

JFK—history of

By JOSEPH VOLZ

WASHINGTON — To millions of schoolchildren across the country, the photo in Wednesday's papers of the Kennedy family's visiting the late President's gravesite was "just history." For such children, some of whom weren't even born yet when the late President was shot down in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963, learning about the Kennedy assassination is not much different from learning about the Lincoln assassination.

Yet the Kennedy assassination is different, because the House Assassinations Committee is still striving — secretly, after initial public embarrassment — to rewrite the history books.

While the assassination may be "just history," the key question facing the committee is still very much alive: Was there a conspiracy that eluded the Warren Commission in its findings a year after the murder?

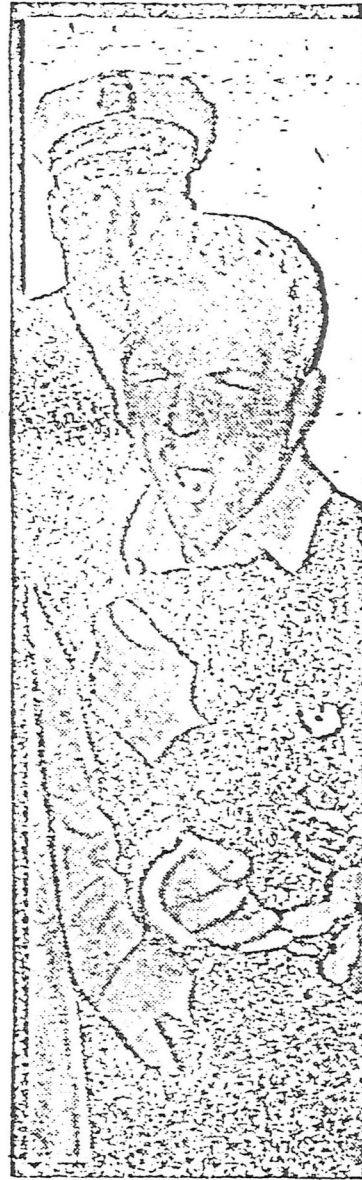
Since things have been so secret at committee offices in a ramshackle building at the foot of Capitol Hill, reporters have not been able to find out whether Robert Blakey, the committee's chief counsel, and his staff have been making any progress. But a general picture of the panel's efforts in recent months has been pieced together from knowledgeable sources.

The committee has culled over thousands of FBI and CIA documents, some not reviewed by the Warren Commission in its original investigation.

The FBI, in fact, will release 80,000 pages of investigative documents to the public on Dec. 7. But committee sources say that although the papers will offer a glimpse into the details of the FBI probe they will not add any substantial new evidence to refute the conclusion that Lee Harvey Oswald was the lone killer.

"There's nothing earth shattering in the FBI material," a source said.

Some committee investigators, although not reaching any conclusion on the Kennedy killing, have succeeded in confusing themselves. One committee staffer said: "Some days I'm convinced that Oswald and Oswald alone did it;



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History and current events



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you get new leads and access to information and you're not sure." In interim committee report, due in six weeks, will not reach any conclusion on the killing, but it may have something to say about the thoroughness — or lack of it — of the FBI investigation and the Warren Commission.

The panel is not ruling out any murder theories, including these:

Mafia hitmen killed Kennedy in retaliation for Attorney General Robert

F. Kennedy's prosecution of the Teamsters Union boss Jimmy Hoffa, who has since disappeared after allegedly crossing the Mafia.

• Anti-Castro Cubans killed Kennedy because he stopped U.S. air support to the Bay of Pigs invasion force in April 1961, aborting their effort to depose Fidel Castro.

• Right-wing Texas moguls paid for Kennedy's assassination in anger at his liberal policies.

But all of these theories have been

around virtually since Kennedy died. And there is no indication that the committee has developed any solid evidence from scores of witnesses — some of whom have changed their testimony from appearance to appearance before the panel — to support any of the theories.

Because the panel operates in unprecedented near-total secrecy, there is no way to know how capable Blakey and his staff are. But the secrecy has prevented sensational witnesses of limited credibility from turning the committee into a public circus through their testimony.

There has been no repeat of the Willem Oltmans embarrassment. Oltmans, who says he is a Dutch TV reporter, came out of a committee hearing room last March, to tell reporters that a Soviet emigre geologist, the late George de Mohrenschildt, said he had been part of a conspiracy that included not only Oswald, but also H.L. Hunt, the late oil millionaire, and the CIA and FBI.

Committee critics began to wonder whether Congress was not giving an air of legitimacy to crackpots who had long since faded from public attention. That's when the committee submerged into secrecy.

Blakey became chief counsel following the embarrassing internal struggle several months ago that resulted in the resignations of Chief Counsel Richard Sprague and Chairman Henry Gonzalez (D-Tex.). Blakey has held one press conference to date — to announce to the press that there would be no more press conferences.

From the way things look now, however, when the committee resurfaces in public hearings next year, it likely will add little more than a footnote to our children's history books. Something along the lines that, although Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone, the CIA and FBI, both of which had some limited contact with Oswald before the shooting, might have been more diligent and more cooperative. Conceivably, the assassination might have been prevented.

Joseph Volz, a Washington correspondent of *The News*, has been covering the Kennedy assassination probe: