

Investigator Ties Navy Intelligence to JFK Killing; Findings Almost Cost Him His Life

A private investigator and former policeman has spent nine years trying to prove a contention that naval intelligence was involved in the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

The detective, William H. (Joe) Cooper, 50, of Baton Rouge, La., also a former paid FBI informant, may have put together a thick packet of bizarre coincidences. But his efforts almost cost him his life.

Cooper, his wife, and daughter were almost killed in a mysterious auto wreck just a few days before he was scheduled to make his information known to a New Orleans grand jury investigating Kennedy's assassination.

Like many Southerners, Cooper admits that he was against President Kennedy's programs in the early 1960s.

"But I love my country, and murdering the President is not the way to change it," he told TATTLEER.

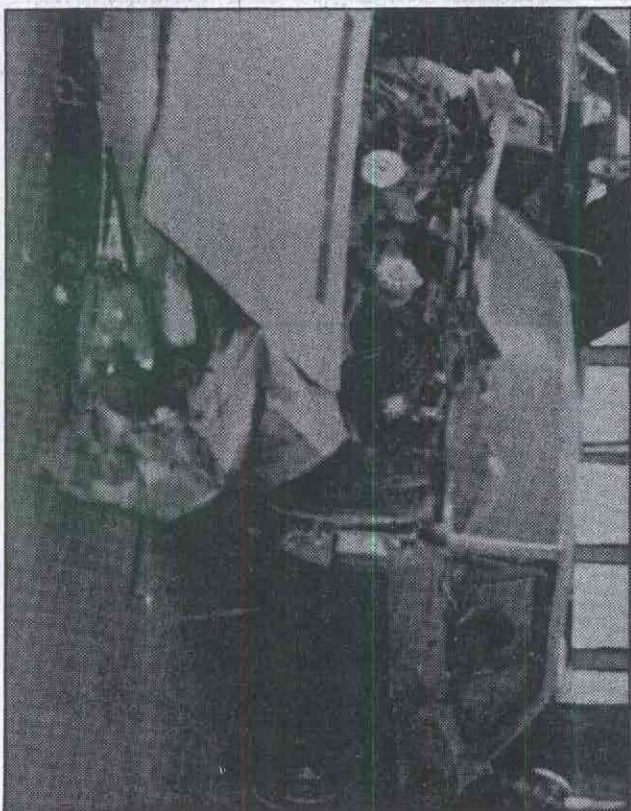
He said he is convinced that Lee Harvey Oswald, whom the Warren Commission named as the sole assassin of President Kennedy, was a naval intelligence agent. Assassination investigators have frequently tried to link Oswald with a military or intelligence organization. Former New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison, who conducted his own probe of Kennedy's death, believed Oswald was in the employ of the CIA and the assassination was a conspiracy.

COOPER, WHO served almost 10 years with the Baton Rouge police department and earlier as a law enforcement officer at Palatka and Fort Walton, Fla., is a former Navy man himself. He was on the U.S.S. Smith when a Japanese plane rammed it, killing 38 men Oct. 26, 1942. Cooper received a presidential citation.

Cooper believes a week-long cruise aboard the aircraft carrier Shangri La in August 1963 — three months before Kennedy's death on Nov. 22 — involved an intelligence operation. As a policeman in the mid-1960s, Cooper

By JOHN MOULDER

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THIS IS WHAT'S left of Joe Cooper's car. Cooper and his family were almost killed in the mysterious wreck just days before he was to testify before a grand jury on his findings.

nine men aboard the carrier, but the names of the other two – provided by Navy – turned out to be aliases. When Cooper persisted in trying to learn their identities through official channels, he received a visit from naval intelligence. Providing no new information to Cooper, the intelligence agent wanted to know why the policeman was interested in the cruise.

THE GUESTS ON the trip were sponsored by then-Secretary of the Navy Fred Korth of Fort Worth. Korth had succeeded John Connally, also from Fort Worth, after Connally resigned the cabinet post to seek the governorship of Texas.

