

6.



Give Us This Day Our Paranoia

THE JOLLY GREEN GIANT

PARANOIA is a little like dog shit. Once you step in it, you can never be sure it is not still with you. You try to scrape it off your shoe and walk on, looking back frequently to see if you are leaving any tracks, continually sniffing the air around your own person so as to be doubly sure, pitting one sense competitively against another, challenging the nose to be sensitive to what the eye cannot see. But you are never certain, and therefore, become more cautious about reality; you learn to live with paranoia, if not enjoy it somewhat. Dan Greenburg, the funny writer, once explained to me that *of course* he was paranoid. "You'd be paranoid, too," he said, "if you had so many people constantly plotting against you." When I told Greenburg I'd heard that one before, he said *of course*—he'd made it up and people were always stealing his lines.

To live it and love it is one way of dealing with the presence. There is another, but it has not proved particularly efficacious since the day the Emperor was sighted without his clothes. You pretend—or really believe—it matters not which, as the result is the same—that the dog doo isn't there, you press on, leaving tracks across people's rugs and hardwood floors, generally creating a stink, and giving the impression of being some sort of a nut.

That last was the way the District Attorney of New Orleans, Jim Garrison, handled his paranoia. I cannot fault him for it,

as no man I have known had more legitimate reasons to become paranoid than Garrison; there actually were people constantly plotting against him.

My last communication with Garrison was on November 5, 1968. It was not untypical. I was interrupted in mid-explanation to an unhappy investor (Keating's stormy departure had not helped the money-raising situation). The investor was turning a tinge yellow at my suggestion that the only way to insure the return of the \$20,000 he had previously loaned *Ramparts* was to cover his bet with an additional \$50,000. The interruption was an emergency long-distance telephone call from New Orleans.

The caller was in no mood to inquire about the weather. "This is urgent," Jim Garrison said. "Can you take this in your mailroom? They'd never think to tap the mailroom extension."

I excused myself to go to the mailroom for a moment on a matter of high priority and left the investor, sputtering like a referee without a whistle, alone with the latest negative balance sheets. In the mailroom, two bearded Berkeleyite mail boys were running the postage machine under the influence of marijuana. I told them to take a walk around the block and get high on company time, and locked the door behind them.

Garrison began talking when I picked up the mailroom extension: "This is risky, but I have little choice. It is imperative that I get this information to you now. Important new evidence has surfaced. Those Texas oilmen do not appear to be involved in President Kennedy's murder in the way we first thought. It was the Military-Industrial Complex that put up the money for the assassination—but as far as we can tell, the conspiracy was limited to the aerospace wing. I've got the names of three companies and their employees who were involved in setting up the President's murder. Do you have a pencil?"

I wrote down the names of the three defense contractors—Garrison identified them as Lockheed, Boeing, and General Dynamics—and the names of those executives in their employ whom the District Attorney said had been instrumen-

tal in the murder of Jack Kennedy. I also logged a good deal of information about a mysterious minister who was supposed to have crossed the border into Mexico with Lee Harvey Oswald shortly before the assassination; the man wasn't a minister at all, Garrison said, but an executive with a major defense supplier, in clerical disguise. I knew little about ministers crossing the Rio Grande with Oswald—but after several years of fielding the dizzying details of the Kennedy assassination, I had learned to leave closed Pandora's boxes lie; I didn't ask.

I said that I had everything down, and Garrison said a hurried good-bye: "It's poor security procedure to use the phone, but the situation warrants the risk. Get this information to Bill Turner. He'll know what to do about the minister. I wanted you to have this, in case something happens. . . ."

I unlocked the mailroom door, and returned to my office. The investor was gone.

I typed up a brief memorandum of the facts as Garrison had relayed them and burned my notes in an oversized ashtray I used for such purposes. I Xeroxed one copy of the memo, which I mailed to myself in care of a post office box in the name of Walter Snelling, a friendly, non-political bartender in the far-removed country town of Cotati, California, where I routinely sent copies of all supersecret *Ramparts* documents. That night I hand delivered the original to Bill Turner, the former FBI agent in charge of the magazine's investigation of the Warren Commission. Turner had drilled me in a little G-Man security lingo. According to our code, I called him at home and said something about a new vacuum cleaner. He replied that he'd be right over, and said he would meet me at the bar at Trader Vic's, which meant that I was to actually meet him at Blanco's, a dimly lit Filipino bar on the fringe of Chinatown, where we often held secret meetings.

That was the way we did things in those days.

"Those days" encompassed several years of sniffing, as Sam Goldwyn might say, along the greenhorn trail of red herrings in the 26 volumes of the Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy. We began asking rude questions in 1965, and by 1968, with paranoia in full bloom, we had divided almost everyone, by some sort of

conspiracy litmus test, into "them" and "us." Even "us" was subdivided into good guys, not-so-good-guys, dangerous fanatics and fifth columnists. We ended up seeing "them" lurking behind every potted plant rented by the CIA; and, occasionally, we found a real spook in the shadows.

I met Garrison on a brisk, moonswept summer evening in 1967 at attorney Melvin Belli's penthouse pad, which sits atop a sagging building on Telegraph Hill like a diamond collar on a dented can. It was the New Orleans DA's first visit to San Francisco. Belli, who assumed the luckless defense of Jack Ruby after other lawyers had run away when Ruby began talking about cancer juice being injected in his veins, had invited the locals to hear Garrison's views on the assassination.

Belli doesn't sneeze without putting on a show, and the setting was adequate for staging *Aida*. The equivalent of several cable-car-loads of lawyers, police brass, newsmen and other San Francisco opinion-makers of smart chic and dowdy chic were munching rack of lamb and sucking in cocktails on Belli's vast bricked terrace hanging asover the Bay, looking in through glass walls to the half-bookish, half-bare-Zen-exhibitionist décor of the penthouse.

Garrison rose to the occasion. He was the essential frontier lawman—ectomorphic, taciturn, handsome, charming, dramatic in a properly low-keyed way. He spoke in the slightest of Southern drawls, just loud enough to be heard over the hoot of foghorns out in the Bay. He presented factually, without the hint of an opinion, a most incredible story of conspiracy, murder, and ineffectual conspiracy to cover the conspiracy—a story that was kerosene at the roots of the legitimacy of our system of government. Garrison rattled off dates, names, contradictory citations from the Warren Report, and extraordinary new evidence his New Orleans investigation had uncovered.

The DA was cool, sharp, informed, confident, convincing. He didn't leave a confirmed scoffer in the audience. A nervous lady in a low-cut print dress said something about how could high people in government be involved in such a thing. Garrison, who uses historical metaphors the way a tubercular

does cough drops, replied: "Honorable men did in Caesar, Madam." His delivery brought a usually emotionless, grumpy Hearst reporter to his feet: "But, Mr. Garrison, if you're right, why it could destroy the government!" The DA replied with the calm of the frontier populist, Fess Parker explaining how to hitch a buckboard: "Well, sir, if telling the truth to the people of this country means that all the marble pillars of government in Washington will fall to the ground tonight; well, then, we'll just have to build ourselves a new government the next morning, maybe a little farther out West."

Garrison's official guide for the evening was an 18-year-old North Beach topless dancer with horn-rimmed glasses and well-buttressed breasts, assigned by his hosts to show him San Francisco's version of Bourbon Street. She looked at Jim doelike with unbridled admiration, a condition of enrapture shared, in varying degrees, by many among the rooftop assembly. The fresh converts to the cause of doubting Tomism waited to shake the DA's hand, standing around rubbing their goose bumps as the familiar early wet chill of a San Francisco summer fog closed in on the evening. Jim Garrison had put on one hell of a performance.

I wasn't sure, that night, if the New Orleans DA was on the right track, or merely enjoying his own show. But I took an immediate liking to him. I have learned to measure people who are uncompromisingly serious in their public pursuits, as Garrison was, by those standards of private weights and measures adjudicated by the late Humphrey Bogart—do they drink, are they able to laugh at themselves, can they appreciate a good time. If not—if they exhibit no capacity to value people other than through the prism of usefulness to the Cause—then beware: They are those monsters of purpose known as missionaries, and will as surely as not boil the baby to purify the bath water, or shove you off a subway platform to stop a speeding train; the same brown bag of constipation is toted by all those who are unable to enjoy the world while changing it, or, worse, while saving it.

I have been fated in many causes to be on the same side as the missionaries, but I suffer being around them. Humorless-

ness in pursuit of principle is no virtue. Having been involved in certain common efforts dear to the puritan heart of the New Left, I have grown drearily accustomed to having creeps as allies. Most of the ideological tinkers who populate the marching and clam chowder societies of the coming revolution tend to view an ice cold martini as the last refuge of fascism.

Thus I said an alleluia that in Jim Garrison—glass of bourbon in his left hand, the scales of justice in his right—a good wild man with the attendant majestic virtues and vices, there was finally a high roller on our side and a District Attorney at that.

In New Orleans the DA is called the "Jolly Green Giant." Jim Garrison is tall enough, and normally jolly enough, and in his dealing with a cheating government and an ambush-primed press in the months and years of his assassination investigation, he showed himself green enough to earn the title, whatever the significance of the original sobriquet.

Garrison was a member in good standing of the law enforcement establishment. A Lieutenant Colonel in the Louisiana National Guard, a conservative individualist who read Ayn Rand without wincing, sought after by other DA's as a popular drinking companion at their national Dick Tracy conventions, he was known as a tough, racket-busting, if flamboyant, DA who knew how to run a tight ship without making New Orleans a dull town.

Things began to change after Garrison read the 26 volumes of the Warren Report, and put them back on the shelf convinced that something was haywire. He decided to investigate Lee Harvey Oswald's activities in New Orleans prior to the assassination—a trail which soon led the DA across state lines, and into a theory that the assassination was carried out by anti-Castro paramilitary types under supervision of persons with past, or present, CIA connections. Rebuffed by Washington in his requests for assistance through normal channels, Garrison turned to private sources to fund his inquiry, which had rapidly grown as far beyond the capacity of the New Orleans District Attorney's staff as a moon flight would be to a

Piper-Cub manufacturer. Several of New Orleans' substantial citizens put up the money for their DA's far-flung activities. With that bittersweet sense of humor peculiar to the town, they called their special fund "Truth or Consequences, Inc." It might as well have been called Trick or Treat.

When the DA dialed the wrong number of the assassination, he not only found himself portrayed in the national media as some sort of Captain Crunch, but discovered, to his anger, that he had been cut off from all the room service of law enforcement. Other states refused to honor normal extradition requests for his key suspects. He could not even get routine cooperation from the FBI on fingerprint checks, let alone access to important records of the original assassination investigation secreted away in the National Archives; those documents not "classified" were crudely reported as "missing." When, in retaliation, he subpoenaed FBI agents to testify, they refused, invoking Department of Justice Order 32464, better known as executive immunity, that catchall doctrine to prevent the asking of embarrassing questions.

Garrison's reflex reaction to trouble was to brush it off with the subtlety of a bull swatting a fly. The resounding slap could be heard far out in the bayous, and was a familiar sound around New Orleans; the city's Criminal Court judges once collectively sued Garrison for defamation because of his constant references to them as "the sacred cows of India." Garrison's response to attacks from the press or brickbats from Washington was to counterattack with a startling, if unsubstantiated, revelation or a hint of impending arrests. The Grand Guignol qualities that made Garrison so popular and, until recently, reelectable in New Orleans, where he brought a little Mardi Gras what-the-hell to everyday politics, provided the media with the raw material to make a Faust, or a fool, of the Jolly Green Giant.

I have no ambition in this book to write the history of the fall of Rome, that is of New Orleans, which under Garrison became the epicenter of the Kennedy assassination empire. That is better left to the future historians of disaster and metaphysicians of collapse. Nor am I about to re-create Garrison's case, or argue those theories of his which are re-

subject, a sizable majority of the American public did not believe the Warren Report—although a substantial number of that majority did not feel the investigation should be reopened, either, which can be taken as an index of the base common sense of the populace along the lines of letting sleeping dogs, or dead Presidents, lie.

I was not overanxious to get involved in the Kennedy assassination hoopla. Inasmuch as *Ramparts* had recently distinguished itself by floating a conspiracy linking the Roman Catholic Church to the war in Vietnam, I figured it might be well to take a breather on conspiracy stories. Yet it was impossible to believe the Warren Report. Anyone who has read those twenty-six volumes (I gave up at about number eighteen; enough was enough) knows that the function of the Warren Commission was not to ferret out the truth, but to put the citizens at ease that there was no conspiracy; the two goals may not necessarily be mutually exclusive, although in the case of John Kennedy's murder I believe that they were.

The Warren Report's chiropractic explanation of how a lone gunman did it was violative of the laws of physics, probability, forensic pathology, Aristotelian logic, and Newton's second law of motion—but I will not replay that broken record here. It will suffice to say that if you believed the "superbullet" theory, you believed the Warren Commission. "Superbullet" was invented by the commission to explain away their own investigators' conclusion that a lone gunman shooting from where Oswald was said to have been had time to get off only three shots as the Presidential limousine passed; yet Kennedy was hit twice, Connally once, and one shot missed. To explain that, the commission came up with the legerdemain of the "magic bullet," as it was called even by the commission's defenders.

The first bullet, said the alchemists in the commission's employ, winged through Kennedy's neck and then, whipping about like a speeding spermatozoon in a sex education film, hit Connally in the back, came out his chest, plowed through his wrist, and, vicious bastard that it was, then pounced down into his thigh. The second bullet had missed, and the Zapruder film made painfully clear that it was the third shot that

exploded the President's head; therefore, the commission reasoned, the first bullet had to be a Tarzan bullet.

The commissioners obviously thought better of calling it Tarzan so some dullard renamed it Bullet No. 399. The commission just grinned and bore the fact that energetic Bullet No. 399 was found on a stretcher at Parkland Hospital, after its cruise through the two politicians' bodies, and it was as good as new—head unflattened, lead intact, not a scratch on it. The ballistics experts shrugged their shoulders, since bullets usually get all banged up if they hit even one person, once; No. 399 hit two persons four times. In response to that quandary, the commission performed some experiments with anesthetized goats, but I will spare the details. The magic bullet theory also got into trouble with the naked eye school of facts. If one is ghoulish enough to watch the famed home movies of the shooting taken by Dallas dressmaker Abraham Zapruder, one sees Kennedy's hands going up to his throat as the first bullet hits him; but Connally just sits there, bovine, serene, looking the other way, a perfect statue—unblinking at the very second the Warren Commission insisted that the Tarzan bullet was hacking and tearing through his body.

Now that LBJ has gone to the great roundup in the sky and his aides are writing for publication, we learn that Johnson himself thought the Warren Commission was full of beans. Of course he was in a position to know something we all didn't.

The man in charge of *Ramparts'* investigation of the failure of the Warren Commission to investigate adequately the murder of the 35th President of the United States was Bill Turner, a ten-year veteran of the FBI turned author.

