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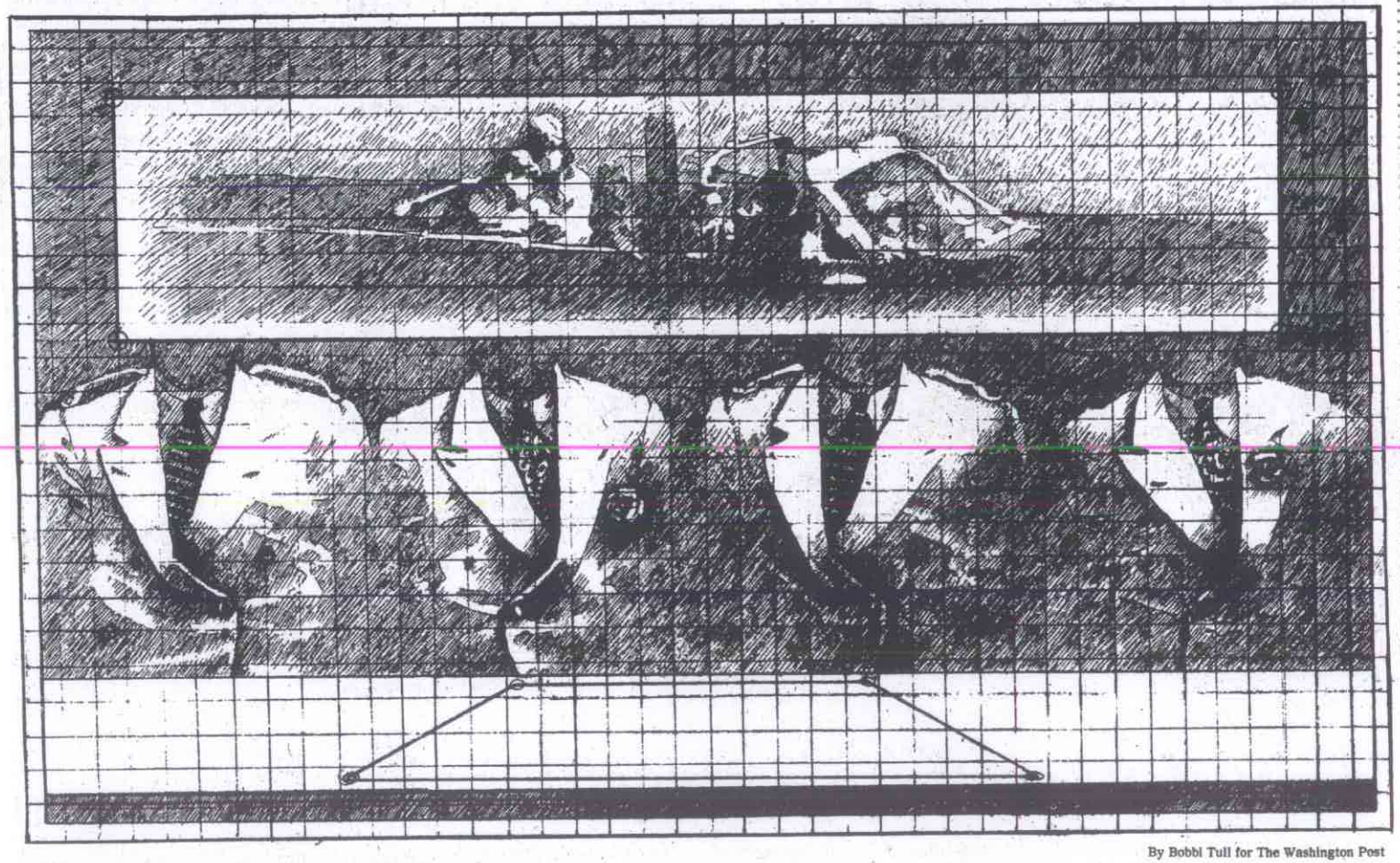
JFK and the CIA: Dallas Revisited

By Robert Sam Anson

This is an excerpt from "They've Killed the President!", published last week by Bantam Books, Inc., ©1975 by Robert Sam Anson. Anson, national political correspondent for New Times magazine and a public television producer in New York, is a former Time correspondent and author of "McGovern: A Biography."