Korth, incidentally, knew the Oswald family before Lee Oswald, an ex-Marine who had once defected to Russia, was accused of killing Kennedy, Korth's boss. In fact, Korth had represented Edwin Ekdahl, a former husband of Oswald's mother, Marguerite Oswald, in a divorce suit.

Oswald had also routinely corresponded with Navy Secretary Connally's office on questions about his Marine discharge. After his arrest, the names of both Korth and Connally were found in Oswald's address book.

Korth resigned as Secretary of the Navy on Oct. 11, 1963, amidst the political furor over the controversial TFX aircraft – which would

made many queries from the Navy Department about the guests aboard the Atlantic cruise, advertised as being to observe maneuvers and air operations of the carrier. He obtained the identities of seven of the

PROBER WAS A TOP COP

William H. (Joe) Cooper, 50, is an investigator with an outstanding law enforcement record and a unique ability to



Joe Cooper in uniform.

solve the most difficult cases with tenacious detail work.

For many years, he served on police departments in Florida and Louisiana. As a member of the Baton Rouge, La., police force, he received two departmental citations – one as the year's "most observant policeman."

In 1964 and 1965, Cooper was a paid undercover contact for the FBI and has served as a special investigator for the Baton Rouge grand jury.

His independent investigation into the assassination of President John F. Kennedy has been carried out, off and on, for almost a decade.

Like many other independent and official assassination investigators, Cooper has become intrigued by the paradoxical contacts and associations of such Kennedy probe figures as Lee Harvey Oswald and Jack Ruby.

His painstaking research has opened up entirely new lines of investigation.

During World War II, he served four years aboard the naval destroyers USS Smith, USS Saterlee and USS Frank E. Evans. He was aboard the USS Smith when a Japanese plane struck it, killing 58 people on Oct. 26, 1942. He received a presidential citation for his service.

Cooper is married and has four daughters. They live in Baton Rouge.

later become the F111 fighter plane used in the Vietnam war. General Dynamics, in Korth's hometown, finally received the \$6.5-billion TFX contract after Lyndon Johnson became President.

THE SEVEN Shangri La guests the Navy identified for Cooper are business or political leaders in the New Orleans-Baton Rouge area.

One of them - by perhaps still another strange coincidence - had worked for the same insurance company with Lee Harvey Oswald's father. Still another man on the cruise was a close friend of Dallas law enforcement officials who investigated Kennedy's assassination. Still another had family connections with a local American Nazi Party leader. Oswald had at least some interest in the Nazi Party. He had written the names of Nazi chiefs Lincoln Rockwell and Daniel Burros in his address book. Both are now dead - Rockwell by an ex-Marine; Burros by his own hand.

A public affairs officer for the USS Shangri La provided Cooper with a list of nine men aboard the cruise when Cooper was with the Palatka, Fla., police department.

When he followed up the communications with requests for more information about two of the names - Adolp Vermont Jr. and

William Craver Jr. - Cooper was referred from one department to another and finally to the Pentagon. There was no record of the two men. The final correspondence from the assistant U.S. Navy chief of information was:

"WE REGRET THAT after an intensive search we are unable to locate the names in any of our files. Unfortunately, there is no other way that we could track down this information for you."

Cooper asked on July 9, 1968, to testify before the New Orleans grand jury about his research into Kennedy's death - research that had led him throughout the country.

Five days later, the steering post came loose on his auto and it crashed into a culvert. Cooper's back was broken in three places. His daughter had a ruptured spleen. His wife had a serious head injury.

Hospitalized, he wasn't able to keep his date with the grand jury.

"I could never prove the steering had been tampered with, but I never believed it was an accident," Cooper told TATTLEER.

HE SAID HE feared for his life after the "accident."

"But I have gotten to the point that I don't care anymore. Somebody needs to get to the bottom of this."



ACCORDING TO COOPER, former Secretary of the Navy Fred Korth (shown at left with then Secretary of Defense McNamara and President Kennedy) knew Lee Harvey Oswald's family quite well long before Oswald was charged with JFK's assassination.

