

November 13, 1974

Dear Vincent,

Forgive this intrusion into your retirement from the investigation of the assassination of President Kennedy. Late developments turned my thoughts to something you once said to me and gave it point which it seemed to lack before.

The National Tatler, published in Chicago, has been conducting an investigation into the assassination, it says, for the last ten years. From time to time the Tatler runs articles on that theme which are a mixture of sensational allegations, fact, and inaccuracy. Most serious researchers and investigators discount the Tatler accounts if they read or hear about them.

But the November 24, 1974 issue, Vol. 21, No. 21, should not be ignored. Reporter John Moulder, with whom I have ~~initiated~~ initiated a correspondence, reports the death in Baton Rouge, La., of a policeman, William H. (Joe) Cooper, "shot in the face while lying in bed" in his apartment in the morning of October 16, 1974. Cooper was "shot once in the right cheek. An autopsy showed the bullet traveled upwards, the slug lodging in the top of his skull. Cooper was right-handed. A 38-caliber pistol was found on the left side of his body. The weapon...owned by Cooper, was partially covered by a cloth. Cooper's body was covered by bed linen, as if he had been sleeping..." His wife "heard a shot and went to the bedroom...Later she discovered that the front door of the apartment was open. Earlier it had been locked." The Tatler reports the Coopers lived in domestic tranquility and Mrs. Cooper is not a suspect.

This account, which leaves out many essential details, is as puzzling as are the accounts of the Kennedy, Oswald, Malcolm X, and King murders, and the attempt on Wallace. But that is not what interests me most at the moment. According to the Tatler "Cooper, a World War II hero, much decorated policeman and former FBI informant, devoted the last ten years of his life to probing the maze of mystery surrounding the John Kennedy assassination. There had been a number of other attempts on "Cooper's life, "the most serious one coming in 1968 when the steering post on his car came loose, causing a crash" in which his back was broken in three places," his daughter's spleen was ruptured, and his wife suffered a serious head injury.

This crash occurred, according to the Tatler, one week before Cooper was "scheduled to present his information to the Orleans Parish Grand Jury on July 9, 1968 - in the midst of the Garrison assassination probe." Cooper "pursued a theory that the Kennedy assassination was plotted on board a naval aircraft carrier in August 1963, three months before Kennedy was slain...Cooper was convinced that Lee Harvey Oswald...was a naval intelligence agent."

In July of this year "Cooper assisted this reporter (Moulder) in tracking down two pilots who were offered \$25,000 each to fly two mystery men from Dallas to an undisclosed location in Mexico on November 22, 1963." One of the pilots is Bill Kemp, a "World War II fighter pilot, husband of Maxine Kemp, one of Garrison's witnesses. "The other pilot who received the offer agreed to talk ~~on the condition that he would not be named~~

on the condition that he would not be identified in the story. He said he feared for his life."

The Tatler story emphasizes that a letter received in Chicago from Cooper a day before he died in Baton Rouge reports the Tatler stories on the assassination "has some people stirred up." The allegedly contained "information on the activities of a Louisiana Mafia member linked by Cooper's investigation to a number of key assassination figures. The letter also gave details on an international gun runner, likewise associated with a number of key assassination figures." The Tatler promises future publication of this information after checking and running down leads. Also in an accompanying piece, "Assassination Death Toll Now Stands at 24," the Tatler includes the name, "Nancy Rich." Remember her wonderful story? Do you know how she died. Tatler does not say.

Now, if I am not mistaken you were in New Orleans working with Garrison in 1968. Was Garrison working with Cooper? Was his office? What of the conflicting attributions of source of the assassination? Did Garrison's accusation the CIA was primarily responsible for the assassination preclude cooperation with Cooper who, according to the Tatler, indicted naval brass? Who supported Cooper? Why has the world not heard of him before? Why didn't Garrison call him as a witness? Did you know of Cooper? Meet him? Know anything about him? Can you shed any light on Cooper's life and activity? What about Kemp? Is the discovery of Kemp phoney?