Turner was a nice Catholic boy from Buffalo and a former semipro hockey player, perfect soup meat for the FBI pot; but he was possessed of a fatal streak of independence, and had made the mistake of criticizing the fingernail-cleaning procedures and other obeisance drills so characteristic of Hoover's FBI. He also raised inquiries which, although polite, were not considered in the "best interests" of the Bureau—such as why FBI field offices spent so much time dummieing up stolen car statistics, a meaningless record of accomplishment which is to

the FBI what body counts are to American commanders in Vietnam, and so little time digging into organized crime. Turner's file bulged with perfunctory congratulatory letters from Hoover on the Special Agent's crime-busting proficiency as a "sound man," which is FBI talk for an electronic bugger, but he was nonetheless punished, by a month's suspension without pay, for his uppityness in asking to discuss his criticisms of the Bureau with J. Edgar himself, a request regarded by the FBI Gauleiters as in the realm of asking for a second bowl of porridge.

As is routinely expected of the person similarly punished in Anglican seminaries or symphony orchestras, Turner was expected to follow an unwritten code of courtly and contrite acceptance of the higher authority justly invoked against him, and exhibit his thankfulness by volunteering for unpaid menial duties around the office, like offering to drive the wife of the Special Agent in Charge to the gynecologist. Turner, instead, went to the Unemployment Office, signed up to get paid during his forced idleness, and took off for a skiing holiday in Aspen.

Retribution came swiftly. Turner was shuttled to the fun spot of Knoxville, Tennessee, where he was not allowed to go outside the city limits on a case, a hindrance in investigating crimes across state lines. At that time there was talk about the alleged intentions of Hoover's nominal boss, Attorney General Robert Kennedy, to lay Kennedy gloves on the FBI's autocratic operations. So Turner wrote the Attorney General, asking that his blackballing by Hoover's lackeys be investigated; he received in return a collect telegram from Bobby, telling him to take such matters up directly with the Director of the FBI. Turner began scratching out lengthy letters to Senators and Congressmen of his acquaintance, suggesting a Congressional inquiry into the mythology of the FBI, and relating certain factual matters tending to create an impression of the Bureau as a cross between an incompetent Gestapo and the Keystone Cops.

Turner was subsequently fired for conduct unbecoming a eunuch. He hired Washington attorney Edward Bennett Williams to sue the Bureau, a fight which went all the way to the

Supreme Court on points of law involving the Congressional and public right to receive information about the malfunctioning of the executive branch without the executive branch interfering by chopping off the head of the word giver. Turner lost. But he caused the FBI such pain in the doing, in the form of highly embarrassing testimony from former FBI men about the absurdities, peccadilloes, institutionalized narcissism and cardboard efficiency of Hoover's private army, that he could in some honesty call the whole thing tit for tat.

Along the way his career metamorphosed, caterpillar-into-flying-object, from cop/bugger to muckraker maintaining journalistic surveillance over the advances and excesses of law enforcement—another editor in the *Ramparts* tradition of career turnarounds.

One evening at a *Ramparts* party Turner was chatting with Bob Treuhaft, Decca Mitford's husband. Treuhaft is a prominent left-wing lawyer in Oakland. Turner kept saying that he was sure they had met before, but Treuhaft kept saying no, he was certain they hadn't, although he was pleased to make the acquaintance. Suddenly Turner put his glass down and said, "Now I remember! It's your voice that's so familiar. When I was in the bureau I used to tap your phone."

7 } With Turner on deck, I went looking for a rope long enough to string up Earl Warren. Some of the people who crashed our lynching party left me with ambivalent feelings about the sanity of our cause. There was a sudden input of bodies from a distaff circle of humanity known as the "sleuths"—volunteers who came out of the woodwork of society to finish the detective work the Warren Commission had left undone. They were an odd lot by any standard of measurement. Some were charlatans or publicity hounds, but most were honest and subdued; the typical "sleuth" was more the concerned suburban housewife than the big city hustler. Some were more paranoid than others, but all shared, to some degree, the paranoia which was the state of nature of their enterprise. This condition was abetted by the wrath of all officialdom, which seemed to descend on their work, a circle of hostility which was completed by the rancor and sarcasm of most of the media.

The sleuths were connected by a grass-roots communications network which was constantly abuzz with gossip and news of the latest "discovery" or new theory. *Ramparts'* interest in the assassination spread like news of a new disease at a convention of hypochondriacs. The *Ramparts* office on San Francisco's topless strip soon became a library, research center, information retrieval system, office, and all-night hot dog stand for free-lance assassination buffs. Many of these amateur crime busters were quite as strange as those they suspected of the crime. But though their methods were unorthodox, they often came up with extraordinary information. An additional attraction to the financially anemic *Ramparts* was that it was all for free. The sleuths worked for the sheer joy of it; in return one was expected to exhibit consummate interest in the details of their handiwork, which at times was a high price to pay. I was forever being stopped in a hallway, or cornered in the office bistro to be subjected to the minutiae of Oswald's alleged love affair with Jack Ruby. One of the most horrific experiences of my life was when a dogged female sleuth trapped me in the men's room, where I was sitting in the loo in a particularly compromised and gaseous state the morning after a long evening of drinking. She lounged against the urinal, lecturing me for half an hour through the stall door about the conspiratorial significance of Oswald's having shaved off all his pubic hair.

The assassination investigation seemed at times like a pageant staged by Busby Berkeley—if I had to cast the Carmen Miranda role, I would give it to Mark Lane. Lane was the New York lawyer and lecture artist who, before Garrison, was chief honcho among the Warren Commission critics. He was one of those people to whom I took an instant and irrational dislike. (Another is the dreadful Al Lowenstein, that boy scout of reform politicians.) I am hard put to explain why; demurring to the laws of slander, I can only cop out to brute instinct. Were I a dog, I would have growled when Lane came around. ("Watch out for the guys who come in fast," Cookie Picetti once told me, meaning that the type of guy who comes through the front door in a hurry, talking a busy streak as he breezes up to the bar, is invariably going to borrow money or

cash a check that will go to the moon and bounce back.) Perhaps it was Lane's speed that turned me off. He moved about the world at a roadrunner's pace, a commercially-minded crusader, developing President Kennedy's murder into a solid multi-media property. Lane produced a book, *Rush to Judgment*, which sold like a Bible beachball at a Baptist resort; a movie of the same name, which consisted largely of on the street interviews with witnesses who said Oswald went thisaway, not thataway; and a long-playing record on which, for the price of an LP, you could hear Lane's testimony to the Warren Commission—consisting, if my recollection is correct, of Lane telling the commission he knew something they didn't know, but couldn't tell them what it was.

Lane's paranoia had a show-biz cloak-and-dagger frosting; while making his movie, he slunk around Dallas under an alias, as if that would fool those conspirators who had been smart enough to bump off the President and get away with it. Lane had a tendency to grab bits of evidence like a sea gull swooping down to snap up a fish, swallowing it whole without taking time to see if it was anything digestible. This procedure got Lane in trouble in 1970 when the Kennedy assassination business was experiencing a recession, and Lane decided to diversify into the fertile field of Vietnam atrocities. He wrote a book purporting to be based on interviews with American soldiers who admitted to various barbarisms and tortures; the gimmick was that the soldiers did not take refuge in anonymity, but allowed Lane to print their names. However, Neil Sheehan, ace war correspondent for the *New York Times*, revealed in a blitzing review of Lane's book, that the muckraker's report of an alleged Nazi working the Vietnam atrocity circuit on behalf of Uncle Sam—one of Lane's soldiers "confessed" that his father was a former blood-lust S.S. officer serving as a United States Army Colonel in Vietnam—was deficient in that the Nazi did not possess name, rank or serial number in the U.S. Army.

For every stridulous Batman there looms a sibilant Robin. Mark Lane's congener and rival for star billing was Ralph Schoenman, who surfaced in the assassination business as the

volunteer head of the London office of Lane's "Citizens' Committee of Inquiry." There is scarcely a left wing cause the doorway of which Schoenman has not darkened. He was possessed of a rabby energy which reminded me of the line of John Barrymore's in Gene Fowler's grand biography of the actor, when Barrymore talks about the rain that "beats with the persistence of an unpaid madam at our door." Schoenman was an indefatigable meddler, a whirling dervish in three-quarter time, a salute without a flag; he circled the globe hundreds of times during the sixties, establishing a reputation as a sort of Red Baron of international unpopular causes. Schoenman was Bertrand Russell's confidential secretary during Russell's last years, and proved a vexatious cross for the great man. The last thing Russell wrote in his life was a personal white paper dissociating himself from many of his aide's statements and activities in his behalf; he had it published posthumously, presumably so that Schoenman could not follow him to the grave. Ralph's capacity to sire dislike was greater than that of any person I have known; Sartre was said to gargle after speaking with him.

Schoenman thrust himself into the Warren Commission controversy in 1965 by bursting through the door of the apartment of Edward Jay Epstein, then a quiet Cornell graduate student hard at work on his uncomplimentary study of the piecemeal procedures of the Warren Commission, which was later to receive notoriety as the book *Inquest*. Epstein had found the FBI report of the Kennedy autopsy that contradicted the Warren Report's lone assassin thesis buried among the hundreds of miles of Kennedy Assassination papers in the National Archives. Schoenman, falsely identifying himself to Epstein as an English publisher, dashed in and demanded a copy of the hot FBI report. Epstein refused, and Schoenman began rummaging through desk drawers, almost pushing the stuffing out of the pillows, and generally behaving as if he were a Florida hurricane just blown in the door. Epstein said he had to yell police to get Schoenman to leave.

Such a stormy visitation from the Radical Opposition must have had a traumatic effect on the cautious and refined graduate student. Epstein, once he could sleep nights without

having nightmares about Schoenman, finished writing his book, which made a barnyard joke of the methods and procedures of the Warren Commission. Yet, at the end of this careful document so destructive of the commission's work, Epstein abandoned the discipline of reason for the certainty of intuition. He implied that, despite the fact that he had just proved the commission was not competent to resolve with any certainty if it was raining, its gratuitous assumption that Oswald was the lone assassin was probably the right one, in the first place. The commission's defenders bent over gratefully to accept the graduate student's whiplashes in order to rejoice in the warm glow of his leap to faith. *Inquest* was popularly and controversially received as a biting attack on the Warren Commission. It was, in fact, something else—a secular masterpiece in the classic tradition of Christian apologetics: The writer one-ups the Saracens in his attacks on the foibles of orthodoxy and then, after finding so many things wrong, the writer still believes! Is this not in itself a proof? (Epstein's work was in the tradition of apologists for the Roman Catholic Church who for centuries have suggested that if an institution so filled with fraud, deceit, and corruption could survive all these years without foundering in some Sargasso Sea of dead religions, then that must mean that it is God's One, True Church. How else could it possibly overcome its own dissoluteness?)

Epstein advanced to a new calling, staked on his credentials as a "reasonable" critic of the Warren Commission, as *The New Yorker's* resident debunker of unkempt enemies of the Liberal Establishment. His targets, to date, have been as diverse as District Attorney Jim Garrison and The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense. Perhaps one day Epstein will get it all out of his system by debunking Ralph Shoeman.

While the paper's drawbridges were up against the likes of Schoenman and Lane, the door was open to most everyone else who would throw rocks at the glass house of the Warren Commission. Some pretty funny people came to dinner, and many stayed for a year; some even longer. The roll call of the sleuths contained as many eclectic models as a used car lot. There was Shirley Harris Martin, a fortyish, blue-eyed

mother of four, of Hominy, Oklahoma, who was so impressed with John F. Kennedy that she converted to Catholicism in 1960, and when he was shot three years later, dedicated her life to solving the mystery of who had done in her co-religionist. She must have been doing something right, since she was followed by the Dallas cops every time she ventured there to do some sleuthing. A kindly lady, she saved any number of stray dogs from the Oklahoma poundman; she named various of the animals hanging around the house in honor of her fellow sleuths: "Anne-Lise," for Mark Lane's Danish wife; "Vince," for Vincent Salandria, a crew-cut Philadelphia lawyer, one of the earliest questioners of the commission, who exhibited more staying power than many of the sleuths, and stayed with Jim Garrison to the bitter end—an end, some of Salandria's critics among the sleuths say, which was hastened by his "purging" the others in Garrison's camp; the dog "Jonesy" was named after Jones Harris, a rich New York bachelor, said to be the son of Ruth Gordon, who kept his hand in the East Coast operations of the assassination investigators from a command post on the second floor of his elegant Manhattan town house.

The sleuth women outnumbered the sleuth men more than two to one. There was Maggie Field, a nice Beverly Hills lady who was thought to be dying of cancer, but didn't. She had a big house with a swimming pool and a pack of German shepherds. Maggie once dressed her teenage son as Lee Harvey Oswald with a gun stuck in his belt, a rifle in his left hand and copies of the *Communist Party Worker* and the *Trotskyite Militant* in his right hand—Oswald's alarmist pose in the famous incriminating picture printed on the cover of *Life*. Fellow sleuths then took pictures of her son as Oswald, in the hope that their photographs would show up the *Life* picture as a fake, Oswald's head grafted on the body of a poseur, but nothing developed. We provided Maggie with the alias of Marjorie Deschamps for her sleuthing activities. Her stockbroker husband feared becoming the laughingstock of Spring Street—Los Angeles' Wall Street—should word get around that all those assassination freaks were camping out in his backyard, where Mark Lane could often be found floating around in the pool, which he used as a combination office-

bathtub when in Lotusland. Queen Bee among the sleuth ladies was Sylvia Meagher, a widow who worked for the United Nations as a researcher but spent another eight hours a day clipping and sorting all the bad news about the assassination. Her knowledge of the Warren Report was reputed to be the most exhaustive and she functioned as the mistress of the court of last resort of disputes among the sleuths. Among other females in the assassination juggernaut were Ellen Ray, a shapely, redheaded Manhattan film maker who twice had secret documents stolen from her on planes from New Orleans to New York, and Mae Brussels, a sixtyish Carmel grandmother who took up the assassination as her hobby and was still going strong, as late as 1974, with a weekly radio program of conspiracy news that has a high audience rating in the Big Sur area.

Like feuding Democrats, hardly a one of the sleuths ever had a nice thing to say about another one. Harold Weisberg, a Maryland gentleman farmer-sleuth, stated flatly that the other sleuths were "counterfeiting" his work. In addition to pounding out his best selling *Whitewash* and its sequels, I remember reading somewhere that Weisberg was the proud father of a stillborn brainchild called "Geese for Peace," a project developed for the Peace Corps which had to do with geese converting waste into protein. Weisberg said his experiments with the geese were ruined by low-flying helicopters. Surpassing Weisberg in the capacity to be unloved was David Lifton, a pushy UCLA engineering student who was known as "Blowup," since his specialty was enlarging photographs of Dealey Plaza taken the morning of the assassination and finding figures lurking in the background. Lifton did not like to hear no for an answer and was persistent in insisting that one pick out the figure of a man among a forest of black and white dots in a twenty-times enlargement of a Polaroid snapshot of Dealey Plaza he toted around like a billboard paster going to work. It all looked like one huge Rorschach test to me, but one of our staff writers swore that if you looked at the blow-up long enough you could make out the figure of a man wearing a Prussian helmet. Lifton also contributed the "one of the trees is missing" theory to the literature of the assassination. By comparing blown-up photographs of Dealey Plaza taken at

7

See 217

Ramparts published
Lifton

a later date to photos taken on November 22, 1963, Lifton discerned that a tree in the famous grassy knoll area was there on November 22, but gone thereafter; this inevitably gave rise to speculation that the missing tree had been camouflage for a sniper.