By Bobbi Tull for The Washington Post

POOR HOWARD HUNT. After Watergate people were ready to blame him for just about everything, and considering his background — spy, burglar, devotee of plots and assassinations — it wasn't really surprising.

The cruelest charge, of course, was that he and his friend Frank Sturgis (who Hunt said wasn't all that good a friend, since they had only met in 1972, although Sturgis put the beginning of their acquaintance in 1961) had been two of the "tramps" arrested by the Dallas police behind the grassy knoll shortly after the assassination.

The accusation received considerable publicity, especially after comedian Dick Gregory repeated it on national television. David Belin and the Rockefeller CIA commission went to great pains to prove there was nothing to it. Belin really didn't mind the effort; indeed he was delighted, since the accusation was so patently preposterous. Photo experts were called in, measurements taken, witnesses interviewed, and in the end the Rockefeller commission was able to report what virtually everyone knew from the beginning: whoever the "tramps" were, they were not Howard Hunt and Frank Sturgis. The height was all wrong. So was the age. As a matter of fact, except to Gregory and a few others, they didn't look like Hunt and Sturgis at all.

Such, however, typifies the investigation of whether the Central Intelligence Agency was involved in the murder of President Kennedy. There was, there has never been, any investigation at all.

The CIA was an inevitable suspect. Kennedy and the agency had long been at loggerheads. The CIA's failure to correctly estimate the resistance of Castro's forces at the Bay of Pigs was only one of a number of incidents. Almost on the eve of the missile crisis the agency, without the President's authority, pulled off one of its patented anti-Castro capers which had at first amused Kennedy. Kennedy did not find this one funny; nor did the Russians.

What the men from Langley did was sabotage a shipment of Cuban sugar bound for the Soviet Union. The opportunity presented itself in late August, 1962, when a British freighter filled with sugar bound for Russia sailed into San Juan harbor for repairs. The CIA managed to contaminate 14,000 of some 80,000 sacks of sugar by injecting them with an allegedly harmless substance that would give the sugar a foul taste. The purpose was to undermine the Russians' confidence in Cuba's chief export crop. When Kennedy found out what had happened he warned the Russians, prevented the ship from sailing, and excoriated the agency for creating a "dreadful precedent for chemical sabotage." The Russians, who were busily installing missiles in Cuba, strongly protested the incident in a series of diplomatic notes.

After the missile crisis and the growing rapprochement with Castro and the Soviet Union, the agency defied Kennedy's orders to turn off exile raids on the Cuban homeland — just as it had prepared to defy him at the Bay of Pigs. Before the invasion the agency prepared a plan for the operation to go forward *even if* Kennedy got cold feet at the last moment and tried to stop it.

The President's orders had also been disobeyed in Vietnam, where, three weeks before his own death, Ngo Dinh Diem had been overthrown and murdered, apparently with the active complicity of the CIA.

The disobedience, at whatever level, enraged the President. At the time of his death he was planning a full-scale review of the agency's activities. He did not like being embarrassed, and the agency embarrassed him not only in Cuba and in Vietnam but in the Soviet Union, where in 1963 the Russians arrested a Yale history professor and charged him with committing espionage against the Soviet Union. Kennedy, after receiving assurances from the agency that the professor was "clean," had personally appealed to Khrushchev to release him, and Khrushchev, as a gesture of his esteem for Kennedy, had agreed. But when the professor returned and met with Kennedy in the Oval Office, he reportedly admitted that he had indeed been spying for the agency. Kennedy was livid.

The President had already sacked CIA director Allen Dulles and his deputy, Richard Bissell, and installed his own brother to honcho the agency's covert operations, but apparently more shake-ups were required. His desire to splinter the CIA into a thousand pieces and scatter it to the winds did not escape the attention of the agency.

THE AGENCY had grievances against the President as well. Hunt was not the only CIA man to believe that Kennedy had betrayed the agency and its people at the

In a new book, "They've Killed the President!", Robert Sam Anson argues the case for reopening the investigation into the assassination of President Kennedy. This excerpt focuses on Anson's contention that "the melding together of American intelligence and organized crime is the key to understanding John Kennedy's murder."

