



TV NEWSMAN WILLEM OLTMANS



THE DE MOHRENSCHILDTS IN 1974

CONGRESS

Assassination: Now a Suicide Talks

"Let's face it. I only made up the story [about Lee Harvey Oswald] because everybody makes a million dollars off the Kennedy assassination, and I haven't made anything. So now it's my time."

—George de Mohrenschildt, quoted by Willem Oltmans

That grotesque confession should be sufficient to discredit the man who made it, a Russian-born teacher and friend of Lee Harvey Oswald's named George de Mohrenschildt. But nothing ever seems sufficient to still Kennedy assassination stories; time and events merely complicate them. Last week—only an hour after a congressional investigator asked to meet with him in Manalapan, Fla.—De Mohrenschildt apparently committed suicide by putting a 20-gauge shotgun in his mouth and pulling the trigger. Suddenly there was intense interest in what he might have told the investigator. Sure enough, within 48 hours, a world-traveling Dutch TV newsman, Willem Oltmans, showed up to reveal to a closed session of the House Select Committee on Assassinations—plus ABC, NBC and CBS—what De Mohrenschildt had been telling him during the several years of their acquaintance.

Oltmans' testimony—given under oath—was sensational stuff. De Mohrenschildt, said Oltmans, claimed he had been the middleman in a conspiracy of rich Texas oilmen, headed by the late H.L. Hunt, and anti-Castro Cubans to

kill Kennedy. Oswald was one gunman, but supposedly several Cubans were also assigned to shoot the President. One could even be identified. Oltmans provided the committee with a picture of a Cuban whom he said fired shots at Kennedy. But apart from the dramatic backdrop provided by De Mohrenschildt's suicide, the story was just another series of rumors that could not be corroborated.

At the time of the Kennedy assassination, De Mohrenschildt was an oil geologist employed by the U.S. State Department in Haiti. He had known Oswald for a year (they were members of a Russian-speaking group in Dallas), and he told the Warren Commission in 1964 that he knew nothing of Oswald's role in the Kennedy killing. But during a series of meetings with Oltmans beginning in 1966, De Mohrenschildt began to remember things differently. By 1975, during an interview with Oltmans on Dutch television, he insisted that Oswald was led by others. Oltmans told colleagues, "De Mohrenschildt knows a lot more than he is willing to say right now." Later De Mohrenschildt was to go so far as to say he felt "responsible" for Oswald's behavior.

In February of this year, De Mohrenschildt told Oltmans he was ready to disclose more but only outside the U.S.—he feared for his life in America. By now De Mohrenschildt seemed depressed. He had been hospitalized as a

psychiatric patient for two months at the end of last year, and he had twice attempted suicide. Said Patrick Russell, his Dallas attorney: "He began to have bizarre hallucinations and distortions. He believed people were following him."

According to Oltmans, De Mohrenschildt would vacillate between claiming his conspiracy tale was a hoax and asserting it was true. In addition to De Mohrenschildt's instability, doubts are thrown on his story by a review of Warren Commission testimony that shows De Mohrenschildt last saw Oswald six months before the assassination. "It is absolutely out of the question that De Mohrenschildt had anything to do with Kennedy's death," fumes Chicago Attorney Albert Jenner, who interviewed De Mohrenschildt for the Warren Commission. Adds Jenner of the House Assassination Committee's entire performance: "Utterly disgusting."

The committee members who heard Oltmans' testimony took a wait-and-see attitude. "I think he is telling the truth as he perceives it," said D.C. Delegate Walter Fauntroy. Oltmans himself cited an obviously disturbing aspect of his charges. Asked a tough question during a television interview, he replied, "Well, I'm quoting Mr. De Mohrenschildt, so that makes it very easy"—De Mohrenschildt being in no position to amend the record.

Oltmans' testimony was only the climax in a hectic week during which the House Select Committee on Assassinations barely escaped its own death by sacrificing its controversial counsel, Richard Sprague. The outspoken ex-district attorney from Philadelphia had angered too many Congressmen with his demands for a \$13 million budget and a staff of 175 for the two-year investigation (TIME, Jan. 10).

Too Raw. With Sprague out of the way, the House was willing to vote 230 to 181 to continue the investigations on a reduced annual budget of \$2.8 million. But Sprague's departure left the committee staff demoralized and committee members full of praise for their former counsel. Gushed Illinois Republican John Anderson: "He laid himself on the altar of sacrifice."

To date, no firm fruits of Sprague's early work have reached the public. Nevertheless, a rush of rumor, innuendo and unconfirmed leads has blared from the committee. The latest concerns a letter the FBI is investigating said to have been written by Oswald to a "Mr. Hunt" asking about "my position." It is dated 14 days before the Kennedy assassination. The committee's operation has outraged many Congressmen. Snarled Michigan's John Dingell: "They tell us they have persuasive evidence! What they have is a lot of crap!"

Even Richard Sprague hit a cautious note before resigning: "The only things that [the staff] can say of significance are things that are too raw and uncorroborated for us to be stating publicly."