Of all these ruminations my favorite assassination theory is one floated by Oswald's mother, Mark Lane's client. She explained what had happened that day in Dallas by advancing the theory that Kennedy and Connally shot each other during a political argument in the car.

At the height of the Warren Commission frenzy the paper's office began to take on the appearance of a Grand Central Station for assassination freaks. A small mob of volunteers was in the office day and night searching for the needle in the assassination haystack—the metaphor for piles of files, annotated volumes of evidence and testimony, photographic blow-ups and other tools of the paranoia trade stacked in the hallways.

These conspiratorial-minded interlopers were treated by *Ramparts'* regular New Left staffers like Arabs squatting in at the Tel Aviv Hilton. Scheer took particular umbrage. He regarded the sleuths as a gang of hysterics, ghouls and fetishists who had taken to hanging around his ice cream parlor.

Scheer's attitude was even-minded compared with that of most of the left, which exhibited an eagerness bordering on anxiety to accept the Warren Commission's word and be done with it. This was a singular exception to the left's general posture of never taking the government at its word about anything, and I discerned an underlying unarticulated fear—of a witch hunt if not a pogrom—should a new investigation reveal Kennedy as the victim of a leftist plot.

For all the fuss being made by the fourth estate and the political opposition—those titular guardians of the truth—one would think the governmental foul-up had been on the level of the Department of Agriculture being in error in a pamphlet on the reproduction cycle of the boll weevil, instead of the President being bumped off and the public's right to know massacred. The hurry-up Warren Report had been slammed together to meet Lyndon Johnson's political deadline for a "lone assassin" verdict so his predecessor's murder

would not be a political issue in the 1964 elections. This miasma was deepened by a bewildering inventory of classified and missing documents, missing X-rays, missing film frames—a Punch and Judy Show of suppressed evidence. I found this especially galling since all the government had to do was declassify the controversial material—such as the Kennedy autopsy records and supporting X-rays—and it could have settled once and for all the most serious challenges to the Warren Commission's verdict, and saved everyone concerned, defenders and attackers, those years of frustration, rumor, conspiracy-mongering, and unresolved doubt.

*no sub to their
own magazine
Tucker's state*

Over foot-stamping opposition from the left wing of *Ramparts*, I fed the sleuths their vitamins and let them plunge ahead with reconstructing the Warren Commission's boondoggle. There seemed to me little else to do but to keep drilling until we either hit a rock or struck oil. It was tedious work, until we lucked across the King Tut curse.

TEN MYSTERIOUS DEATHS

Once, during a boring panel discussion I responded to a witless question about what "school of editing" I belonged to by answering, "The Nero Wolfe School." I explained that while it was perhaps true that Nero Wolfe never edited much of anything except the small print on the bottom of orchid bulb packages, I nevertheless believed his approach to work to be efficacious and instructive for other disciplines, in particular that of the editor. To be a good editor requires as much the calm doping out of what will move people's minds as blue penciling a writer's words, and both require sitting still. Wolfe just sat on his fat duff and did what detectives are supposed to do, solve mysteries, without ever going anywhere, getting hit on the head, fornicating, climbing in windows or any of the hog wallow that detectives perform between the covers of paperback novels. However, many denizens of the print business seem to feel that meeting the public is an important element of influencing the public. This is to my mind a nonsensical proposition, leading to the circle-jerk intellectual

Remnants sent them's account book for agency
for it

cocktail party circuit and campus lecture tour binges. The lecturing thing has always baffled and horrified me. Many editors and writers of my acquaintance seem to spend as much or more time talking, for money, about what they do than actually doing it; this may boost their pocketbooks or egos, but is of little aid or comfort in actually writing or editing, as such public chitchat is an exhausting indulgence which can only be pursued, as the right wing is wont to say, at the cost of sapping the vital juices. That is one no-no of the Nero Wolfe school. Another is the equally silly belief in nervous movement, going places, seeing things, having meetings, and other trappings of professional persiflage, as somehow contributing to making a good editor—a calling which is, after all, nine-tenths intuition and one-tenth alchemy, with an infinitesimal percentage of burglary. Excessive wayfaring brings with it the unwholesome exposure to strange bars and strange beds, which is productive of melancholy. I therefore avoid traveling, whenever possible, other than to a favorite tavern to read the papers and plot the next move against the world.

It was thus an extraordinary business which brought me, kicking and screaming, to Dallas toward summer's end, 1966. Dallas in August was as dismal as Sunday in heaven, as Marcel Aymé wrote of another time and place. I doubt that anything other than a King Tut's curse could have inspired me to make the trip.

"Death Shall Come on Swift Wings to Him That Touches the Tomb of the Pharaoh": There had been fourteen deaths since King Tut's tomb was opened in 1923, fifteen if you want to include Marilyn Monroe, who was said to have died with a fat gem in her jewel box that had originally been snatched from the sarcophagus of the Tut. But now a small-town newspaper editor near Dallas was said to have uncovered a Kennedy version of the King Tut curse.

The newspaper editor was Penn Jones, Jr., of Midlothian, a small former cotton town some twenty-five miles out of Dallas. The sleuths said he had discovered at least thirteen deaths that were mysteriously related to the assassination of President Kennedy. Disbelieving, I had called John Howard Griffin, a neighbor, Texas style, of Jones, living only some forty miles distant. I asked if he knew this Penn Jones, and if so,

see p
217

what sort of a nut was he? John knew him well. "Penn's a good fellow," he said. "He's the scrappiest editor in Texas. If he says there's been a series of deaths, I'm sure there's substance to it." John Griffin would say something nice about a man who had just run over him, but he would never misstate a fact, or give a false impression; if he took the King Tut's curse in stride, then there had to be something to it.

But if there was something to this one, I was saying disagreeably to myself on the way to the airport, then we may as well check out that rumor that Hitler was alive and living with the Hopi Indians.

Sometimes, only sometimes, the wildest stories turn out to be true. This was one of those times.

The Texas School Book Depository, a pedestrian building even by Dallas standards, was both monument to the assassination carnage and a beacon to its continuing controversy. Three of us who had come to Dallas stood genuflectory fashion in front of it. With me were two *Ramparts* editors working on the assassination—Stanley Sheinbaum of Michigan State University fame, and David Welsh, a former *Detroit News* reporter who had covered the South for *Ramparts* and was gearing up to cover Southeast Asia for the paper; meanwhile, he shared with Gene Marine baby-sitting responsibility on that frenetic part of the paper that had come to be known as the "sleuth desk."

Penn Jones had insisted we "soak up the atmosphere" of the Dallas assassination shrines before making the half hour drive to Midlothian. We dutifully poked around atop the grassy knoll, urinated in a seedy alley near Jack Ruby's boarded-up Carousel Club, visited Oswald's former rooming house in the sprawling Oak Cliff section of Dallas, an entire suburb of ill-repute, and went through the sleuths' checklist of curtsies, handsprings toward the East and such that assassination pilgrims are supposed to perform in Mecca. When those stations of the cross were at last completed, we rented a wheezing Hertz machine which poked along amid the diesel trucks and vintage automobiles, most of them candidates for the

Bonnie and Clyde prop department, that crowded the two-lane blacktop to Midlothian.

Midlothian (population 1,521) was a whistle-stop without a train, a dusty, tree-lined town of modest brick and frame houses. The *Midlothian Mirror* was a weekly, six-page journal which successfully defied all the laws of typography. It was printed on strange, coarse newsprint which had the look of a recycling experiment that had failed. The *Midlothian Mirror* was the genuine item, an indigenous, atavistic frontier weekly which covered the boredom of Midlothian like its dust. Its fighting editor, Penn Jones, Jr., was of a dying breed of populist prairie journalists, an editor who was part *Front Page*, part *Grapes of Wrath*. He had received Southern Illinois University's Elijah Parish Lovejoy Award for Courage in Journalism for beating up a Bircher on his composing room floor. His newspaper appeared to be the only functioning anti-Establishment voice in the shadow of Dallas. Penn's wife ran the linotype, and he did everything else—from writing the editorials to boarding up the front window after receiving a letter to the editor in the form of a firebomb. Penn looked like a wash-and-wear version of Burgess Meredith. He was five foot five, his weathered face had an unfinished texture, as if sandblasted out of balsa wood, and his uneven, receding hairline was semi-crew cut in a style scalped by amateur Indians.

John Griffin had called him "scrappy," and God perhaps had Penn Jones in mind when he created the word. When the city paved the streets in the black section of Midlothian with a gravel loaded with rusty nails, Penn not only wrote about it—he dug some 50 pounds of nails out of the streets and put them on display in his office window for all the world to see. When a lieutenant in the Dallas police department offered Penn the lucrative job of printing the regional KKK newspaper, Penn told him to go to hell. "Half the cops in Dallas belong to the KKK or the Birch society," he said. Penn pledged allegiance to no creed but the truth, which (his corny country parlance gave a dignity to the cliché) he called the "cross and grail" of the newspaperman. He was a card-carrying member of Genuine America and proud of it: he had

landed at Salerno with the fighting Texas 36th Infantry in World War II; his collection of barbed wire was the largest, he said modestly, in the continental United States; his pudgy son was the drum major for the University of Michigan marching band. He was especially proud of the esteem in which he was held by his fellow country editors in the Southwest and Midwest, who viewed him as something of a cross between William Allen White and the Green Hornet. When the Frederick, Colorado, *Farmer and Miner* called Penn Jones "the most courageous newspaperman of our time" for his editorials on the assassination in Dallas, that meant more to Penn than the day Walter Cronkite came to take his picture.

I asked Penn why he put out such a crusading newspaper in a place like Midlothian. "This is the only newspaper which cares about Midlothian. If I left, nobody would care."

This man, this prime-rib slice of middle America, swore on a stack of Bibles that a dozen or more people connected with the assassination had met mysterious deaths in its aftermath—and that more deaths were in the cards.

We drove out to Penn's ranch to talk. He wanted to show us his hand-made waterwheel; he boasted it was the only working waterwheel in Ellis County, although it took a kick and a run up the hill to the pump to get it going. Penn found the necessaries and a quart of branch water in a hingeless cupboard in the ranch's ramshackle main cabin, and we sat down to listen to the waterwheel chug in the distance as the editor discoursed in narrative detail on the spidery, black world of Texas politics. He described the several Dallases: the jet stream, superchic, millionaire liberal fashion-plate Dallas of department store owner Stanley Marcus; the fanatic, paramilitary billionaire right-wing Dallas of General Edwin Walker; the crawling lowlife of cheap punks, pimps and perverts in the dingy Dallas of Jack Ruby; the corrupt, stetson-sporting, justice-for-sale, penny-arcade official Dallas. He talked of the "Texas Mafia," those pot-bellied bosom buddies of Lyndon Johnson, the middlemen who also got theirs off the top, who could fix everything from a speeding ticket to a murder charge; of Bill Brammer, Lyndon's former aide who had the poor sense to write a good novel, *The Gay Place*, about

LBJ's world, and how LBJ had destroyed him, crumpled the man up and thrown him away like a used pack of cigarettes.

Penn was just getting warmed up about Dallas by the time he got down to the grit of the assassination. He estimated that he had spent "several thousand hours" reading and knocking on doors, asking questions, attempting to connect the dots in the puzzle left by the Warren Commission. "The Warren Report," he said decisively, "wasn't worth the paper it was printed on." He was not averse to backing up that statement. He ticked off a list of social contacts between Ruby and Dallas police officer Jefferson Davis Tippit, and then between Oswald, who shot Tippit, and Ruby, who shot Oswald, that read like a computer matchmaker's dream datebook. There was the testimony of Oswald's landlady, Earlene Roberts, that a Dallas police car had pulled up in front of the rooming house shortly after the assassination, while Oswald was inside, and honked twice, in some sort of signal, then drove off; Oswald left via the front door a few moments later. There was a list as long as a tattooed man's arm of Oswald's FBI contacts in Texas and New Orleans. And stories like that of Julia Ann Mercer, an eyewitness who was told to deny what she had sworn in writing to the Dallas County Sheriff's Office, and was never called as a witness before the Warren Commission; she had seen a man with a rifle case get out of a green pickup truck and walk up the hill to the grassy knoll above Dealey Plaza minutes before the assassination—the driver of the pickup, she said, was Jack Ruby.

We sat transfixed, listening over the *chung-plung, chung-plung* of the waterwheel to his verbal catalogue of the sins and omissions of the Warren Commission. "I've got a million of them," Penn said. One of the strangest was the story of Rose Chermi. According to police reports Penn had dug up, Ms. Chermi, a lady of less than tender years and experience, had been thrown from a moving automobile near Eunice, Louisiana, on November 20, 1963. A passing good Samaritan picked her up and drove her to a hospital, where she angrily volunteered information to the effect that she was in the employ of Dallas nightclub owner, Jack Ruby, and had been driving to Florida with two of Ruby's men to pick up a

load of narcotics for their boss; during an argument, one of the men had shoved her out the door of the speeding car. She also volunteered the information that President Kennedy and other officials were going to be killed on their impending visit to Dallas but two days hence. No one took her seriously. After the assassination, the Eunice authorities thought a little differently and Rose Chermi was questioned further. Shown a news story the day after Ruby shot Oswald, which quoted Ruby as denying having previously known Oswald, she laughed out loud. "They were bed mates," she said. What further information, if any, Rose Chermi provided was not later found in the official records of Eunice, Louisiana. And l'affair Chermi somehow escaped the attention of the Warren Commission.

When Penn went looking for Rose, he found that she had been killed by an unidentified hit and run driver, on September 4, 1965, while walking along the side of a highway near Big Sandy, Texas.

"So that's one of the mysterious deaths," I said.

Penn looked at me as if I were some sensation-mongering big city journalist.

"Nope," he said. "Not yet, anyway. She's dead all right. But I haven't finished checking her case out."

No rush, he said. There were plenty of other, duly certified, mysterious deaths. And there'd be plenty more where they came from, no doubt; he reckoned he'd be working on the assassination the rest of his life, there was that much to do.