Tattler Uncovers Escape Plan for JFK's Assassins

(Continued from Page 1.)

GARRISON CONTENTS that Kennedy's murder was part of a right-wing conspiracy originated in Louisiana.

Part of his contention was that Oswald was in Jackson and Clinton, La., in August of 1963 with Clay Shaw and David Ferrie. Ferrie, an investigator for New Orleans Mafia boss Carlos Marcello, died mysteriously just after Garrison's probe was made public in 1967. Shaw, a New Orleans businessman, was tried and acquitted of conspiracy charges.

Oswald was more probably in the Jackson-Clinton area to claim the body of his aunt, Pearl Whitaker, who died on Aug. 15, 1963, in the state hospital where Mrs. Kemp worked.

Kemp and the other man who was made the flight offer were located by a TATTLEER reporter through the help of William H. (Joe) Cooper, a Baton Rouge private investigator and former police officer. Cooper has been independently investigating the Kennedy assassination for nine years.

KEMP AND HIS former friend said they went to Dallas from Louisiana together because they needed jobs and knew the defense plant was hiring many people.

Kemp's former friend, a 45-year-old businessman, would talk to TATTLEER at length only on the agreement that his name would not be publicized.

He said he feared for his life, since many people who have been connected to the assassination probe have died in deaths ruled murder, accidental, suicide or from natural causes.

Sitting on the patio of his home in a fashionable section of Baton Rouge, the man, who now is engaged in various business ventures, told a TATTLEER reporter and Cooper the name of the man who proposed the flight.

TATTLEER is withholding his name because of the on-going efforts of this publication's probe into Kennedy's death.

Several days before Kennedy was assassinated, the businessman said, the fellow employe offered \$25,000 for him and Kemp to fly two men from Dallas to a destination in Mexico on Nov. 22, 1963.

"IT WAS TO BE unknown," he said. "No names asked. No questions."

He said he believed Mexico City was mentioned as the destination of the flight. Oswald, incidentally, had visited Mexico City two months before the assassination.

Kemp, a decorated fighter pilot during World War II, was to have piloted a twin-engine plane that would be furnished for the trip. The offer was made to both men because they were partners at the time.

Kemp's ex-partner said he had attended a meeting in a



Special Projects Editor John Moulder (right) talks with Billy Kemp, one of two men allegedly contacted to fly President Kennedy's assassins out of country.

building with the fellow employe and several other men. He said he believes David Ferrie was present at the meeting, which was held in Garland, a Dallas suburb. Ferrie was also a former Eastern Airlines pilot and was believed by Garrison to have flown anti-Castro missions to Cuba.

BOTH KEMP and the Baton Rouge businessman said that a month before the assassination the fellow employe had tried to get them to enter a deal to distribute in the Dallas area counterfeit money that had been printed in New Orleans.

"It was a matter of buying it for one amount and selling it for another," Kemp told TATTLEER.

Both men said they turned down the counterfeit money offer.

Kemp said the phony money proposition made him

Investigator's Life in Danger

People connected with various investigations of the John F. Kennedy assassination have something in common — a short life expectancy.

An uncommonly large number of persons connected with the probe — either prominently or vaguely — have ended up dead.

Baton Rouge private investigator William H. (Joe) Cooper, a former police officer, was almost killed in 1968 a few days before he was scheduled to testify before a New Orleans grand jury about his findings (up to then) in an independent investigation of the assassination.

The steering column came loose in his auto and it crashed into a culvert, seriously injuring Cooper, his wife and daughter. (The accident and the information Cooper had will be detailed in next week's TATTLER.)

IF ALL THE "accidents" and deaths of people related to assassination probes are coincidental, it is the strangest coincidence in history.

Concern for their safety is contained in excerpts from a recent tape-recorded interview Cooper had with a Baton Rouge businessman who was offered a deal to fly men believed to be Kennedy's assassins from Dallas to another country.

"It's a wonder you didn't get killed, Joe," the businessman told Cooper. "You know, that's what it was meant to be."

Cooper: "I believe so, too. Because it happened when I had asked to testify. You see, what bugs me, if the car was tampered with, it was tampered with here in Baton Rouge."

