice, since it prevents a nuanced understanding of an important phase of the Cold War, and of the internal strife within the state that overtook people such as John Kennedy. My own research into the Kennedy assassination has never been motivated by a desire to lionize John Kennedy. Kennedy was clearly a player in the Cold War, but a large part of the historical record shows that his was one of the very few centrist, essentially cooptative positions toward the socialist bloc at a time when virtually all sectors of state power were calling for massive incursions into the colonial domain picked up by the U.S. from its enemies and allies after World War II. A surprising amount of the historical record, much of which tends to ignore the assassination, shows that at the time of the Bay of Pigs and the Cuban Missile Crisis, "Kennedy demonstrated that he would stand up to the belligerent advice from his closest aides." [9] While Kennedy suggested a policy of restraint, Gen. Thomas Powers, commander of the Strategic Air Command, had other ideas: "Restraint? Why are you so concerned with saving their lives? The whole idea is to kill the bastards. At the end of the war if there are two Americans and one Russian left alive, we win." [10] During the Missile Crisis, Powers raised the readiness of SAC to DEFCON-2, one step away from war, without JFK's authorization. [11] After one meeting with the Joint



Chiefs during the Berlin crisis, Kennedy left the room fuming, stating "These people are crazy." [12]

Throughout Kennedy's term in office his relationship with the military was extraordinarily strained, and "the generals and admirals did not think much of Kennedy's ideas, either." [13] About Gen. Curtis LeMay, Chief of the Air Force, Kennedy remarked after one of his many walkouts on LeMay: "I don't want that man near me again." [14] After feeling misled at the time of the Bay of Pigs, Kennedy stated "...Those sons of bitches with all the fruit salad just sat there nodding, saying it would work." [15]

And while Russo and other current narratives have it that Allen Dulles and the CIA entranced Kennedy, the full record shows something much more complex. While Kennedy was indeed enamored of James Bond novels and the world of intelligence, after the Bay of Pigs betrayal Kennedy said: "I've got to do something about those CIA bastards." [16] An important book on the internecine battles that confronted Kennedy contains the following illuminating passage:

*Pacing his office later, alone with his friend Red Fay, the President said: "I sat there all day and all these fellas all saying 'This is gonna work, and this won't go,' saying 'Sure, this whole thing will work out.' Now, in retrospect, I know damn well that they didn't have any intention of giving me the straight word on this thing. They just thought that if we got involved in this thing, that I would have to say 'Go ahead, you can throw all your forces in the thing, and just move into Cuba'...Well, from now on it's John Kennedy that makes the decisions as to whether or not we are going to do these things."* [17]

New scholarship is also useful in countering the revisionism that has Kennedy the architect of the Vietnam invasion. In a book on Vietnam, Francis X. Winters notes that while Kennedy approved of the coup against Diem, he was taken aback by his assassination. Kennedy's ultimate intent was to install a new, reformist government that would gain legitimacy with the public, co-opt the socialist agenda, and allow the government of Vietnam to do its own policing. In contrast, the Johnson Administration regarded the reformist strategy as "do-gooder" and opted instead for

direct military intervention. [18]

On the matter of the assassination cover-up being put in place not out of official guilt but out of a desire to prevent a nuclear confrontation with the Soviets, I would have thought by now that this risible notion was long since put to rest. One recent book shows that not only were the Soviets appalled by the events of Dallas (this was known to U.S. state authority rather quickly), they were informed by an emissary of the Kennedy family that the Kennedys felt JFK to have been the victim of a rightist coup. [19]

The issue of David Atlee Phillips seems to be an inconvenience to those who feel obliged to defend state authority in this matter. Thompson avoids the Phillips issue entirely, not even attempting to pose Phillips as a "renegade." Thompson cites a recent book by a HSCA staff attorney who seems fixed on protecting the legitimacy of state power in the matter of the JFK assassination, opting, like Thompson, for some vague low-level cabal. But this same attorney was present when David Atlee Phillips told bold-faced lies to the Congress. Gaeton Fonzi's The Last Investigation observes that the HSCA avoided the opportunity to have Phillips indicted, and thereby open a full inquiry into the CIA's role in the assassination.