The tiny Texas editor discussed such matters with the calm of a reporter who had his scoop down pat, and was just waiting for the man from Pall Mall cigarettes to come along and give him its \$500 Big Story award. Curses, like rivers, have to start somewhere, and the string of mysterious deaths connected with the Kennedy assassination was traced by Penn Jones to a fateful meeting at Jack Ruby's apartment on Sunday, November 24, 1963—the night that Ruby shot Oswald. Penn discovered that three of the five people present at that meeting had died in a mysterious manner afterwards. It was this discovery which started the Mysterious Death clock ticking. When we talked, in 1966, the count was around thirteen or

fourteen; Penn's latest tabulation, as of 1974, has the number at one hundred or more. Granted the actuarial tables and hardening of the arteries, that list still amounts, at the least, to a bit of a curse. The first fatalities are instructive of the lot. The two newspapermen who were at Ruby's apartment that night died—by all fair-trade applications of the adverb—mysteriously within a year. Jim Koethe, a reporter for the *Dallas Times Herald*, was killed, as Ed Sanders would say, chop-chop, by a karate blow in the neck when he stepped out of the shower the morning of September 21, 1964. His apartment was ransacked, and two notebooks filled with information on the assassination were taken. The second reporter, Bill Hunter, of the *Long Beach Press Telegram*, was shot to death by a cop while sitting at his desk in the press room of the Long Beach Public Safety Building six months later. Two Long Beach police detectives confessed that they had been horsing around, playing cops and robbers with loaded guns, when one cop dropped his gun and it went off, killing Hunter with a bullet through the heart. The cops were convicted of involuntary manslaughter, but sentence was suspended. The third dead man who had been at Ruby's apartment that night was Tom Howard, a Dallas professional character who, as Ruby's first attorney, had proclaimed that his client should get the Congressional Medal of Honor for shooting Oswald. In 1964, Howard, a healthy and gregarious fellow, began to act in a very nervous manner, then reportedly died of a heart attack at the ripe old age of 48. No autopsy was performed.

From there, Penn Jones's list of dead people who had some connection with the assassination began to balloon:

Nancy Jane Mooney, a stripper at Jack Ruby's Carousel Club, the mother of four, jailed on a disturbing the peace charge, was found hanged by her own toreador pants in her cell in the Dallas City Jail. (In addition to having worked for Ruby, Nancy Jane's tie to the assassination investigation was as the prime alibi for an individual accused of shooting a used car salesman in the head; the salesman had seen a man with a gun fleeing the scene where officer Tippit was shot—and said the man was not Oswald; when he recovered from his wound, and after consulting at length with General Edwin Walker, the

car salesman changed his story and said the man with the gun was Oswald, after all, just like the Warren Commission said.)

Housepainter Hank Killam, the husband of Wanda, Ruby's favorite B-girl, and the buddy of a man who lived in the same roominghouse with Oswald, massacred himself on Valentine's Day, 1964, by falling through a plate glass window and severing his jugular vein.

Cab driver William Whaley, who drove Oswald from the Kennedy murder scene, died in a weird head-on collision in 1965. He was the first Dallas cabbie to be killed in action since 1937.

Edward Benavides, the brother and lookalike to an eyewitness to the killing of officer Tippit, was shot in the back of the head in a Dallas beer joint in 1964; when a relative, dissatisfied with the police classification of the shooting as "unsolved," began to poke around on his own, someone took two potshots at him.

The list went on much in the same fashion. The only exception to the editor's scientistlike restraint in naming a person as a mysterious death was the bitchy matter of Dorothy Kilgallen. Penn just couldn't get over the fact that she was the only reporter ever to interview Jack Ruby alone—with no official or unofficial interlopers; just before she died she had been going around New York telling friends that she was about to "bust the Kennedy assassination wide open." She was found dead in bed, reportedly of too many cocktails made of one part alcohol to three parts barbiturates. The thing that freaked Penn was that Miss Kilgallen died on November 8, 1965—the night the lights went out in New York. Fair to jumping up and down over this coincidence, Penn wrote an editorial in the *Midlothian Mirror* titled: "Was It A Mickey?"

"Find out," I asked David Welsh in the plane on our way back to San Francisco, "if all those people are really dead."

Meanwhile, back at *Ramparts'* drydock in San Francisco, there was an armada of sleuths afloat on Dexedrine, attempting to meet the deadline for the November issue, in time to observe the third anniversary of the assassination. They were

preparing an encyclopedic broadside against the Warren Commission as "merchants of alibis," to borrow a phrase of the great Mike Gold, that one-man Addison and Steele of American Communist letters. This Song of the Sleuths would be of such sweet clarity as to compel the reopening of the assassination investigation.

Consistent with *Ramparts'* operating procedures, we had a cover before we had a story. Stermer had procured an official color photograph of Jack Kennedy—chin propped on hand, handsome beaver teeth smiling, money-pouch bags around the eyes, comate hairdo shining with vigor. It was a visage suitable for a Camelot airmail stamp. Stermer sent it to a local jigsaw puzzle manufacturer with instructions to make a puzzle out of the picture of the martyred President. We figured the jigsaw maker for a Republican, since he got the finished puzzle back to us, as several boors in the office noted, in jig time. Before sending it off to the engraver, the art director removed a few pieces from the bottom of the puzzle, for dramatic effect. Keating wanted to improve on the idea and take pieces out of JFK's head, exactly where he had been shot. Stermer refused, and after considerable pushing and pulling of Kennedy jigsaw pieces, the art director carried the day. The assassination-puzzle cover ready, I waited for the sleuths to deliver their giant speckled egg so long in gestation; the time had come to crack open the Warren Commission.

The sleuths' manuscript was a monument to the irrelevance of logic. Slightly less bulky than the Manhattan Yellow Pages, our counterthesis was as academic, convoluted and tautological as the Warren Report itself. It was a goddamn legal brief; I wanted something that would get people talking about the Warren Report with the cynicism they did about the weather report. All public opinion polls and other scientific ilk belong in the same cocked hat; they are loaded in the first place, since they weight the question simply by bringing it up. In my book, the only reliable indicator of what is weighing on the national consciousness is what people are talking about in neighborhood bars. The books that had come out criticizing the Warren Report had stirred the nation's intellectuals but left the masses becalmed. I wanted to churn the bars.

I stuck my head in the door of David Welsh's office. "Did you find out if all those people are dead?"

"So far, ten check out. Ten dead," he said.

"Ten's enough," I said. "Pin it all on Penn Jones."

I threw out the 30,000 plus words of sleuth sweat and tears. To purple gazes of hate and small gurgling sounds of rage from the sleuths, I ripped apart the entire magazine and, over the weekend it was scheduled to go to press, inserted a special section of Penn Jones's "mysterious death" editorials from the Midlothian *Mirror*. It was accompanied by Welsh's report, titled "In the Shadow of Dallas," which related with spartan objectivity the story of how the small-town newspaper editor in Texas had discovered a series of deaths related to the assassination of President Kennedy, and that all these people were, indeed, dead. The tone was that of *Dragnet*: slightly incredulous but respectful of the facts. We included Dorothy Kilgallen on the list of those mysteriously dead—but with a question mark after her name. I rewrote the lead for the Kilgallen section in a manner conducive to the raising of an interesting rumor, but not a flag:

"We know of no serious person who really believes that the death of Dorothy Kilgallen, the gossip columnist, was related to the Kennedy assassination. Still . . ."

Amnesia is said to be curable by a good hit on the head; national amnesia may be no different, as the use of King Tut's hammer proved most effective. The "mysterious deaths" became an overnight sensation. *Ramparts* sold out, and went back on the presses. Penn Jones found himself catapulted to the status of instant folk hero. Walter Cronkite dispatched a film crew to Midlothian and devoted long segments of three consecutive CBS newscasts to Penn Jones's Big Story. European newspapers ran scare headlines, while many American papers editorialized against anyone taking seriously such sagebrush rumors—but in denying a conspiracy the press found itself in the unexpected position of promoting a curse. Mysterious deaths were suddenly reported everywhere, from the gruel dished up in drug-store tabloids, to the mass slicks; *Cosmopolitan* reprinted the *Ramparts* story in its conspiratorial entirety, which was one of the last acts of the old management

before Helen Gurley Brown took over and began asking men to take off their clothes in the centerfold. Some time later I was in a proletarian bar in outer Brooklyn, and, over a beer, I heard a toothless old lady tell the fellow next to her about "all these people who got murdered down in Texas because they knew who killed President Kennedy"—I knew then that the national consciousness barrier had been cracked.

The sleuths were unhappy. Although I had got a good national buzz going in their cause, they were so upset at my trashing their manuscript that had I brought the sun whirling down to the crowd at Fatima on their behalf, I doubt they would have approved. Missionaries like to control the process of conversion, and do not always find miracles to their taste. David Lifton, the supersleuth, sat grumping in my office one afternoon while I attempted to explain that it is necessary to break the ice before you can go swimming in winter; now that people were talking about the assassination in neighborhood pubs, the public attention span for considering the Warren Commission's misfeasance had been sufficiently expanded so that people might even be willing to look at one of his blow-ups and see a rifleman in the bushes.

Unable to appeal to any higher authority, I retreated to citing Hinckle's Laws of Advocacy Journalism, which I had made up that instant, just to shut him up:

"Listen, buddy," I said, "if you can't prove a conspiracy, settle for a curse."

Finally, a regrettable incident occurred which caused me to be drummed out of the ranks of the sleuths.

A book review came into the office that was a rather funny satire on the excess of insignificant detail and latent necrophilia in the ballooning literature of criticism of the Warren Report. It was in the form of a review of a nonexistent book, *Time of Assassins*, allegedly a privately published, four-volume work printed on slick paper and written by a Franco-Russian sociologist of Levittown, New York, one Ulov G. K. Leboeuf. The satire had been written by Jacob Brackman and Faye Levine. It skirted the absurd in a somewhat heavy-handed fashion, praising the fictional author Leboeuf for linking the

not the real
sequence

Kennedy assassination with the deaths of Aldous Huxley, Marilyn Monroe and Adlai Stevenson, and tied in the conspiracy with George Hamilton's "evasion" of the draft and Ben Bella's ascent to power. But it was worth a chuckle, and the paper had been grim lately, so—to Scheer's great joy—I decided to run it, and in the book review section, lest we belabor the obvious. Besides, the mysterious deaths story was running in that issue and I thought it might confuse the readers if the spoof was in the body of the paper along with the spook story.

The "book" was listed thus in *Ramparts* in the time-honored book review fashion:

TIME OF ASSASSINS by ULOV G. K. LEBOEUF. Levittown, N.Y.: Ulov G.K. Leboeuf. 4 Vols. I: 495 pp., II: 387 pp., III: 691 pp., IV: 460 pp. \$24.

The November issue of *Ramparts* appeared on the newsstands in Manhattan on a Tuesday. By Wednesday evening, Bookmasters had received over 100 orders for the \$24 set of *Time of Assassins*. The demand increased geometrically each day. The *Ramparts* switchboard in San Francisco was besieged with long-distance calls from readers who couldn't find "Leboeuf" in their local bookstores, and from hungry booksellers who wanted to stock such a hot item but couldn't raise the author and publisher in Levittown information. Over three hundred people sent checks for \$24 to *Ramparts* in an effort to acquire the hard-to-get volumes. My sister, Marianne (aka Vampira), a roving *Ramparts* editor in charge of trouble, drew the duty of writing all three hundred souls, returning their money and explaining in the nicest possible way that they had been had.

Within the ranks of booksellers and Kennedy assassination enthusiasts, "Leboeuf" created the same kind of havoc that Orson Welles' notorious Mercury Theatre broadcast of *War of the Worlds* did in certain panicked hamlets in New Jersey. That was to say nothing of the reaction within the ranks of the sleuths themselves, who recognized the review for the fraud and deceit that it of course was and reacted with angina pectoris, chain letters of canceled subscriptions, historical

analogies to Pearl Harbor, and cursory threats of physical violence. The cold unbridled fury of the sleuths was given its most eloquent statement in a letter from Sylvia Meagher, who wrote that the publication of such a sordid lampoon "places you in the same camp with the outright pornographers and other befouled merchants who are assassins of the human spirit."

I wrote a monthly column in the front of the magazine with the standing title "Apologia," and there I apologized to one and all for the laying of so unexpected an egg. I thought that would be the end of it; but I was wrong. "Leboeuf" would not die from a simple declaration of its nonexistence. A month later, the *Boston Globe* ran a front-page feature story on the critics of the Warren Commission by two investigative reporters who had been assigned to dig into the controversy and give the readers the straight poop. The reporters ridiculed most of the critics, including and especially *Ramparts*, as irresponsible and unbelievable. Nevertheless, the *Globe's* article postulated that the assassination inquiry should be reopened anyway, because despite crackpots such as *Ramparts*, substantive questions had been raised in serious and responsible works on the assassination—among them the interesting new study of sociologist Ulov G.K. Leboeuf of Levittown. . . .

A year later, the paper was sued for libel for the one and only time in my five years' stewardship. The service was from Texas, and the complainant a janitor in Parkland Hospital in Dallas, one Darrell Tomlinson. Mr. Tomlinson was the man who found the Warren Commission's Bullet No. 399, the superbullet, on Governor Connally's stretcher. He was so mentioned in the Warren Report, and correctly identified in the Leboeuf book review, but from there the satirists had run amuck, implicating the janitor in the fantasy-plot through his "clubfooted wife named Mary from whom he was divorced," and who was said to actually be, through a very complicated lineage, a second cousin to Jack Ruby; and living secretly in Las Vegas "as the commonlaw wife of one Officer Toasty," an FBI agent the satirists linked sexually to Oswald.

The lawsuit asked for a perfunctory million dollars. I

passed the matter on to Bruce Stilson, our libel lawyer, who reported that the action by the distressed Mr. Tomlinson included among the defendants a San Diego book publisher, Publishers Export, Inc., which had recently distributed a book on the Kennedy assassination titled *Oswald Alone?* The authors of *Oswald Alone?* had apparently been impressed by the non-existent Leboeuf's credentials as a scholar and investigator—so much so that they had gone Leboeuf one better and suggested conclusions in their book, based on the “coincidences” of Leboeuf's fictional evidence, that the sage of Levittown himself had not dared to make.

Thus Mr. Tomlinson alleged in his formal complaint that, in spite of the fact that his former wife was *not* club-footed *nor* named Mary, and that he had never used an alias let alone been known by the name of one “Artemis Heverford” (as he was identified in the satirical review), he “has received and been subjected to many insults and abuses from various persons by telephone or otherwise from all parts of the United States as a result of said statements to the extent that he has been required to avoid most telephone communications and obtain a non-listed telephone number; that his life has been threatened as a result thereof by anonymous calls at all hours of the night; all of which has caused. . . . stress of mind and mental anguish. . . .”

It is sobering testimony to the state of investigative journalism in San Diego that the authors of *Oswald Alone?*, unable to find Leboeuf's four-volume work in the library, were undeterred in their zeal—even unto listing *Time of Assassins* by Ulov G. K. Leboeuf in their bibliography, citing the *Ramparts* fictitious book review as documentation.

Stilson hired Dean Carlton of Dallas as local counsel, and together they were able to obtain a dismissal of the lawsuit against *Ramparts* on the technical ground that the magazine was so unpopular in Texas that it did not sell enough copies there to establish it as doing business in that state. The judge who determined the case was United States District Judge Sarah T. Hughes, whose previous connection with the Kennedy assassination was her swearing in of Lyndon B. Johnson aboard Air Force One.

THE MINUTEMEN WANT TO HELP

My political education around this time was advanced by learning the distinction between left-wing Minutemen and right-wing Minutemen. Far from being a relatively cohesive block of lunatics, the gun-toting paramilitary right was split between the anti-Communist Minutemen, in some relative position approximating a left on the fanatical right, and the late George Lincoln Rockwell's American Nazis, located farthest to the racist and anti-Semitic right, with those armed bigots operating under sheeted cover of the Ku Klux Klan somewhere toward the middle—liberals on this bizarre spectrum.