Later in the hour-long interview, the conversation went like this:

"I'll tell you, Joe, you're still open to problems with what you're doing."

COOPER: "YOU think I ought to leave it alone."

"You're still open to problems."

"Did you fly anybody into Mexico?"

"Hell, no. You know better than that."

When Cooper pressed him, the businessman said:

"The people in any way associated with this damned thing are dead."

Cooper: "I don't believe that. I believe those behind it are still living."

"Some of them are that were involved in it. Some that carried it out and some that got too close on the trail of it are dead. About 18 out of 22 of them are dead."

The interview was concluded this way:

"Joe, be careful on this thing."

Cooper: "Do you think it's still dangerous?"

"You're damn right."

Cooper: "If it's dangerous, the people who are involved in it must still be living."

"WHY, SURE, the people who perpetrated it are still living."

Cooper: "Yeah, that's what I feel, too."

"You see, you're not dealing with just regular old Mafia stuff here. With the Mafia, you know who to stay away from. With this, you don't know who to stay away from."

Cooper: "Yeah, with this, you don't know who to stay away from."

suspicious of the proposed airplane flight.

Kemp said he was never told the destination of the flight, "but only that it was in some South American country."

THE PILOT SAID he was afraid he and the other occupants of the plane might be arrested on landing in a Latin American country.

His former partner said he told Kemp before the assassination that he suspected Kennedy was going to be murdered. He said he reached that conclusion after reading in a newspaper that Kennedy was to be in Dallas Nov. 22.

"I said, Billy, do you know what they want for \$25,000?" he said. "I said, Kennedy ain't gonna' get out of Dallas. They're gonna' kill him. He says, 'you're crazy.'"

The businessman added, "It was going to be a one-way trip. Leave the plane there. Come back by the commercial airlines."

He said he encouraged Kemp to turn down the offer.

"I SAID, BILLY, you're gonna' end up dead. I said, money like that — throw it away. I saw, you've got yourself in a position of something real serious ... They can get people to fly dope for \$5,000."

The businessman said he had never told the story of the \$25,000 offer to anybody in authority. Investigator Cooper asked him why he had not told the FBI about the offer.

"Oh, hell, Joe," he replied. "I don't trust anybody. Who could I talk with that you could trust? Look at all the other people who got involved in testifying and who wound up dead."

Through directions supplied by Maxine Kemp, Cooper and a TATTLER reporter located Kemp living in a trailer house in the country near Slaughter, La.

Kemp generally confirmed the story told by the Baton Rouge businessman whom he had not seen or talked with in several years.

"I don't feel all the truth has come out about the assassination," Kemp said.

HE SAID HE had never told anybody else about the flight offer, except his brother.

Kemp said that, since the assassination, he had not been in contact with the former L-T-V employes who made the offer. Neither has his former partner in Baton Rouge. But the businessman said he had heard the man, who at the time was about 35 years old, had ended up in the construction business. He said he tried to locate the man recently, but could not.

KEMP DISTINGUISHED himself as a fighter pilot in the South Pacific during World War II. He shot down at least two Japanese fighter planes and his own plane was shot down over China. He was awarded the Air Medal for his service. He was a pilot instructor during the Korean war.

During the past few years, he has suffered three serious heart attacks. In failing health, he does light truckdriving work. Divorced from Maxine Kemp, he now lives with his son.

Startling conclusions about naval intelligence involvement in the assassination of President Kennedy will be carried in a later issue.

This is a never before published photo of Lee Harvey Oswald in his Civil Air Patrol uniform at the age of 15½. It was given to Baton Rouge Investigator William H. (Joe) Cooper by Oswald's mother, Marguerite Oswald, whom Cooper interviewed in Fort Worth during his independent investigation of the John Kennedy assassination.



Joe Cooper, Baton Rouge Private investigator, is cooperating with the TATTLER in uncovering facts surrounding the escape plan for President Kennedy's assassins. Cooper has been independently investigating JFK's killing for the past nine years.

