

Post Daily Magazine

By JOSEPH BERGER
N. Y. Post Correspondent

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THE CONGRESSMAN who is expected to head the House committee investigating John F. Kennedy's murder does not believe Lee Harvey Oswald was the sole assassin, but he does agree with the official finding that three rifle shots were fired during the attack. He heard the shots himself.

Rep. Henry B. Gonzalez (D-Tex.) was traveling in the fourth car behind the Presidential limousine when the shots crackled over Dallas' Dealey Plaza at 12:30 p.m. Nov. 22, 1963. His car followed as the limousine carrying the fallen President raced four miles toward Parkland Memorial Hospital.

While he was standing in the hospital's corridor, the door to trauma room one opened. Gonzalez recalls seeing a stretcher, with the ashen-colored soles of a man's feet protruding from under the bedsheet, and realizing for the first time that the President was dead.

Gonzalez was then a second-term Congressman. Now the portly, 60-year-old San Antonian is about to start his ninth term and he has been chosen vice chairman of the House Select Committee on Assassinations that was set up Sept. 15 to re-examine the murders of Kennedy and Martin Luther King. Since the current chairman, Thomas Downing (D-Va.), is retiring from Congress next month, Gonzalez will almost certainly take charge of the committee, a panel whose creation he vociferously sought for three years.

Over the weekend, the committee continued to lay the groundwork for its inquiry into the Kennedy slaying, dispatching investigators to Mexico City to interview a CIA translator who prepared a transcript of a mysterious telephone call made by accused assassin Lee Harvey Oswald to the Soviet Embassy eight weeks before the assassination.

[The Washington Post reported the action followed four hours of closed-session testimony from David A. Phillips, a retired CIA officer who prior to the killing saw transcripts of the call, in which Oswald reportedly offered to exchange information for free passage to Russia.]

"When I heard those three shots," he said in a recent interview, "it was like I was hearing the first shots of World War III. I don't know why I felt that way, but it was a premonition, a premonition that without Kennedy at the helm the chances would be much greater for involvement and conflict. I know in my heart of hearts that President Kennedy would never have led a prolonged war such as the Vietnam War turned out to be."

Gonzalez, who speaks slowly in a Texas twang with a lilt to it, retreats from actually declaring that some unknown forces interested in an expansion of America's role in Vietnam were behind the assassination. But he leaves no doubt that he feels there was a conspiracy and that governmental agencies were probably involved.

"If there wasn't a conspiracy, why has there been a coverup?" he asks and then lists some of the developments that have startled and mystified him in the 13 years since the assassination.

He wonders why the CIA never told the Warren Commission that it had plotted several assassination attempts against Cuban Premier Fidel Castro and enlisted racketeers Sam Giancana and John Roselli in these efforts.

He cannot accept official judgments that

the gangland-style slayings of Giancana and Roselli over the past 18 months were unrelated to the public disclosure of their role in the CIA plots.

He believes that "there was a deliberate and systematic attempt to obstruct Jim Garrison and make him look like a buffoon," when the former New Orleans District Attorney in 1969 prosecuted local businessman Clay Shaw for allegedly conspiring with Oswald and a third man to murder Kennedy.

Shaw's lawyers contended that the so-called plot was a fabrication concocted by Garrison for personal gain and Shaw was acquitted after the jury deliberated less than an hour.

But Gonzalez feels the trial produced significant testimony supporting a conspiracy theory, particularly the admission by

an Army pathologist who assisted in Kennedy's autopsy at Bethesda Naval Hospital that his superiors instructed him not to dissect the President's neck in examining the path of one of the bullets that struck Kennedy.

The Warren Commission found that Oswald fired all three shots from a building window above and behind the President's limousine. Critics of the report who believe that a second gunman fired at Kennedy from a position in front of the limousine cite the pathologist's omission as discrediting the autopsy evidence.

Gonzalez, however, neglected to mention that the pathologist also testified that his examination of the neck wound, partial as it was, indicated the bullet entered through the back of Kennedy's neck. That finding would be consistent with the Warren Commission's conclusion.

Gonzalez also doubts that the Warren Commission adequately researched the background of Oswald's killer, Jack Ruby. The picture of Ruby in Chicago, that of a tough brawler who mingled easily with underworld figures, would "contradict the picture of a grieving saddened diabetic who was moved by the tears of Jacqueline Kennedy into killing Oswald," Gonzalez says.

While some of these questions gnawed at him during the years after the 1964 report of the Warren Commission, "the possibility of a conspiracy was something I felt my mind could not logically entertain for long," Gonzalez said.

"But in the summer of 1973, with the sordid developments then, where the head of the FBI [L. Patrick Gray] was lying, cheating and destroying documents and the CIA was obviously corruptible (during the days following the Watergate burglary), then some of the thoughts gained some importance. At that point I felt the possibility of something other than a one-man verdict was worthy of serious evaluation.

"Our system has been permitted to reach the point where you have agencies that are unaccountable," he said. "If you have a runaway agency, then you're going to have coverups, you're going to have harassment and destabilization of individuals . . .

"We like to think we don't have a police society," he went on. "But I know we're not as innocent as we were four years ago. Since the summer of 1973, America has begun to see that, damn it, these things can happen



The scene 13 years ago in Dallas, as the pre-sidential motorcade speeds towards Parkland Hospital carrying the mortally injured President Kennedy.

For the Kennedy Probe, A Man Who Was There



REP. HENRY B. GONZALEZ
"We're not as innocent as we were . . ."

here. Indeed, they have happened here . . . Who in the world would have dreamed that the head of the FBI was himself going to violate the law and burn documents?

"As long as you have the intimate buddy-buddy system between crime and the chief law enforcement agencies of the nation, you're bound to have it [a police society]," he said. "What do you have? You don't have liberty, you don't have freedom. You can't have democracy whether we like to delude ourselves or not. Can anybody explain to me how you can have a man such as Jimmy Hoffa disappear and the complete inability of law enforcement agencies to do anything about it?"

"It can only be explained by the untenable tie between crime and law enforcement bodies. Because if you're going to sup with the devil, you have to have a mighty long spoon. And the chances are that if you do, the devil is going to be a lot smarter than you."

Gonzalez credits the Warren Commission critics for raising questions—"questions that finally have relevancy"—which have kept the Kennedy investigation alive for 13 years.

He even wrote an introduction for "Coup d'Etat in America," a book by two of these critics, Michael Canfield and Joseph Opikapu, which suggests that Watergate burglars E. Howard Hunt and Frank Sturgis were at the Dallas assassination scene disguised as hoboes. The Rockefeller Commission study of the CIA rejected the Canfield-Opikapu theory and Gonzalez points out that his introduction was noncommittal.

Gonzalez, the son of the mayor of a small Mexican village, was born in San Antonio where his father took refuge during the 1911 revolution. A graduate of St. Mary's University law school, he worked under both Army and Navy intelligence in World War II as a civilian cable and radio censor.

He served as chief probation officer of Bexar County before entering San Antonio politics in 1950. During his years as a city councilman and a Texas state senator, he fought against the state's segregation laws and the new "race" bills introduced by his colleagues.

After he was elected to Congress in a special contest in 1961, he became a staunch supporter of Kennedy's New Frontier programs and, he says, an "intimate" friend of Kennedy as well. Gonzalez has eight children.