Turner was my mentor in all this, having somehow gained the confidence of Robert DePugh, the head Minuteman, after doing a *Ramparts* article on the right-wing gun slingers. Turner wrote that the Minutemen were a dangerous, well-organized, well-financed, well-armed and well-disciplined assembly of vicious right-wing commandos with the human compassion of electric eels. The Minutemen seemed genuinely pleased by this description, and thought Turner a regular fellow for taking issue with his former boss, J. Edgar Hoover, who had recently pooh-pooed the Minutemen as a "paper organization" that was no threat to national security, unlike the very real menace of that gaggle of incendiaries in the W. E. B. Du Bois Clubs. When Turner wrote that the Minutemen had twenty times the members and eight hundred times the weapons that the FBI credited them with, he had himself a friend for life in DePugh. Militant right-wingers are like that: They don't care if people like them, they just want them to be scared pissless of them.

DePugh was a balding veterinarian who took good care of the cats and dogs in Norborne, Missouri, a town distinguished by the stanzas of the Hail Mary being posted on Burma Shave signs along its main highway. The veterinarian once invented a Molotov cocktail which utilized Tampax for a wick; I found the idea irresistible, but, even though Turner brought back explicit directions from DePugh, I never could get the hang of fixing the Tampax wick on the bottle.

As the Lord says in *The Green Pastures*, even bein' Gawd ain't a bed of roses. DePugh, who considered himself a responsible extremist, was worried sick over the uncontrolled activities of Minutemen "defector" groups which were springing up around the nation like weeds along a highway. These renegade riflemen had bolted the organization's central authority, drifting off toward the sign of the Horst Wessel, or becoming freelance sharpshooters for hire against any target veering leftward from the American Medical Association. DePugh complained that he had to spend too much time dashing about the country breaking up unauthorized snipings, instead of tending to the important Minuteman business of secreting caches of arms and ammunition and establishing gun-making workshops in strategic hiding places in preparation for the invasion of the Red Menace. (The workshops were deemed especially important since the fifth columnists running the government would of course cut off the people's access to automatic weapons, and it would become necessary to fabricate them. "It is better to buy one lathe," said DePugh, in the solemn manner of Father Christopher talking about lighting one candle, "than a dozen machine guns.")

The Minutemen leader had recently nipped two rump Minutemen ambushes in the bud. The targets were Senator J. William Fulbright and Stanley Marcus of Dallas. The contracts on both men, DePugh said, had been put out by certain spoiled billionaires in Dallas—one of whom had turned out to be a nut using an alias who was put in an asylum after his check bounced. Then there was the messy business of a Minuteman plot to dump cyanide in the ventilators at the United Nations. That had gone as far as the purchase of ten gallons of potassium cyanide when it was discovered by DePugh loyalists who, not wishing to bother the boss, had arranged to punish the cyanide deviationists by shooting them in a room lined with butcher paper, so as not to bloody up the floor. But the cops got wind of it and everybody was arrested. A mother cat with too many kittens, DePugh was having a rough time keeping track of his illegitimate offspring, and no wonder: A former Minuteman told Turner that there were only some 8,000 mainline Minutemen in the country—and some 80,000 ex-

Minutemen and neo-Minutemen in splinter groups and Eagle-worshipping societies, over which the main lodge had lost all control.

Now their leader had yet another concern: He suspected that some of his fallen away riflemen who had drifted off to the Nazi sandbars along the shore of Southern California had been part of a rifle team shooting at President Kennedy at Dallas. Master Marksman DePugh scoffed at the idea of Oswald scoring those hits on his own; his opinion was that the President had been caught in a "classic guerrilla crossfire" at Dealey Plaza.

DePugh was so concerned about cleaning up his organization's act that he offered *Ramparts* the resources of the Minutemen's extensive intelligence system—the Minutemen said they had infiltrated both the American Nazi Party and the FBI—and access to its carefully guarded card files of Gold Star right-wing fanatics, which confidential records were chemically coated to self-destruct in the event of a government raid. DePugh's objection to the Kennedy assassination was technical and legal, not political; I had the impression that he would not have minded the business of bumping off Kennedy had it been done according to Minutemen regulations—but such suspicions about one another are properly suppressed by wartime allies. His tender of help was quite earnest, and we accepted it in the good faith it was offered.

I timidly asked a favor that the Minutemen might do the paper. The decibel count of paranoia in our offices had reached a new high pitch with the recent arrival of a letter, signed by "The California Minutemen," which warned in the time-honored rhetoric of death threats that time was running out for the editors of *Ramparts* unless they changed their "nefarious ways." I hoped some conciliatory word from the Moses of the Minutemen might calm the staff jitters. Word came down from the Rockies that we should not fear and, sure enough, it was later discovered that "The California Minutemen" was an organization with a membership of one, a cranky San Francisco mailman who had begun delivering death threats to everyone in the town whom he didn't like. (One

other request was less favored. I was drooling at the thought of those Minutemen card files—a bonanza of guilt by association for cross-checking routine questions of paranoia. But discreet inquiries about *Ramparts* footing the bill to put the whole system on a computer for instant reference were gently rebuffed.)

The Minutemen showed themselves to be as much doers as talkers, which is something that cannot be said of their ideological opposites on the left. When Turner and Bill Boxley, an investigator from Garrison's staff, scoured the briar patches of Southern California in search of a missing link to the assassination, the Minutemen were as helpful as could be. They provided *carte d'identité* to sundry Minutemen units, and to the armed religious camps with whom DePugh was engaged in intraservice rivalry on the right. One was "The Church of Jesus Christ-Christian," the hyphen-Christian being a signal that a dirty Jew like Jesus couldn't get in the door; this fundamentalist Church worshipped the gods of race prejudice, and the Church-sponsored radio programs in Florida and California logged over one million mucus-eared listeners; the more devout among the faithful spent their worship hours in close military drill, preparing for the Inevitable. Some members of the sect even made threats of bodily harm to Billy Graham in 1961 when the minister committed the sin of playing golf with JFK.

But the DePugh follower who drank of the deepest waters was the Reverend Dallas Roquemore, a Californian who went around looking in stables, as he was certain that the Russians were buying up all of our horses to merge with all of their horses to mount a Cossack-style attack on Southern California, rendering automobiles and armored cars alike useless on the jammed freeways. Roquemore was accidentally shot to death when he sneaked up behind a Minutemen recruit to test his reactions—which were good.

Turner dined out for some time with stories of the Eric Ambler style "security" precautions taken for meetings with these Woody Allen militarists, most of whom seemed to live at home with their mothers. One meeting with an Orange County choirmaster and Minutemen executive was moved to

three different sites—first from his house, where his mother nervously said he wasn't home as the back door slammed, then to a coffee shop, where an underwear salesman of harried appearance came up and whispered the number of a room in a nearby motel. There Turner and the New Orleans detective were frisked by a bodyguard wearing a plaid hunting jacket and a Dodgers' cap. Everyone in the room was told to toss his gun on the bed—a friendly precaution that is customary in some circles of the paramilitary right. Garrison's man tossed in his Police Special .38, which made Turner the only one in the room without a gun to put in the kitty. When the Minutemen leader walked into the room, the first thing he told Turner was what a great article he had written about what menacing bastards the Minutemen were.

DePugh assigned his best Sherlock Holmes types to the riddle of Dealey Plaza. They came up with a clue that Watson would have saluted. Rifle clubs are to Minutemen as kennel clubs are to dog fanciers, and DePugh's investigators located a rifle buff who had found a singular device discarded on the ground in Dealey Plaza the day of the assassination—an ingeniously constructed piece of plastic piping which the rifle experts said was used to stuff down a rifle barrel for the purpose of changing its bore. DePugh was excited by this discovery, because it meant that the bullets from Oswald's rifle—the only concrete evidence linking him to the assassination—could have been rigged to be fired from more technically proficient rifles in the hands of marksmen, and after the shooting was over the only evidence left would be Oswald's incriminating bullets.

Regrettably, the Minutemen were not able to pursue this line of investigation, and the telltale piece of plastic tubing was somehow lost to posterity, when FBI agents arrested DePugh on Missouri bail-jumping charges at his New Mexico hideout near the rustic town of Truth or Consequences. (That was the real name.)

DePugh then spent several years as a resident in federal prison in Atlanta where, he once wrote Turner, those Minutemen inside beat the John Birch Society, 1-0, in softball.

If the good neighbor policy of the paramilitary right did not seem peculiar to me at the time, it was because I had stepped through the looking glass into that shadow world of intelligence derring-do where the bizarre became the commonplace, and half truths were the only constructive grammar. The real thing was not as tidy as the classy spy fiction of John Le Carré and Noel Behn would have it. The only constants were corruption and degeneracy, and there was more double-dealing and double-crossing among compatriots than those classy tricks intelligence services play on one another in the movies.

It was a technicolor nightmare, and it was anything but slick. The shadow nucleus of the Kennedy assassination seemed surrounded by a clownish penumbra—a kaleidoscope of swamp mists and strange noises night and day, where there was no black or white but only vile oranges and purples smothered in gray—an undulating demiworld of never clearing fog, formed by the confluence of the hot air of Caribbean intrigue with the chill jet stream of Cold War politics, hanging damp and sticky over the southeastern rim of the United States.

The professional scum who had CIA meal tickets—errand boys, cheap-shot artists, blackmailed homosexuals, cooperating crazies, ex-cops lusting after red blood and low-life thrills—seemed to thrive in this absurd climate, where their intelligence covers gave them immunity to make an illegal buck on the side, sometimes with official approbation; if smuggling guns or dope was their “cover,” they pocketed the profits. The mess had more levels than the Moscow subway. The atmosphere of intelligence and organized crime was further complicated by political vibrations from the foot-stamping restlessness of those thousands of illegal soldiers on American soil, professed freedom fighters for a capitalist Cuba, who, lured by the propaganda of armed return and by the CIA’s largesse, remained bivouacked in cheap rooming houses and swamp holes along that ninth-inning stretch of the Gulf of Mexico from the Petticoat Junction of New Orleans to the Caribbean Cold War capital of Miami. These beached

gusanos had cash in their pockets and guns in their hands, but nowhere to go and nothing to do. Inevitably, many of them drifted into such profitable mischief as high-stakes dope-importing, gun-running, Caribbean black-marketeering, and general backstabbing for hire. They also fell in with various American fringe groups—frenzied anti-Communists of paramilitary bent—with whom the stranded Cuban guerrillas shared feelings of betrayal and bitterness toward Washington.

(The Cubans, I believe, had objective cause for their anger. They were suckered by the CIA into smoking the long pipe of overthrowing Castro and then left stranded on the beaches at the Bay of Pigs. Similarly, Washington encouraged masses of Cubans to leave home—creating a refugee population of over half a million in the Greater Miami Area alone—but when it became clear that Castro, despite the CIA, was there to stay, the American Government was unwilling to accept responsibility for the unassimilated refugee population it had caused to be so artificially encamped on the shores of the world's greatest melting pot. Many Cubans regarded it as an exercise in black humor when Congress finally got around to passing a Cuban refugee aid bill that exempted exiled Cubans from paying U.S. income taxes—if they could find a job to earn any money not to pay taxes on.)

In this mosaic of intrigue few facts could be certain, but we learned enough to establish the un rebuttable presumption that the Warren Commission had covered up the involvement of U.S. clandestine intelligence operations in the Kennedy assassination; of the jillion things that remained uncertain, the most troubling was whether the government cover-up had been motivated by embarrassment or complicity.

At any rate, the intelligence backgrounds of both minor and major characters in the assassination drama were inescapable, although their individual stories often were unsuitable for *Night Gallery* on grounds of unbelievability.

If some of the assassination stories we stumbled across had overtones of Kafka, others were more Marquis de Sade. Queen bee of the bizarre types was David Ferric, a homosex-

Miami, shot in the heart and his head split in half by a machete, but that was of course a coincidence.

My eyebrows ached from rising at the ooo-la-la life styles of the CIA types we found submerged in the intelligence swamp surrounding the assassination, and I began to wonder what the heralded CIA "connection" was all about.

Silly boy, an espionage-wise and cynical friend said to me, did you think the CIA was running a tennis club?

My friend was from a distinguished Eastern seaboard family. He had worked for the CIA for ten years, before concluding that his father had been right when he told him he was rich enough not to work for a living if he didn't care to, and never mind the bourgeois conventions about having a job. He therefore retired, at 41, to write novels and hike in the Adirondacks.

Although we did not agree about many things politically, he was more than happy to set me straight about the CIA. He proceeded to give me a proper dressing down for my naïveté. Was I some sort of a Protestant dope like John Lindsay, who thought the world could be straightened out with *Robert's Rules of Order*? He said he would straighten me out about the Kennedy assassination theories and countertheories. I must warn the reader that his interpretation is about as favorable to the CIA as it is possible to be under the circumstances. He put it to me thus:

"The movies have fancied up the spy business, and the adventure-hungry academics who joined the agency have given it an Ivy League frosting, but the filling is rotten like a cream puff filled with pus. In some ways, it has to be like that. Spies must operate in the scumbelt of humanity cinching the world; the scum attracts the weak, and weakness is the backbone of intelligence. Without weakness and greed there would be no spies or counterspies. The system depends on the bribe and blackmail—those are the basic tools of intelligence, the pen and pencil, the hammer and sickle—but they can only be applied to soft spots. If you can't find a soft spot, you make one: That's why agents employ the corrupt to compromise the weak, when necessary. Where else would the fishermen of

espionage search for their minnows but in the pools of miscast and misfit humanity? These people have no existence to be proud of, so they are willing to change it for the purposes of a job. And, they are expendable.

"It is a rotten business, to be sure, but the name of the game is results—and a satisfactory result is just maintaining the status quo. You shouldn't be surprised that a lot of people have to spy, and people even have to die, and a lot of dredge go under the bridge unnoticed, just to keep things the way they are—between nations, and between intelligence establishments. Those people in the business who still have consciences tell themselves that in a rotten world, it becomes necessary to spread a little more rot, just for the limited but desperate purpose of keeping the whole shebang from collapsing of its own dry rot."

I asked if he thought the CIA would go so far as to kill the President.

Negative, my friend said. Highly unlikely, anyway. "Intelligence is not in the business of overthrowing the government. If the CIA ever bumped a President, they'd have a war with the Pentagon for ultimate power. They need the President as a buffer; the executive is something to influence and manipulate, not destroy. Even a hostile President isn't that much trouble for the CIA. These guys have got staying power. Look how long Hoover hung around, and he didn't have half the shit on people that the Agency has in its files."

Well, then, I asked, could individual agents, or their hangers-on have done it?

"Of course. It wouldn't surprise me. Oswald obviously had an intelligence background. And the CIA in the sixties was spread as thin and was as long and as screwed up as a tapeworm. If it wiped its ass it couldn't be sure if it was its own hand that was doing it.

"The CIA kept all those poor Cubans on the string for years after the Bay of Pigs—it had them running around all over the place, using the CIA's guns and money for God knows what. Most of them ended up in narcotics or smuggling of some kind. It's not unlikely, either, that some agency guys would

work out a deal on the side with them. Opium smuggling was standard operating procedure for CIA and Air America guys in Southeast Asia. It was a goddamn fringe benefit.