Fonzi's account of the Phillips affair and the HSCA non-investigation of the CIA contains other instructive material. At the time the Congress became interested in reopening the assassination inquiry, Clare Booth Luce, widow of Time-Life magnate Henry Luce and former lover of Allen Dulles, gave out a good deal of malarkey (about Cubans no less) to investigators designed to send them on a wild goose chase. The Luce nonsense—Clare was an official in an organization of retired CIA officers—is especially instructive as we see it within the context of the overall cover-up. In 1977, Carl Bernstein wrote an article for Rolling Stone in which he described virtually all of the major media as essentially handmaidens of the CIA and the rest of the state apparatus. [20] A three-part article in the New York Times this same year did Bernstein one better by noting the ways by which the CIA used the media to discredit critics of the Warren Report. [21] This activity continued long after fears of Soviet missiles flying at the U.S. had been abetted,

long after the deaths of Johnson and RFK, long after a concern for Kennedy privacy had faded from the governmental agenda as JFK was steadily portrayed as a profligate degenerate—unworthy of serious study—by these same media.

Let me make it country simple. The evidence in the assassination of John Kennedy was taken control of and represented to the public by those sectors of state and private power who despised Kennedy and his policies. It is true that Mafia types and various exile groupings appear within the assassination scenario. These same groups appear within Watergate and Iran/Contra. Does appreciating the presence of these groups go very far to aid our understanding of these events as state crimes, in facts as crimes against the Constitution and the people of the U.S. carried out by state authority? Does the presence of these groups make these crimes other than state crimes? More important, would the American media and much of officialdom continue to attempt to bolster the various official narratives as a favor to the Mafia and some Cuban exiles? Would they do this to prevent a member of the Kennedy clan, or Allen Dulles or J. Edgar Hoover, from being "embarrassed"? Would they do this to prevent hostile relations with other lands, even years after the collapse of the Soviet Union? Thompson suggests that the Joseph Milteer tapes are "a valid pointer to the source of the true assassination conspiracy." Did not the federal authorities have access to these tapes many years ago? Were they attempting to assist a southern racist group by hiding Milteer's "true" connections to the assassination? I suggest that these provocative tapes, which have been in the public's hands for years, were another small attempt to divert public attention from the state's implication in the assassination.

I would hope that eventually we will have no more talk of Shadow Governments and Cabals. The invisible government discussed by various researchers is no more invisible than our political-economic system. This system is synonymous with the postwar national security state. Kennedy was killed when he became a flashpoint for a debate that began immediately with the creation of this state. The Great Depression brought U.S. capitalism to its knees; this ter-

rible economic collapse was halted by the wartime military build-up. The collapse threatened an immediate return after the war, and was prevented by the government's hooking the economy to military production. The public was forced to subsidize the biggest military expansion in history as corporations began to depend on public revenue for their survival. Many within state power saw the potential problems of the new "Pentagon system." Senator Arthur Vandenberg told President Harry Truman: "You are going to have to scare the hell out of the public" in order for them to accept a huge increase in taxes, and an economic system that would give extraordinary authority to the military and the intelligence agencies, who soon became essentially lobbyists for sectors of capital involved in military production. Indeed, fear became the currency of the national security state. Although the Soviet Union suffered twenty-seven million dead in World War II, with most of its major cities and industrial plant destroyed, the American public coughed up billions of dollars to support the U.S. "free enterprise" system and its expansionist aims, as public programs soon went begging.

Cold War propaganda gave legitimacy to the national security state, although debate raged on within state and private power against the backdrop of the sleepy fifties.[22] Many felt that the creation of the "garrison state" would bring about an enormous deficit and weaken us in relation to our Western capitalist rivals. Kennedy was not the first victim of the fierce internecine battles that began almost immediately with the creation of the national security state. Secretary of Defense James V. Forrestal became a victim in 1949 of what was referred to as "the revolt of the admirals." As each sector of the military fought over their share of public revenues, with the Joint Chiefs "at each other's throat" in a climate of unbridled avarice, Forrestal attempted at least to inject a note of civility as the military sensed its unprecedented authority. Forrestal was eventually "ground down by the bickering and backstabbing in the Pentagon." He was "under constant attack from the admirals and generals he supposedly commanded." The national security state's lapdogs in the press, including Walter Winchell and Drew Pearson, ridiculed Forrestal, terming him a "liar



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**Back cover illustration: Kennedy and the Military**

Shown is an excerpt (pp. 305-307) of President Kennedy: Profile of Power by Richard Reeves. It depicts Kennedy's profound distrust of most of the country's military leaders and his fear of a military coup d'etat. For further discussion along this line, see "The Assassination of John F. Kennedy as Coup d'etat," this issue.