

Joe Cooper Saved Vice But Wound Up Dead After

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William H. (Joe) Cooper, good natured down-home Louisiana man, once saved the life of the Vice President of the United States.

And he spent most of a decade tracking down possible links connecting the assassination of President John F. Kennedy to the government intelligence network — particularly Naval Intelligence.

His investigation ended last Oct. 16 when the 50-year-old Cooper was found shot to death in his apartment in Baton Rouge, the home of the state capital where Gov. Huey Long was assassinated 40 years ago.

Cooper's death was officially ruled a suicide, although his wife, other relatives and friends are convinced Cooper was murdered. He enjoyed living too much to take his own life. And, a few days before his death, Cooper telephoned me, excited as usual, with what he considered new angles in his Naval Intelligence theory.

I FIRST MET Cooper last summer when we tracked down and interviewed two men who said they had been offered a bundle of money — and had turned it down — to fly two men from Dallas to Latin America on Nov. 22, 1963, the day John Kennedy was killed.

TATTLER told this story, but never before Cooper's death was the story told of how Cooper, working for government intelligence himself, headed off a plot to assassinate Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey.

The Humphrey assassination conspiracy was carried out in Louisiana, the same state where former New Orleans Dist. Atty. Jim Garrison said the conspiracy to kill John Kennedy was hatched.

Cooper filled me in on the details of the Humphrey plot during three separate interviews in the Baton Rouge area. The conspiracy was started by members of what Cooper described as "the old, original Ku Klux Klan" although, he said, he had no evidence to indicate the conspiracy was an official Klan action.

A former Baton Rouge policeman, Cooper was a paid informer for the Federal Bureau of Investigation from 1963 to 1965.

HE ATTENDED KLAN meetings in abandoned houses in the woods, abandoned

buildings in town, private homes. Once a meeting was even held in a barn.

"My government contact encouraged me to take part in Klan activities," said Cooper. "The Klan would sometimes beat somebody up, fire gunshots into somebody's house, intimidate integrated restaurants. Once 25 of us drove cars up and down the street all night long in front of an integrationist's house to intimidate him.

"The police didn't try to stop us. Hell, members of the Klan included state troopers, policemen and deputy sheriffs."

It was only natural that Cooper would learn of the plot to assassinate Hubert Humphrey when he appeared before the Louisiana AFL-CIO state convention in Baton Rouge on April 9, 1965.

Cooper was a member of the KBI — the Klan Bureau of Investigation, the Klan's answer to the FBI.

BUT AS AN FBI CONTACT, Cooper had the code name — "Lyons Bucks." He used the code name when he telephoned his FBI contact to report on Klan activities. But when he signed receipts for payments from his FBI contact, he used his real name.

One day a fellow Klan member came to him and told Cooper of the plan to assassinate

Humphrey. The man asked Cooper if he could use his intelligence contacts with the police to find out how much security would be used for Humphrey's visit. "He told me the name of the man who was to be his back-up man."

Cooper immediately called his government contact.

"This is Lyons Bucks," he said. "I need to meet with you."

Cooper met with the federal agent in an auto near the campus of Louisiana State University.

Carrying out instructions, Cooper returned to his fellow Klansman and reported the security along the route of the Vice President's motorcade would be heavy. Cooper reported he didn't know how heavy the security would be at the Jack Tar Capitol House Hotel where Humphrey would speak.

The FBI instructed Cooper to stay away from the hotel on the night Humphrey would

arrive. That night, the Klansman-spy was with other Klansmen scattering anti-Humphrey literature around the LSU campus.

Meanwhile, based on Cooper's information, the Secret Service — directly responsible for the Vice President's safety — urged him to cancel his trip to Baton Rouge.

SINCE LOUISIANA Gov. John J. McKeithen was going to be with him at all



FIVE DAYS AFTER Cooper testified before the grand jury Jim Garrison used to probe the Kennedy assassination, the steering post on Cooper's car came loose and his auto crashed into a culvert. Cooper's back was broken in three places, and his wife sustained serious injuries. Cooper went to his grave convinced it was no accident.

times on the Baton Rouge visit, Humphrey insisted on making the trip.

The Secret Service sought the cooperation of Victor Bussie, president of the State AFL-CIO, a friend of Humphrey's.

Cooper had heard that an effort would also be made to assassinate Bussie. Bussie's home indeed was bombed two years later.