"But you can be sure of this. If any of the CIA people, regulars or fly-by-nights, were involved in any way in the assassination, the CIA would cover it up. And that isn't just a matter of complicity—it's a matter of survival for them. Even the involvement of minor agents acting unilaterally would open such a public can of worms that the Agency could never go fishing the same way again.

"Now, I'll bet on this too: The CIA would take care of those people privately. Their eyeballs would be on somebody's cuff links. But at the same time the agency would do anything they had to—even kill—to keep the lid on."

I must confess that *Ramparts* contributed little toward reducing the smog of alarmism hanging over Garrison's investigation when I ran a cover on the DA which was half a tightly-cropped picture of his studious face, the other half, in large type, this out-of-context quotation from Garrison: "*Who appointed Ramsey Clark, who has done his best to torpedo the investigation of the case? Who controls the CIA? Who controls the FBI? Who controls the Archives where this evidence is locked up for so long that it is unlikely that there is anybody in this room who will be alive when it is released? This is really your property and the property of the people of this country. Who has the arrogance and the brass to prevent the people from seeing the evidence? Who indeed?*

"The one man who has profited most from the assassination—your friendly President, Lyndon Johnson!"

With the exception of the unlikely bedfellows of *Ramparts*, *Playboy*, and the *New York Review of Books*, Garrison had a solidly hostile national press. Among the sidebars of history to the Kennedy assassination, it has always struck me that the most singular was the cooperation of the government and the major media to sanctify the sleight of hand of the Warren Commission and to dump on its critics. This began long before Garrison got in the act. Of course those were the halcyon days before the Pentagon Papers, when cooperation and gen-

demerit agreement were the rule of thumb between the Eastern Establishment's media branch in New York and its governmental apparatus in Washington.

Much of the beating Garrison took from the media was his own fault. When his investigation became bogged down in the intelligence swamp which was the real milieu of the assassination, Garrison adopted the practice, inadvisable for a swamp guide, of grabbing some slimy green thing out of the water and holding it up for the press to see, as if that showed how the ecology of the swamp worked. The denouement of the Garrison story belongs to the tradition of *Waiting for Godot*, except that we are still waiting. The more viperous among the sleuths now maintain that the CIA "got" to the DA, but I think not. The truth is considerably more commonplace. The blue meanies got to Jim. Angered by his Faustian sparring matches with the press, distraught from defections within his own staff of investigators, frustrated by the refusal of other states to extradite his suspects, physically run down from a recurrent bad back, yet propelled forward by the high octane of paranoia, Garrison eschewed the probably hopeless alternative of amassing sufficient evidence of the government's cover-up of its intelligence agencies' involvement to get Washington to reopen formally the assassination investigation.

The prosecutor in him rising with his temper, Garrison elected to go for the kill. Since he could not get to many of his prime suspects, he opted to hang it all on Clay Shaw, the New Orleans businessman he had put in the dock for alleged complicity in the assassination. As Garrison escalated his pronouncements during the long waiting period before the trial, the guilt or innocence of Shaw became synonymous in the public mind with the truth or falsity of the assassination probe.

I was worried, and sent Sidney Zion, a former Assistant U.S. Attorney, then a legal correspondent for the *New York Times* and then a friend, to New Orleans to check out Garrison's case. Zion came back scratching his balding head. "Idono," he

said, "if Jim's got what he says he's got on that guy, he's got a hellofa case; but he wouldn't show me what he had."

It took two years for the Shaw case to get to trial, a period during which many people lost interest, among them, seemingly, Jim Garrison. He went through the motions of pursuing the investigation, but when the trial date arrived, Jim turned his big case over to an assistant district attorney, barely showing up in the courtroom, except to make a dramatic midnight summation to the jury. As powerful as Jim's oration was, the jury seemed more impressed by the admission of one of the witnesses for the prosecution, who said he had been hypnotized over 100 times by his "enemies." It returned an acquittal. Garrison then turned around and rearrested Shaw for perjury, on the ground that, among other things, he had lied under oath by saying that he was not guilty as charged.

Despite the collapse of Garrison's investigation, the government has continued to act as if he knows something they don't want others to know. In July of 1971 the DA was indicted by a federal grand jury on charges of taking bribes to protect illegal pinball games in New Orleans. Attorney General John Mitchell himself announced the indictment. The media coverage of the DA surrendering himself to federal agents was as extensive as that for Mardi Gras.

The press somehow missed a considerably more significant Garrison story some ten months later. In May of 1972, the government's main witness against the DA formally recanted his testimony and said that the whole pinball charge was a frame-up engineered by the Department of Justice. In an interview televised in Canada by the Canadian Broadcasting Company, but blacked out in the United States, the witness said that in return for swearing a false affidavit against Garrison, the Justice Department had supplied him with a false name and a false birth certificate for his son and sent him to Canada where he had an \$18,000-a-year job with General Motors—but never had to do any work because the salary was his "pay off." The Justice Department had no comment to inquiries from the Canadian press. Most American papers didn't ask. [Jim was eventually found innocent.]

That is far too glum a note on which to end about Jim Garrison. He is a remarkable piece of Americana, wild and imperfect man that he is.

There is one Garrison story that cheers me up. It was at a time that the conspiracy bubble was just beginning to crumple. The District Attorneys' Association—sort of the Elks Club of big and little city DA's—was holding one of its many national gatherings in fun New Orleans, and most of the nation's DA's were there.

The main event was a dinner-dance-soiree for the DA's and their wives in the ballroom of the Royal Orleans Hotel. Garrison, as the host District Attorney, was scheduled to speak. The program committee had elicited a solemn promise from Garrison's chief aide that Jim's remarks to his fellow DA's would deal with subjects other than the Kennedy assassination.

The afternoon of the dinner, Jim met with the program committee. He was excited. A "major break" had developed in his investigation in Dallas, he said, which he would announce during his speech that evening. His fellow District Attorneys reminded Jim of the pledge to assassination silence. But he was not to be put off. He said he was going to say whatever he wanted to say, and that was that.

The other DA's reluctantly told their host that if he insisted, they would have to take him off the speakers' program.

"This is my town," said Garrison. "You just go ahead and see what happens if you don't let me speak."

The DA's said they were very sorry. . . .

Garrison went directly to the hotel kitchen and summoned the manager. He told him to padlock the doors to the ballroom. The dinner for eight hundred was off.

The distraught manager asked what was he going to do with the steaks. "Give them to the Little Sisters of the Poor," Garrison said. "I'm sending over a truck."

The law enforcement executives and their wives found the ballroom padlocked that night, and no food in the hotel cupboard. Garrison, at the time of this unsettling discovery, was having a few reporters in for drinks at his hospitality suite.

The irate head of the DA's committee burst in and demanded an explanation.

Garrison glanced up, took an extra breath, and said in a friendly drawl, "I don't speak, you don't eat."

THE MYSTERY OF THE BLACK BOOKS

"Just because you're paranoid
doesn't mean you aren't being
followed."

—*Thomas Pynchon*

Somewhere back in the primordial ooze of the Garrison investigation there lingers a story that has never been told before. It is not an assassination story, it is primarily a mystery story, and it is not even a story about Garrison himself, although his interests at the time spurred on the events. There have been good reasons for the long silence of the participants, or victims, as the telling places certain people where they perhaps should not have been, and involves the violation, or alleged violation, of several laws of the land, among them those proscribing the unauthorized dealings by private citizens with the governments of unfriendly foreign powers. By now, though, Richard Nixon the Elder has left pecker tracks all over those previously clear ground rules, and one no longer knows if one is dealing with an old enemy or a new friend until one picks up the morning paper. So I will be indiscreet.

In the New Orleans summer of 1968, Bill Turner was chewing the conspiracy fat with Jim Garrison and enjoying a Southern bourbon without benefit of mint. Turner suggested that it would be nice to know what the Russians knew about the murder of John F. Kennedy. Assuming that they didn't do it, they doubtless had a pretty good idea who did.

The thought of the KGB's bulging files on the CIA lit Garrison up like the White House Christmas tree on opening night. But a frown browned out his enthusiasm. "Even if

they'd cooperate," the DA said, "we could never make the approach from my office. The wolves out there would never stop howling if they caught us asking the time of day of the KGB."

Never mind that, said Turner, *Ramparts* would make the Russians an offer they couldn't refuse. . . .

It was a week later. Turner was having coffee in a San Francisco beanery with a young man who had no name. He was the shady side of thirty-five, tall, tanned, sandy-haired, with high, raw cheekbones and polished turquoise eyes. He was not a professional mystery man, although he was mysterious about his profession, and it would be as accurate to say he had several names as none, because names to him were as paper plates, to be used and then discarded. His primary employment, in the year and a half that we had known him, was that of a contract combat pilot for the CIA. He flew a Douglas B-26 out of Miami on itinerant bombing raids against the Cuban coastline. His targets were usually pedestrian objects such as oil tanks, although once he made a pass over a Russian-built radar installation. He had also flown aerial reconnaissance missions over Cuba out of Central and South American airfields.

He had flown and fought in many other places in the world at the drop of a dollar. His disillusion with the CIA began when he worked for them in the Congo. "You can rescue nuns," the Agency had told him. He found himself shooting up supply boats instead. But he kept flying, partly for the money, which was good, partly because he was hooked on adventure, and the CIA was the big Connection.

It is testimony to the perverseness of his world that—although he came to see himself as working for the bad guys, an employment he was loath to give up because he enjoyed the means if not the end—his dangerous compulsion to simultaneously do something for the good guys was limited by his inability to find any. He had once tried an undercover assignment for the federal narcs, but their bumbling ways nearly got him killed. Given the paucity of angels, he latched

Duvalier. That would get a good press, as everyone knew he was a miserable bastard. The Free Republic of Haiti would then accept as naturalized citizens those large numbers of displaced Cubans who had been giving the CIA such a headache by hanging around Miami. Thus stocked, this artificial trout pond of a republic would proceed to drive Castro to the wall, gradually knocking out Cuba's defenses by low-flying bomber attacks across the narrow windward passage separating the two islands, and the amphibious landing of teams of saboteurs and Fuller Brush salesmen of insurrection. With a little bit of luck, Castro would crack under the pressure, or be faced with no alternative but that of counterattacking Haiti. That would mean war in the Caribbean, and the United States could come to the defense of its new democratic neighbor Haiti, and thereby land the Marines in Cuba—all on the up and up. It was not a bad plot, as evil plots go, and for all I know it's still in the CIA's Out Basket.

Hill was the man we tapped to send to the Russians.

Anyone who has seen a good spy movie knows how to get in touch with the KGB. All you do is go to a Russian Embassy and ask to see the Second Secretary, who is invariably the resident Soviet intelligence chief. (If you're looking in an American Embassy for the CIA, best try the Cultural Attaché first.)

Anyway, that's what we did. And it worked.

There was, however, some hesitation before the fateful knock at the KGB door. Hill quite understandably gave thought to the damage possible to his CIA meal ticket, or his person, lest word get back to Langley, Virginia, that one of their pilots was fraternizing with the enemy. But the lure of rubbing noses with the KGB eventually overshadowed any cautionary reserves in his nature. When he said he was ready to go, we took extreme steps to insure that the man with no name would leave no trail should any untoward or unfortunate event occur while he was dealing with the enemy. We bought his airline ticket with cash, so it could not be traced back to *Ramparts*. We even shook him down for incriminating matchbook covers. When we were satisfied he could not be connected to any organization in America, save perhaps the

Bace?

CIA, he boarded a jet for Mexico City, on his way along the yellow brick road to see the wizard of espionage at the Russian Embassy. It had been agreed all around that the act of asking to borrow a cup of intelligence from the KGB had best take place in another country.

By the estimate of the *Reader's Digest*, the Russian Embassy in Mexico City is "one of the world's great sanctuaries of subversion." It has the appearance of a giant cuckoo clock that has been put under house arrest. A gray Victorian mansion bedecked with gingerbread cupolas, it is cut off from the outside world by grounds dotted with peach trees and patrolled by sentries with a do-not-touch look about them, who are in turn cut off from the street by an iron fence unsuitable for pole vaulting. The twenty-four-hour work of the Embassy is carried out behind shuttered windows to the sound of crickets at night, melting into the click and whir of camera shutters by day, as most of the handsome houses across the street on the Calzada de Tacubaya are apparently in the possession of camera bugs of various intelligence services who have made a hobby of photographing everyone including the milkman who approaches the Russian Embassy. Not to be outdone, the Russians also photograph everyone who comes through their main gate, and occasionally even photograph the hidden photographers across the street.

Hill walked chin high through the moat of cameras. Once inside, he asked to see someone who could get word back to Moscow. He was ushered to a monastic waiting room. A stocky, owl-eyed man with the look of a well-groomed card mechanic soon entered, blinking in a formal, quizzical manner which gave the impression that he only blinked during working hours.

The visitor introduced himself as the undercover emissary that he was and explained the peculiar circumstances of his mission. The Russian warily asked for the camera which hung around Hill's neck, and said he would return it when their conversation was completed. Hill got it back later, "in better working order than when I gave it to him."

The Russian and the young American without a name talked for two hours. Hill explained Garrison's theory of the

assassination, and the Russian nodded on occasion at the mention of the CIA. Hill made his plea for "sanitized" information from the KGB files on Oswald and others.

"Our assumption is that you must have information about these matters that we do not," he said.

The Russian rose from his seat unblinking. He asked Hill where he was staying, and suggested he stick to his hotel and not do too much touring. "It may be necessary for you to stay in Mexico City for a few days."

Hill was followed when he left the Embassy for the hotel. "They used a tail on a tail," he said. "It was a very professional job."

When Hill went down to dinner that evening, a burly man in a ruffled suit sat down directly across from his table, making no pretense that he was doing anything but watching Hill. Hill sent him a complimentary vodka, and the big man smiled, displaying several gold teeth in a setting of black teeth.

The man was there again the second night. On the third day, Hill received a request to visit the Embassy.

The Russian was blinking again. He spoke in careful, circumventive, translated-from-the-Martian phrases, as if his every word were being broadcast that instant to a stadium full of hostile people. His caution was taken by Hill as some sort of a signal, because the Russian hardly said anything more than, "Don't call us, we'll call you."

"What you request is not impossible. But it is not necessary that it will happen. The only way that it could possibly occur is in a way that would be most unexpected, and untraceable to its source. Something might be left in your hands, for instance, by a visitor to your country. That is all for now."

The official smiled, extended his hand, and gave Hill his camera. "Do you like books?" he asked. Hill said that he did. The Russian gave him several books, "all about how the East and West could get along together." Hill reached in his knapsack. The only reading material he had was a Robert Crumb comic book, which he presented to the appreciative Second Secretary, who, expressing unfamiliarity with some of Crumb's idiom, in particular the phrase, "Gimmee some reds," said he would have it translated.

