

The Mystery Tramps in Disguise?

Add Dick Gregory, the comedian turned activist, to a long list of assassination buffs who've been sleuthing around with a set of photos taken by three press photographers at Dallas, November 22nd, 1963.

The photos show three men, short, medium and tall, being led through Dealey Plaza by two Dallas policemen to the Dallas County Sheriff's Office. The cops released the men without, apparently, getting their names. "They were just tramps," the policemen were supposed to have said, "and we let 'em go."

For years, buffs looking for "the real killers of JFK" have been trying to identify the tramps. Richard Sprague, a computer scientist from New York and former board member of the Committee to Investigate Assassinations, has maintained that one of the tramps is a Minuteman from Washington D.C. named Fred Lee Crisman. Sprague dubbed the tramp of medium height "Frenchy" and it was Sprague who fed *Ramparts* and the *New York Times* the intelligence that "Frenchy" bore a startling resemblance to a widely circulated police sketch of a man wanted for the assassination of Martin Luther King in 1968.

In 1972, after years of trying to link up the tramp photos with, mainly, anti-Castro Cubans and some of their American compatriots, the buffs started scanning photos of the actors in the Watergate scenario. Could any of the Watergate crowd have been in Dallas? And if so . . . Eureka!, they said, the short guy was E. Howard Hunt and the tall one was Frank Sturgis.

The short man does bear a resemblance to current photos of Hunt, to be sure, but the tramp photos were

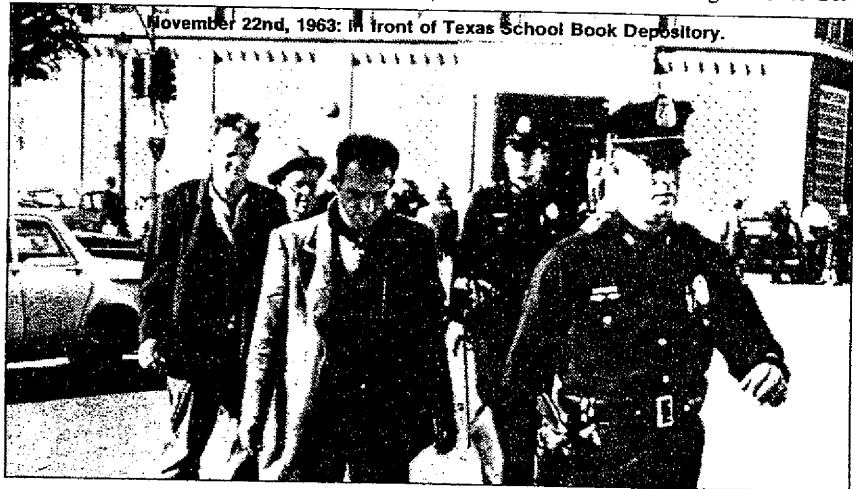
taken in 1963, when Hunt was 45, and the short tramp looks at least 55. Some facial features of the tall tramp appear to bear some similarity to Sturgis's, the shape of the nose and chin most particularly. But the gestalt is different. The tall tramp is obviously Nordic and Sturgis is obviously Latin. Furthermore, there is a great disparity in height between the tall and the short tramps. The tall tramp seems to be at least eight inches taller than the short one. Sturgis seems to be no more than two or three inches taller than Hunt.

To the buffs wanting to believe, however, the photos were too good to drop. They "proved" a CIA complicity in the plot to kill Kennedy. Underground newspapers all over the country began to reprint the tramp photos, alongside those of Hunt and Sturgis, with the blatant assertions that the tramps were Hunt and Sturgis.

Two months ago, ROLLING STONE had the tramp photos examined by the

Institute of Forensic Sciences in Oakland, California. There, criminologist Charles V. Morton measured the facial characteristics on comparison photos of Hunt and Sturgis and tramps and concluded that the tall tramp was definitely not Sturgis. The short tramp was probably not Hunt—though the details in the fuzzy photos of the short tramp were insufficient to provide Morton with an absolute basis for an opinion. However, reported Morton, "at least one definable characteristic appears to argue strongly against identity. This is the shape of the ear." According to Morton, the helix of the ear in the Hunt photos is concave and the helix of the ear of the short tramp is convex.

All this seemed somewhat superfluous in light of Hunt's angry denials to me that he was even in Dallas on November 22th, 1963. I found Hunt at the Hotel Sheraton Russell in New York in November. He told me where he was on November 22nd, 1963—in Washington, at a meeting of some CIA



Frank Sturgis



Tall tramp



Short tramp

officials who could corroborate his presence there. Hunt said he'd given their names to the FBI, which grilled him rather recently about his whereabouts during most major political crimes of the last 50 years. Hunt added: "I'd like you to tell the world I've had these FBI interviews, so that your colleagues in the media would put some pressure on the FBI to reveal the results of their investigations. Those investigations would help clear my name." Hunt promised he'd sue anyone worth suing who charged that he was in Dallas in November 1963 or part of a plot to kill JFK.

Hunt made similar disavowals on network TV and local TV shows during November 1974. Nevertheless, the tramp photos (with one of the tramps now labeled "Hunt") seem to have a life all their own, have become part of the collection of artifacts surrounding the JFK assassination mythology. Dick Gregory found the tramp photos circulating at the Assassination Information Bureau convention in early February, latched on to them (along with Robert Groden's Zapruder film blowup) and took tramp photos, Groden's blowup and Groden on the road.

Because Gregory is who he is, however, something of a folk hero who commands attention from the media, the Rockefeller Commission called Gregory to testify before it in Washington for a firsthand account of his charges. There Gregory stopped short of identifying the short tramp as Hunt but played the role of "aggrieved citizen." If this isn't Hunt, said Gregory, then the government has an obligation to tell us who it is.

—R.B.K.