Bay of Pigs. The bitterness was increased by what Hunt termed Kennedy's "heaping guilt on the CIA." Even John McCone, whom Kennedy had appointed to succeed Dulles and who was supposedly his ally, deeply disagreed with the President's moves to normalize relations with Cuba.

The agency was also fearful of a whole range of Kennedy initiatives that grew out of his American University speech in the summer of 1963, from arms control to the banning of atmospheric testing of nuclear weapons to accommodation with the Communists in Laos to the reevaluation of the entire American commitment to Southeast Asia. Shortly before his death Kennedy had approved the first withdrawal from South Vietnam of American advisers. A thousand advisers were to be called home by the end of the year — a token number perhaps, but a clear sign of where Kennedy was heading. On his return from Texas he had said he would conduct a full-scale policy review of U.S. relations with South Vietnam. One of the first moves was meeting with Ambassador to Saigon Henry Cabot Lodge. He and Kennedy were to have lunched at the President's Virginia estate on Nov. 24. CIA liked none of it.

Indeed John Kennedy was one of the agency's opponents, potentially its most dangerous adversary. The CIA had a motive. It had the means. It had the experience. It had the disposition. The agency could have killed him, and far better than anyone else covered its crime. But did it? *If* Lee Harvey Oswald was the assassin (or a member of an assassination conspiracy), and *if* he was still an intelligence agent (as he certainly seemed to have been during his sojourn in the Soviet Union) on Nov. 22, 1963, and *if*, finally, he was acting with the agency's approbation when he killed Kennedy, then, of course, the answer is self-evident. But there are a number of hurdles to cross before reaching that conclusion.

It is by no means certain, in the first place, that Oswald was an assassin. Much of the evidence, along with his casual behavior immediately after the shots were fired, points to the contrary. However cool and calculating killers are supposed to be, it is difficult to imagine someone who has just shot the President of the United States pausing to drink a Coke, then strolling outside in no evident hurry, getting on a bus, getting off, hailing a cab, offering it up to a little old lady, and finally, as the police and FBI closed in, making good his escape, which turns out to be to a local movie theater.

Oswald's excuse for "fleeing" the scene of the crime was that he thought that, because of the assassination, work would be suspended for the rest of the day. The assumption was not illogical. Work, as it happens, was suspended for the rest of the day, and besides Oswald 11 other workers left the Book Depository after the assassination. There may have been a conspiracy, but it wasn't *that* big.

Some critics have found Oswald's going to the movie theater suspicious, a sign perhaps that Oswald was an intelligence agent. George O'Toole, a former CIA man who suggests that the FBI may have been involved in Kennedy's killing (a not surprising contention, considering the bureau's and the agency's mutual detestation), points out that movie theaters are a favored rendezvous for agents.

Oswald's apparently having been an agent does not necessarily mean he was a CIA man. Army intelligence, in particular, has nearly as large a budget as the agency, and more than three times as many agents. Far better than the CIA, Army intelligence was in a position to know the arrangements of the President's trip to Dallas, as well as the security precautions the Secret Service was taking to ensure his safety. Chronically shorthanded, the Secret Service worked with Army intelligence as a matter of routine.

ALMOST SURELY Oswald was an intelligence agent of some sort. While in Dallas, New Orleans and Mexico City he was in close, even intimate contact with other intelligence agents or contract employees of the CIA. On Nov. 22, however, he could just as well have been operating *without* the agency's sanction, or, though this seems less likely, without its prior knowledge. There are numerous instances when the CIA has lost control of its own people, and, one presumes (though the agency has yet to admit it), when one of its agents has been turned against it.

Another possibility is that Oswald was "taken over" by an extremist faction within the agency, or a group close enough to it to be aware of Oswald's background.

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Again, there are a number of cases when this has happened, when individual agents have acted not only contrary to the orders of the President but those of the leadership of CIA. One longtime observer of the agency, journalist Frank McCulloch, says:

"That sort of thing is inevitable, given the sort of people the CIA recruits. CIA looks for guys who are bright, tough, naturally competitive. Ideology does not mean nearly as much as the instinct to win. If you take one of these guys...and give him a job, well, he's going to do it, whatever it takes. Maybe there are things the agency doesn't want him to do — tells him he can't do. But he does them anyway. How will the agency ever find out? It's just part of winning. These guys are trained to win."