Hill was en route back to San Francisco when there occurred one of those bollixes that come from too much sucking on the snow cone of paranoia. He was about to go through customs in the crowded Los Angeles International Airport, one of the seven plastic wonders of the world, when he suddenly found himself staring into the bloodshot recesses of my own one good eye. Hill came up and gave me what I suppose was the password for his secret mission. He instantly assumed that my unexpected presence in the customs area was meant to head him off at the pass from some certain disaster that had befallen our comrades.

He repeated the password. I looked at him as if he were panhandling in Swahili. I snarled something nasty and incoherent to the effect that if he shaved his legs he might get a job in the chorus of the *Nutcracker Suite*. The atomic pile behind his turquoise eyes flared into critical mass, and he stepped back as if his toes had just dissolved before his eyes. He was gone before I could remember who he was, for if truth be told, I had forgotten—so hung over and generally dissipated was I, an empty egg carton that had just been helped off the plane from Ireland, whence I had fled in a deep funk to drink my way through the apocalypse of turning thirty. I was twenty-nine when I left and a human junk heap when I returned, and could not even recognize the most unforgettable person I had ever met. But Hill knew none of that. Believing my catatonic hello to be a signal that we were all in the gravest peril, he went underground from his underground assignment. That began a carnival of pixilation, a lost weekend of paranoia. The *Ramparts* people assumed Hill's disappearance meant death, or a double-cross. Hill, seeing no report of our arrest under the Espionage Act in the papers, assumed the government was suppressing the news until they hunted him down. Each non-fact reinforced another non-fact, with me not speaking all the while lest the aftertaste of Guinness escape my mouth.

It was straightened out several hundred corkscrews later. But it was a Second letdown when we learned, upon Hill's belated surfacing, that all we could do was wait some more for some sign from the KGB that might or might not come.

The only concrete result of that traumatic mission to the

Russian Embassy was an invitation for the editors of *Ramparts* to attend the Red Army Ball in Mexico City, which was graciously declined.

Sometime later, Jim Garrison took a long-distance call in his New Orleans office. The caller identified himself as the traveling representative of the Frontiers Publishing Company of Geneva. That firm had, the caller said, an important four-volume original work on the Kennedy assassination which was about to be published in Europe. Would Mr. Garrison be interested in seeing the manuscript? Yeah, sure, send it, Garrison said, hanging up. Another nut.

The United States mails deposited a fat package in the New Orleans District Attorney's office. It contained three thick volumes of manuscript, each bound in black.

When this manuscript later emerged in book form, its title was *Farewell America*. The author, according to the book jacket, was James Hepburn, a thirty-four-year-old writer, former acquaintance of Jacqueline Bouvier, and former student at the London School of Economics and the Institute of Political Studies in Paris.

Garrison took one look, and called *Ramparts* to say that the Miracle of Fatima had occurred. Instead of a lovely lady, the creator had sent down something to read.

The next day a courier arrived from New Orleans lugging a Xerox of the sign from the KGB. It was a heavy sign: a thousand-odd pages of flawless typescript, as if part of an IBM demonstration at a convention of old-maid office managers, or from the Pope. Book manuscripts normally have at the minimum a few peanut butter and jelly stains on them, not to mention hen scratchings and other placental alterations. No author since the dawn of movable type has got himself together enough to dam the babbling brook of creativity, settle the last word and position the final comma, and then had the time or the money to completely and perfectly retype his manuscript before sending it to the publishers, or they to the printers. This masterpiece of the touch system was patently the product of some boiler-plate rewrite bank in the basement of an intelligence factory.

The content of the manuscript confirmed the validity of that superficial assessment of its origin. Garrison was amazed that the unheard-of Geneva publishing outfit had as well-developed and documented a conspiracy theory as Garrison's own—with many of the same villains by name, and others of the same faces, but different aliases. The shock waves were equally as great at *Ramparts*. The mystery manuscript was as sprinkled with details as an ice cream cone dipped in chocolate jimmies. There were names and addresses, where relevant, about the clandestine operations of the Central Intelligence Agency. Much of the information was of the type that could only come from the CIA's own files or from the dossiers of a rival intelligence network. For instance, it was revealed that the CIA maintained a training center for saboteurs on Saipan Island in the Marianas, and that the Agency had exactly 28 agents in Iceland, working out of two offices, one at the American Embassy in Reykjavik, the other at the U.S. military base at Keflavik.

A *Ramparts* team of New Left researchers had been digging into the internal operations of the CIA for the better part of a year and had scavenged numerous scraps of available information, save whatever was tattooed on the inside of John McCone's belly button. A large part of the material in our files was unknown to the general press or public. But these manicured pages so inexplicably handed down from the mountain repeated, in a matter-of-fact manner, many of our zealously acquired CIA supersecrets—and revealed many more, all of which subsequently checked out. Whoever James Hepburn was, he had reliable sources of information about the inner workings of American intelligence.

The poop on the CIA was plotted in with the subtlety of a Vincent Price movie. The book's text gasped for breath as it crawled through hills and valleys created by mountainous footnotes, which were as jam-packed as a lifeboat with whole file drawers full of classified data. The manuscript revealed the locations of secret CIA schools for sabotage; exposed CIA-owned newspapers, radio stations and publishing houses in Cyprus, Beirut, Aden, Jordan, Kenya and other countries in Africa, the Middle East and the Far East; named the CIA's

clandestine commercial "covers" in the United States, and recorded the Agency's role as co-director of the Eisenhower Administration, and examined its links—through Kermit Roosevelt in the fifties and John McCone in the sixties—to the oil industry. Among other epithets, the manuscript alleged that former "specialists" for the CIA's DCA (Department of Covert Activity) were members of an assassination "team" at Dallas.

Similar working details were disclosed about the KGB, the assessments being quite favorable. "In the domain of pure intelligence, the KGB is superior to the CIA." This supported our belief that the manuscript had been typed on Russian typewriters fitted with American characters.

Many sections of the book were non sequiturs which reminded me of Groucho Marx's line in *Duck Soup*: "A child of five would understand this. Send somebody to fetch a child of five." The gratuitous mention of a 1931 Paris detective story by an author who used the premonitory pseudonym "Oswald Dallas" made at least impish sense. But I couldn't figure the humor of numerous out-of-context references to Roy Cohn, the former boy witch hunter, whose selected quotations merited several vague footnotes with citations such as, "Roy Cohn, at the Stork Club in 1963."

Later, after we had gone scuba diving in the black waters of the manuscript's authorship, much of this strangeness was to be cleared up somewhat, as was the motivation behind a puzzling chapter alleging shocking Secret Service foul-ups which made the Dallas assassination almost a pushover. The critique amounted to a white paper on the deficiencies of the Secret Service, and was obviously prepared by someone very much on the Inside. There was a rather bitter attack on the competence of Kennedy White House aide Kenny O'Donnell, who supervised the security arrangements. The unsubstantiated attack made little sense as the mystery book went on to provide a lengthy analysis of the demonstrably superior security arrangements of other nations, particularly France and Russia, for protecting the lives of their chief executives. There was a puzzling hurrah for Daniel P. Moynihan, a professional thinker of moderate means, who so far as I knew had zero to

do with guarding the President: "Only Daniel P. Moynihan, a former longshoreman, had some idea of such things."

The thesis of the mystery text was that of John F. Kennedy as the good guy-golden boy of American democracy, whose honest policies were so at odds with the power-mad and corrupt CIA and its billionaire oilmen kingmakers that he was accordingly snuffed. But by whom?

The three-volume manuscript was accompanied by a cryptic note: If we were interested in seeing the fourth volume, we should cable a law firm in Geneva, and arrangements would be made. An obvious deduction, Watson: The fourth volume would name the murderers.

We cabled. We waited. A week later Garrison telephoned: "You know that fourth volume? Well, it just walked in the door."

There was to be a further complication. The messenger who had arrived in New Orleans from Geneva did not have the final volume with him. We would have to send a representative to Geneva to inspect it in person.

At that, I began to wonder if this was a present from the KGB, or a booby trap from somebody else.

Garrison immediately dispatched an emissary to Geneva to collect the tainted goods. Selected for this delicate task was Steve Jaffe, the peach fuzz side of twenty-five, who had already established a reputation as a professional photographer and was envied by other assassination sleuths because he had credentials from Garrison authorizing him a special investigator for the District Attorney's office, and was so registered in Baton Rouge.

In Geneva, Jaffe discovered that the office of Frontiers Publishing was a desk in a large Swiss law firm that specialized in representing Swiss banks. The most concrete information the law firm would provide was that Frontiers was a Liechtenstein corporation. The real headquarters, Jaffe was told, were in Paris. Jaffe went to Paris.

The Paris editorial offices of the elusive Frontiers were in the modern offices of a famous international law firm. Nobody was minding the store but lawyers. It was explained to

Jaffe that important "financial interests" were behind the publishing of the book. At one point, the smarmy suggestion was dropped that the Kennedy family itself had underwritten part of the costs.

Jaffe had been asked to interview the author, James Hepburn, and question him about his sources.

The answer came from Paris: It is impossible to meet the author. The author is a "composite."

As my friend Tupper Saussy, the composer, once wrote, "I turned on the Today show and wished it were yesterday." Additional communications across the Atlantic weaved back and forth like carrier pigeons drunk on elderberries. Such facts or suppositions of fact as emerged made only one thing clear to me: we were shadowboxing with a high-level intelligence operation—although no longer necessarily the KGB. French intelligence was suddenly in the running; even the ubiquitous CIA became suspect.

Farewell America was published in Germany, with fanfare but without the missing final volume, and became a moderate best seller. The phony book was syndicated in *Bild*, Germany's largest daily newspaper, which is owned by Axel Springer, who is not exactly a raving Bolshevik. Why would Springer authenticate such a KGB plant? The inevitable suspicion arose that this might be a triple-decker CIA cake with Ian Fleming icing to somehow entrap *Ramparts*.

Further investigation revealed that Frontiers Publishing Company of Vaduz, Liechtenstein, had never published a book before, and had no apparent plans to publish anything else in the future.

Farewell America was then published in France in a handsome edition by Frontiers. The review in *L'Express* was quoted on the book's jacket ". . . the most violent indictment ever written by a man about his country, out of love for that country." Not a bad notice for a composite.

Jaffe reported that he had tracked down the publisher of Frontiers. He identified him as one Michel. According to the curriculum vitae supplied to Jaffe, Michel had been the publisher of a French women's magazine, in the early sixties.

Before that, he had been a combat officer in the French army in Indochina, had studied at Harvard for a time, and had attended the French Diplomatic Training School. Jaffe said that Michel was the key to the preparation of the mystery book and added his opinion, which he said was not totally unconfirmed by Michel, that the "Publisher" was highly placed in French intelligence.

Whoever he was, the "Publisher" knew his way around the Elysée Palace.

When Jaffe asked him for some authentication of the material in the book, Michel whisked him into the Elysée Palace and into the private office of the Director of the French Secret Service, André Ducret.

Ducret was most gracious to the young American. He said that the Secret Service of France had indeed provided certain information for parts of *Farewell America*. He gave Jaffe photographs and diagrams hand-drawn on his personal stationery supplementing the criticisms of the American Secret Service made in the book. Ducret also told Jaffe that he had knowledge of the weapon that had actually been used in the Kennedy assassination—which was not the dime store rifle the Warren Commission said Oswald fired.

Jaffe asked the Secret Service head if there was any chance of getting a letter to General de Gaulle. Ducret said it was certainly possible, although he had no way of knowing if the General would have time to send an answer. Jaffe gave Ducret a letter stating the gist of his mission, and inquiring into whatever clarification was possible on the role of the French government in the publication of the book.

Ducret said he would personally take Jaffe's letter to General de Gaulle. He returned about fifteen minutes later and handed Jaffe De Gaulle's engraved card, with a personal note scribbled on it:

GENERAL DE GAULLE

*Je suis très sensible à la
confiance que vous m'exprimez*

The head of the French Secret Service also told Jaffe in so many words, just how important that he, too, thought both Jaffe's mission and Garrison's investigation were, and how

France appreciated their efforts. Jaffe left the Elysée Palace, equally impressed and puzzled.

Michel indicated that the "documents" on which the book was based were locked up for safekeeping in a Liechtenstein bank vault. However, he said Jaffe was in luck as one of the sources, a French intelligence agent known as "Phillipe," was in town. Michel said that Phillippe had interviewed a member of the paramilitary sharpshooting team that had murdered Kennedy at Dealey Plaza. At midnight, Michel drove Jaffe to the Club Kama, a dingy Latin Quarter bar, to have a drink with the spook.

Phillipe spoke only in metaphor. Most of his metaphors were about the Hotel Luna in Mexico City, which he implied had—in the assassination year of 1963—a "Cuban band," whose musicians had dangerous "instruments."

Then Michel said there was just one little thing more before we got to see the fourth volume with the yellow pages listing Kennedy's murderers. *Frontiers* was anxious to publish *Farewell America* in America—and wanted *Ramparts* to publish it, just as Axel Springer had been so kind to have done in Germany.

It seemed time either to retreat or send in reinforcements, so I bludgeoned Larry Bensky, the current victim on the sacrificial altar of the *Ramparts* Managing Editor's chair, into catching a night plane to Paris. Bensky was not all that happy about going, since he had been a founder of a Franco-American antiwar group during his previous residence as an editor of the *Paris Review* and had reason to think the French police would be watching him.

Bensky found Michel to be a very average-looking Frenchman, a chain smoker of Gitanes, a chain lover of women, with a strong taste for luxury, a seemingly inexhaustible supply of pocket money, and many flashily dressed friends with nice apartments and no visible means of support. He was an expert in "pillow-talk intelligence," having been assigned by French intelligence, with its concern for industrial counterespionage, to infiltrate the social circles of the oil industry in New York and Texas by seducing the daughters of the pet-

roleum magnates. "I learned English to fuck them," the Frenchman told Bensky.

The French intelligence agent came on as an orgy freak, or, more precisely, he came on as a combination self-voyeur and fetishist about being an orgy freak. He sat in Paris sidewalk caf  s ostentatiously picking his teeth, and otherwise acting the part of Terry-Thomas playing the stud. His conversation was that of an after-dinner speaker in a bordello catering to civil servants. He would preface intimate accounts of the sexual proclivities of prominent politicians with the phrase, "It is known in French intelligence that . . .," then proceed to the nitty gritty about several American politicians and their boy-friends.

Michel was in other ways the perfection of rottenness. He pulled off one of the meanest ploys in the book of dirty tricks: He deliberately got one of our men the clap. The victim was a *Ramparts* lad who had been standing by in Paris, another innocent New Leftie abroad. Michel apparently convinced his young victim that sexual intercourse was a prerequisite to commercial intercourse in Paris and that their discussions could best be held during nightly visitations to Paris whorehouses in which he was a stockholder. There our lad received a sexual mickey. Relying on the young American's pride not to cry uncle, the fiendish Michel stepped up the whoring pace, putting his negotiating partner at the disadvantage of extreme physical and psychological discomfort. Bensky arrived just in time to put a halt to this slow torture, which he learned about only by accident. The lad met him at the airport and on the way into Paris asked Bensky to wait for a minute in the cab while he ran up to a doctor's office to get a "vaccination." After the meter had ticked by twenty minutes, Bensky, figuring even *Ramparts'* expense accounts did not have that elasticity, paid off the driver and wandered upstairs. After several wrong numbers in doctors' offices, he found the innocent American, all blushing red, pale white, and depressed blue, sitting uncomfortably on a folding chair in a VD clinic. The embarrassed investigator confessed his plight, which was redundant in light of his surroundings. He perked up a bit when Bensky explained to him, Captain Ahab to

Penrod, that his extended discomfort was not due to inexperience or bad luck but a trap of the devil, in all his cunning.