Cooper had been able to supply the FBI with the names of only two men to be involved in the attempt on Humphrey's life.

Agents, using miniature cameras, obtained pictures of the two men, but didn't arrest them before Humphrey's visit.

Cooper said the Secret Service obviously feared others would be sent in their place.

ON THE NIGHT OF the Humphrey appearance at the hotel, the ballroom was filled with FBI-Secret Service undercover spies and trusted union men serving as sergeants at arms.

The entrance to the ballroom was arranged so all visitors could be observed. Therefore, the would-be-triggerman was spotted immediately. He was a union member and had a ticket to get into the ballroom.

Undercover men serving as sergeants-at-arms escorted the man to a seat in the rear of the ballroom. Two FBI agents sat down in front of him. Secret Service men sat on both sides. Two others sat down behind the man.

Humphrey arrived in Baton Rouge and rode with the governor in a limousine to the governor's mansion. Later they rode together to the hotel. Security forces were everywhere on the routes, covering the motorcade with high-powered rifles from the roofs of building.

Humphrey and McKeithen arrived at the hotel, entered the ballroom and walked onto the speaker's platform.

THE GUNMAN THEN stood and reached for the pistol stuck in his belt under his coat. The federal agents grabbed him and pulled him out a kitchen door.

The second man on the assassination team was also grabbed and pulled from the room. He had no gun on him, but there was a gun in his car parked outside.

From the men, federal agents learned the name of a third that was in on the scheme. He had been in the convention hall, but backed out and left before Humphrey arrived.

The men were questioned, but were never charged. Cooper said the FBI told him there was not sufficient evidence.

"I know this guy would have killed Humphrey," Cooper said. "He was a crack shot. He could part your hair without touching your scalp."

After the men were arrested, Humphrey went on with his speech. The agents handled everything so smoothly the others at the convention didn't even know there had been an assassination attempt.

Cooper said the men had wanted to assassinate Humphrey because he was an

integrationist. Feelings about desegregation were still high in the Deep South in 1965.

NO WORD LEAKED out about the assassination plot until two years later when the New Orleans States Item printed part of the story. They described an attempt on Humphrey's life by a "right-wing organization" but did not mention the Klan. And, of course, there was no mention of Cooper's participation in the case.

Within a few years, all three of the men

picked up in the assassination plot were dead. One was shot to death by his wife. Another was killed when a metal door fell on him. The third, a young man, died of a heart attack.

Cooper was paid an average of \$200 a month as a federal informer.

People close to Cooper knew of his efforts in the Humphrey case.

"**THERE IS ABSOLUTELY** no question in my mind that Joe saved Hubert Humphrey's life," Cooper's lawyer, Emile W. Weber, told me after Cooper's death.

Four months before Cooper's death, the policeman, ex-government intelligence man, private detective, assassination researcher, wrote to me with information about the Klan and similar right-wing organizations:

"There are a few of these birds left in Baton Rouge and in Mississippi that would kill me," he noted. "I have rode with some of the bad ones and know what they can and will do."

Cooper explained how groups such as the KKK and the American Nazi Party have been infiltrated by the various governmental intelligence agencies.

"The FBI, CIA, the IRS and the Secret Service may each have representatives in a single group - all the spies unknown to each other," he said.

The disclosures since Watergate have proved that Cooper was not exaggerating.

AN EXAMPLE: The New York Times disclosed on May 20, 1973, that one of the most militant and outspoken members of the radical Weathermen organization during its peak period of bombing and other violence - Larry Grantwohl of Cincinnati - was an informer and agent provocateur of the FBI.

In 1966, the year after the Humphrey affair the House Un-American Activities Committee in Ohio was hearing testimony that an Ohio "grand empress" of the Ku Klux Klan, had plotted to kill both President Kennedy and President Lyndon B. Johnson.

And the Warren Commission volumes were revealing other bits and pieces of threats by Klan members against Kennedy that had come into federal agencies shortly before Kennedy's death.

But Cooper, was off on his own Kennedy conspiracy investigation by then - and his efforts involved Naval Intelligence, not necessarily the Far Right civilian groups.

THE DETECTIVE started a project that would last nine years - putting together huge packets of strange coincidences he felt pointed to Naval Intelligence possibly being involved in the Kennedy assassination.

At the time Kennedy was President, Cooper was as against Kennedy's civil rights policies as any typical Southerner. But his political views were tempered by a strong sense of patriotism and an instinct as a top researcher and investigator.