Cuba produced that feeling in many agents, of whom Howard Hunt is merely the best known. The cause of the exiles came in time to be the cause of the Americans who worked with them.

THE COMING to power of Fidel Castro was a disaster not only for U.S. foreign policy but for organized crime. The mob was anxious to see Castro removed from the scene at the earliest possible moment. So was the CIA.

During the agency's planning of the Bay of Pigs invasion one of the sources it turned to for intelligence information on the disposition of Castro's forces was the mob, which at the time still maintained a considerable apparatus on the island.

Before and after the invasion the mob was also trying to secure Castro's assassination, sometimes with the agency's help, sometimes without it. Frank Sturgis, who as a casino operator in Havana had lines to both the CIA and the mob, was twice approached shortly after the Cuban revolution by organized crime figures wishing to enlist him as an assassin. Sturgis declined, but reported the conversations to CIA friends in Havana.

The CIA itself had been talking of eliminating Castro since the closing days of the Eisenhower administration, and Sturgis' report may have freshened interest in the project. A mob hit rather than an assassination by the agency itself would provide the CIA with what was known in the trade as "plausible deniability" if, as ultimately turned out, the attempt went askew.

By early 1961 the agency and organized crime were deep into discussions on how best to eliminate their common foe. Reports vary on how the initial contacts were made. What the stories agree on is that after protracted discussion John Roselli, the suavely vicious Mafia *capo* of Las Vegas, agreed to recruit a team of hit men for the CIA.

All of this was unknown to all but one of the men of the Warren Commission in 1964. The exception was Allen Dulles, and he was hardly talking. The mob, after all, worked for him.

Even now the full truth about the CIA and the mob is far from clear. What the few brief glimpses down the corridor have provided is chilling enough: the two most secret and powerful organizations in America working hand and glove in a relationship so intimate that for all practical purposes there has ceased to be a distinction between what is done in the name of intelligence and what is done in the name of crime. Everything, even murder, comes together under a single heading: "the national interest."

THE MELDING together of American intelligence and organized crime is the key to understanding John Kennedy's murder. Without that understanding the conspiracy is like the jumbled pieces of a puzzle, each of them odd-shaped, impossible to connect. But lay in that keystone and suddenly what has all seemed so bizarre for so many years makes terrifying sense.

One way or another all the major figures connected to the assassination are also linked to the agency and the mob.

There is Oswald, the apparent agent, in constant contact with other CIA men, many of whom have their own ties to the mob. He lists as the address for his fictitious pro-Castro organization a building whose tenants include both mob and intelligence figures. After the assassination a large quantity of Oswald's literature turns up in the office of one of those tenants, Guy Banister, a private investigator employed by New Orleans crime boss Carlos Marcello and a man who in the past worked on CIA operations. One of his close friends in New Orleans is David Ferrie, an identified agent who also works for the mob. Another reported associate is Clay Shaw, like Ferrie an identified agent.

After the assassination Oswald is shot to death by Jack Ruby, a man with numerous connections to Cosa Nostra figures, who is also involved with Cuba and Cuban exiles. When a story arises that Oswald has met with a prominent exile figure to plan the assassination, the man who conveniently appears to debunk it turns out to be a reported gunrunner for an agency-backed organization. Later, an Oswald look-alike is found to be one of the leaders of an exile organization reportedly backed by both the agency and the mob.

Finally, when the pressures for a new investigation of the assassination are boiling over, the man who announces he has solved the case is a district attorney who by his own admission has numerous contacts with Cosa Nostra figures. During the trial he dismisses all references to the Cosa Nostra and fixes blame on an odd-lot assortment of conspirators. The trial ends in farce and the prospects for a new investigation are obliterated. In the process the CIA gains sympathy.

Just how many coincidences can be piled atop one another before one has to wonder? One especially wonders when the groups involved are neither Boy Scouts nor, as Jim Garrison once put it, "retired circus clowns." They are two secret violent societies whose fates are inextricably intertwined. Many things bring them together. One of them is Cuba. Another is hatred of John Kennedy.

Few people know of their alliance, and only one is in a position to do anything about it. He has sworn that he will. Before he can, he is murdered in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963.

Coincidence.