Bensky ducked Michel's efforts to lure him to the whorehouses, where he was certain a trap lay germinating for him, pleading a Benedictine vow of celibacy from a previous incarnation, and instead maneuvered the Frenchman into successive cat-and-mouse encounter sessions of drinking cognac in bistros of Bensky's choice. On the third night, he beat the Frenchman at the endurance game. As the sensuous intelligence agent wandered drunkenly around the bistro, having left his jacket on the chair, Bensky went through his pockets, discovering business cards and press cards in several identities, only a few of them in Michel's own name, and a British passport in yet another name.

Bensky dropped these identities on Michel in subsequent conversations, which caused the Frenchman to raise ever so slightly his egg-skin eyebrows and compliment the Managing Editor on *Ramparts*' "excellent sources" of information.

Back home, we at last developed a good hunch about who was dealing in the bridge game in which *Ramparts* was playing a dummy hand. The droopy fleur-de-lis of French intelligence overshadowed the cardboard publishing house of Frontiers, but that in itself was of little specific help in tracing the river of data in *Farewell America* to its source, because the French SDECE was so notoriously, and almost hilariously, riddled with KGB double agents that as a matter of course Frenchmen were offered vodka before wine at international spy gatherings.

There were also some noisy cross signals indicating that the book's brewmasters might be in the private sector of international espionage. A dandruff-collared crew of former French spies, tossed in the garbage when the rotten apple that had been French intelligence was drawn and quartered after World War II, had been hired en bloc by the French oil cartel. The paté of flab around their midsections was strengthened by the addition of Marseilles thugs and floating assassins to their number, creating a relatively sophisticated and mean chorus line of Harry Palmers in berets, ready to do whatever

was necessary so that the Frenchies might gain a bigger share of the world oil lamp, Standard Oil be damned.

This was something by the way of cherries on the matzos, as the SDECE itself assumed as a prime part of its *raison d'être* the protection and furtherance of French petroleum interests. (It remains an object of bar bets in Paris whether it was the SDECE proper or the freelance French oil agents who erased Enrico Mattei, the Italian oil magnate whose North African holdings encroached on French vital interests, and who conveniently perished in a plane crash near Milan in 1962 which had the suspicious markings of that other political plane crash of General Sikorski off Gibraltar in 1943, in which Winston Churchill was alleged to have pulled the fatal cotter pin.) At any rate, such types as these, who possessed sufficient rough magic to make the Moroccan leftist Ben Barka disappear from the Left Bank and from the face of the earth in 1965, had the financing if not the suavity (that apparently was Michel's function) to palm off *Farewell America* on the public libraries of the world. This was something they might wish to do inasmuch as the book contained between its hard covers considerable dirt on the American oil industry, including the not very nice suggestion that the kingpins of American petroleum got together to knock off the President of the United States.

It sounds mad, I know, but when you get into it, and down to it, all real madness takes place in some factual context. The French are not the only ones who have found other uses for old spies. Everywhere, former intelligence agents for hire constitute a black belt of overprivileged crud. What really goes on in the world is made all the more dreadfully complicated when one becomes aware of the existence of this private half-world on top, or rather beneath, that other half-world of officially sanitized clandestine intelligence work and subversion.

We never learned for certain whether Michel worked for the French intelligence, with or without its KGB brandy float, or for the Watergate division of French private intelligence, or, for that matter, for some other squad of Flying Dutchmen. Someone substantial was paying his whoring and typesetting

bills. He admitted to being a plant but would not say who potted him. All his identities were phony. He had never been the publisher of a French magazine. But in his earnest efforts to get *Ramparts* to publish his thing Michel did clear up several of the minor mysteries about the black books. He said the extraordinary detail about the CIA had come from the files of the SDECE, which of course kept tabs on the competition. The information in the book about the KGB had come from the same source; he denied it came directly from the KGB. The nasty details about the American petroleum industry were the product of the same files and from Michel's own years of spying and snookering his way into the inner social circles of the filthy oil rich. He also explained the derivation of some of his most scarlet name-dropping. Michel's imagination took him to the heights of drugstore fiction. The nonplusing references to Roy Cohn, for instance, were explained as a simple matter of "friendship"—Michel claimed to have become great buddies with Cohn while working the stud circuit in Eastern seaboard millionaire playgrounds. To hear the Frenchman tell the tale, he and Roy were something of a frogman team of cunnilingus experts who made many successful forays together in the dangerous waters off East Hampton; therefore, one nice guy to another, the spy put his friend's name in his book. (I later asked Cohn about this; he said he recalled no such person and that the whole story smacked of a left-wing lie.)

Michel also came clean that the name James Hepburn, the pseudoauthor of *Farewell America*, was of a metasexual derivation. James was the French *J'aime*, and Hepburn from the actress Audrey Hepburn, with whom Michel professed, without substantiation, to once having dated, and for whom he had kept a soft spot in his black heart, even though, he said, his affection was unreciprocated.

On the basis of this less than complete information, *Ramparts* purchased an option to publish *Farewell America* in America, paying for it with a postdated check drawn on a bank with which we no longer had an account. I had never bounced a check on an intelligence agency before and it seemed somehow a fair idea. If the truth be told, the cables I was sending

Bensky urging him to hurry up and make haste so we could go to press with James Hepburn's exclusive were in that gray area between little white lies and big black lies. It was in for a dime, in for a dollar, and I couldn't see the harm in hanging tough and trying to find out just who had gone to all this expense and effort to bloody up the good name of the CIA and eminent American oilmen such as H. L. Hunt, the billionaire brown-bagger whom James Hepburn, the pseudoauthor, had defamed in terms I would be loath to repeat even about someone poorer than Hunt.

There being no Geneva Convention of publishing, I figured that if the culprits coughed up Volume Four, with the names and numbers of the players in the Dallas assassination bowl, and if we succeeded in pinning the goods on one intelligence agency as opposed to another, then we could screw James Hepburn and run the story with its proper by-line—"Who Killed Kennedy, by the KGB." I thought that would make a terrific *Ramparts* cover.

Under prodding, the proprietorship of Frontiers Publishing came clean as to their most extraordinary source: the material on the internal foul-ups of the Secret Service—detailed down to the number of bourbons a Secret Serviceman had had the night before and how many aspirins he took the morning after—was hand delivered from the inner councils of the Kennedy family. The chapter was based on a private, unpublished and undistributed memorandum prepared for Attorney General Robert Kennedy after his brother's murder. Bobby had convened a select committee the day after the assassination, which was to conduct a secret investigation of the Secret Service, independent of the work of other federal agencies such as the FBI or the CIA.

For RFK's first thought had been that the person responsible for his brother's death was his old enemy, Jimmy Hoffa.

Michel said the committee's report had been written by Daniel Moynihan. It excoriated the Secret Service for organizational and functional deficiencies, but it also cleared Hoffa of any involvement in any plot. Once he was assured that his nemesis hadn't done it, Bobby apparently lost all interest in the investigation. He didn't even turn the report over to the

Warren Commission, although it was far more critical of the Secret Service than the eventual Warren Report.

This memorandum had lain hidden somewhere in the file cabinets of Camelot ever since. Through "personal friendships" developed within the Kennedy inner circle—Michel would not say with whom—it had come to rest in the hands of French intelligence, which had made such expert use of it.

Such was the root of the strangest one-liner in the inscrutable text of the espionage classic *Farewell America*: "Only Daniel Moynihan, a former longshoreman, had some idea of such things."

We were of course sworn to secrecy because of the "extreme sensitivity" of this confidence, a trust I violated in a flash by bracing Moynihan. At first he refused to talk. This was not wholly unreasonable of him, as a tart invitation to a liberal intellectual of the stripe of Daniel Moynihan from the Katzenjammer Kids of *Ramparts* would naturally raise suspicions of New Left entrapment. However, a second telephone call to his Cambridge home, in which the subject matter of the desired discussion was mentioned, brought him flying down to New York, where a *Ramparts* Face the Nation panel had hastily assembled.

Moynihan almost swallowed his bow tie when briefed on what we knew. He vehemently denied knowing the man known as Michel, or any French cockfighter, but he would not deny his secret mission for Bobby. He would not confirm it, either. He became fidgety and begged permission to use a telephone for some private calls. "I have to ask some people," he said. Twenty minutes later a slightly more composed Moynihan reappeared, announced that he had no intention of discussing this matter with us, and made a less than graceful exit. We presumed he was under homing instructions beamed from some transmitter still functioning in the ruins of Camelot.

That is everything there is to know about the mystery of the black books except who did it.

Bensky returned from the Paris talks with little more substantial than a fervent dislike for the other side. When pressed

to the wall, Michel handed over the long-awaited "fourth volume," which consisted of one double-spaced page. Here is what it said:

"THE MAN OF NOVEMBER FIFTH"

"The choice made by the people of the United States on November 5th, 1968, will have profound and far-reaching consequences for the life, liberty and happiness of the universe. The peoples of the earth are awaiting new decisions. The man of November 5th cannot escape the conflicts of the modern world. If he chooses to ignore them, he will only delay their consequences. If he is prepared to confront them, he can overcome them.

"John and Robert Kennedy had the courage to meet these problems and break down the doors to the future. They were stopped by the frightened confederates of the traditions on which they infringed.

"When John Fitzgerald Kennedy's head exploded, it was for some the signal for toasts. The funeral did not go unnoticed. One November morning the cannon boomed, the Panama Canal was closed, flags flew at half-mast, and even Andrei Gromyko wept. Adlai Stevenson declared that he would bear the sorrow of his death till the day of his own, and the Special Forces added a black band to their green berets. Almost five years passed, and another bullet shattered the brain and stopped the heart of another Kennedy who had taken up the fight.

"There was another funeral. Once again the Green Berets formed the Honor Guard; once again the Stars and Stripes flew at half-mast. On an evening in June, Robert Kennedy joined his brother beneath the hill at Arlington, and those who pass by can bring them flowers.

"The tombs are splendid, but the scores have not been settled.

"Who killed them?"

"And why?"

It is perhaps indicative of the nature of the real knowledge of the Kennedy assassinations on the part of the authors of

Farewell America that their manuscript finally ended on a question mark.

At that, the book remained chock-full of an odd lot of goodies. Stalemated in the attempt to determine to which intelligence agency to award the by-line, I adopted a new tactic which, in retrospect, may have been counter-productive: I told the truth. Frontiers Publishing was informed via its Geneva, Paris and Vaduz, Liechtenstein, addresses that *Ramparts* would regretfully not publish its book as it would not tell us which brand name of espionage it represented. Michel replied, in something of a snit, that Frontiers would publish the book itself in America, as it had successfully done elsewhere. They proceeded to print a hard-cover, 418-page English-language edition of *Farewell America* in Belgium which was air-freighted to Canada, warehoused and prepared for distribution in America.

For reasons best known to Frontiers—a publishing firm which, needless to say, has ceased to answer its telephones—the book was never brought into the United States. I fear now that its failure to surface may have had something to do with my promise to Michel to “write about” the book when it was published in the United States. I meant that as a promise, not a threat, but it may have been interpreted otherwise.

The plot died lingering. A month after the events just described, Michel showed up in California. He telephoned Bill Turner, who had been Jaffe's contact man. Turner was getting ready to fly to New York, but offered to stop by Michel's hotel on the way to the airport. Hill—our supersecret emissary—was driving Turner to the airport, and he joined the meeting. The encounter was light on substantive conversation, but the next evening Michel called Hill, who had let it slip that he was staying in Sausalito, and said that he was leaving town but had “a present” for the gang at *Ramparts*. Typically, although the Frenchman was staying at the Fairmont Hotel, the present was in the hands of the bell captain of the St. Francis Hotel. From the bellboy Hill retrieved a can of 16-mm film. It was a print of the famous Zapruder film, at that time off-limits to the world at large and under lock and key in the vaults of the National Archives in Washington and

ad in
Ramparts

?

at *Life* magazine, which had paid Zapruder a tidy sum for all the prints in existence.

Bensky volunteered the most articulate explanation of these strange goings-on. The Bensky Theory is the product of his tiptoeing through the intelligence poppy fields of Paris without getting dizzy from the fragrance. He believes Michel was working with a politicized wing of the French intelligence service which had become the last bastion of gainful employment for various supporters of the right-wing militarists who lost out to reality in the French Indochina and Algerian colonial wars. These types were all young-to-middle-aged rightist playboys of the intelligence world, grinning fascists with souped-up cars and a hand in the till of private business deals, of whom Michel was a specimen. A thinking cult among their number, anxious to develop some ploy that would appeal to De Gaulle, hit upon the black books to worm their way into favor. The General was of course very anti-American, but was known to have achieved something of a personal rapprochement with Jack Kennedy, whom he liked and whom he was convinced was the murder victim of a conspiracy within the United States. General de Gaulle was also extremely concerned about France's future sources of energy, which he saw at the mercy of the American and British petroleum cartels. Industrial counterespionage, both oil and nuclear, was an important function of French intelligence. The object of the black books, therefore, was to show De Gaulle that he was right in his views about the conspiracy to kill Kennedy, and at the same time create a scandal both in Europe and the United States by linking the hated American oilmen to the assassination. Neat, no?

There are differences of opinion about the Bensky Theory, but I will refrain. If that was the purpose of the black books, the perpetrators were at least partially successful. They managed to con the largest daily newspaper in Germany and newsmagazine in France into buying their poke, not to mention thousands of book buyers in both countries who were taken along for the ride. And although *Farewell America* has never been reviewed or written about in the United States, for reasons now familiar to the readers of this history, numerous

copies of the book have somehow wormed their way into the public libraries and card catalogs of the nation, including the Library of Congress (Catalog Card Number 68-57391).

I do not know what happened to the shipment of books in Canada, except that six hundred of them ended up in Bill Turner's basement. Michel had asked him at their breakfast tête-à-tête if Turner would like "some copies" of the book. Turner said sure. Two months later he received a notice from a freight forwarder in San Francisco that they were holding something for him. It was a considerable poundage of *Farewell America*, sent via Montreal to Turner's San Rafael home. Turner refused to accept the skid of books, since there was a \$282 shipping tag to be paid, and he did not feel like subsidizing a foreign government to that amount. He so notified Michel. Michel wired back telling him where to pick up money to pay the shipping cost. Following Michel's instructions, Hill went to a Swiss bank in San Francisco and got the money.

So the ex-FBI man keeps the only known extant stash of the black books next to his lawn mower. It is a slowly dwindling pile, as he is constantly bothered by requests to send copies through the mail. Most of these orders come from bookstores near college campuses, one shop apparently getting his address from another. He mails out a dozen or more copies each month, at \$8.95 a pop. The Los Angeles Public Library bought five copies.