More important than all this, however, at least to me, are the references by Tatler to naval involvement in the Kennedy assassination. Unless there is convincing evidence of Oswald as a naval intelligence agent, the idea can be dismissed as even less tenuous than the theory of his being an FBI or CIA agent. In any case, his being an agent is a red or, if you prefer, a white, herring. The suggestion of naval involvement in the assassination, however, gives some point to the mysterious role and treatment by the Commission of an important nonwitness, Kennedy's physician, Rear Admiral Burkley. Do you know why his ridiculous deposition, in which he paints himself a fatuous, sentimentally romantic ninny, was accepted by the Commission at face value; and why he was not called as a witness? Why, after asking for and receiving an official death certificate for Kennedy in Dallas, which he took with him to Washington, he made out, a few days later, a second death certificate which was not included in the Commission's Report and Hearing transcripts and exhibits; and which came to light only recently? Could he have been a living conspiratorial link between Dallas and Washington? Between assassination and autopsy? Why was he concerned to collect the entire medical "protocol" in the assassination, including the Dallas doctors' notes?

Beyond Burkley is the aircraft carrier, identified by Cooper as the Shangri La and its guest list which he was investigating for reasons which, we must hope, Tatler will make public. And the date - August, 1963. That's an important date.

On August 31, 1963, at a meeting in the State Department, two opposed policies for South Vietnam were debated. A so-called

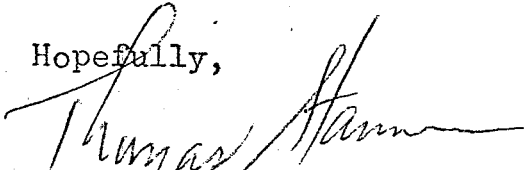
"political" faction, representing Ambassador Lodge's and Kennedy's hardening view, spoke for "the decision to get out honorably," before Diem threw the US out. Secretary Rusk, speaking for the so-called "military" faction, thought "it would be far better... to start on the firm basis of two things - that we will not pull out of Vietnam until the war is won, and that we will not run a coup. Mr. McNamara expressed agreement with this view. Mr. Rusk ...then asked the Vice President if he had any contribution to make. The Vice President (LBJ) stated that he agreed with Secretary Rusk's conclusions, completely; ...he had never really seen a genuine alternative to Diem. He stated that from both a practical and a political viewpoint, it would be a disaster to pull out; that we should stop playing cops and robbers and...once again go about winning the war." The quotations are from the the minutes of the meeting taken by General Krulak as included in Peter Dale Scott's essay, Vietnamization and the Drama of the Pentagon Papers, which together with 14 other essays, some documents, and an appendix, constitute the contents of Volume Five of the Senator Gravel Edition of the Pentagon Papers (page 221, Beacon Press, 1972).

Thus, whatever Johnson's participation or lack of it in the conspiracy to remove the head of state, it was known to the conspirators in August 1963 that Kennedy's successor in office was committed to escalation of the war in southeast Asia. Perhaps Cooper found material implicating naval brass in the political murder conspiracy. Perhaps Burkley was given a role in the affair. Incidentally, Scott described Robert Kennedy as his brother's trouble shooter on South Vietnam and described his opposition to Rusk's "firm" bases of policy, a point which should be borne in mind in recalling that Robert Kennedy was killed at the moment when his bid for presidential power had reached the threshold of success.

All this brought to the forefront of my mind something you said years ago. I do not recall the exact words. But the gist of it was a suggestion that the possible connection of Secretary of the Navy, Fred Korth, with the Kennedy assassination be investigated. I do not think you explained why and I don't think I asked any questions. At the time it may have seemed far fetched, a will o' the wisp, perhaps like the fruitless pursuit of Baganov. But I have not forgotten and now the Cooper story may give it point. Is there anything you know or suspect which can or should be followed up, that you can and will tell me about ex-Secretary of the Navy Korth? I would appreciate it.

Something else I have not forgotten - your charming wife. I wish her well.

Hopefully,

  
Thomas Stamm

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*copies to Wecht  
Ruth Paine  
not Weisberg*