Russell Says He Never Believed Oswald Alone Planned Killing

By Don Oberdorfer
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Sen. Richard B. Russell, who was a member of the Warren Commission which investigated the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, says he never believed that Lee Harvey Oswald planned the assassination alone.

"I think someone else worked with him (on the planning)," the Georgia Democrat said in one of a series of taped television interviews to be broadcast next month by WSB-TV, an Atlanta television station.

"There were too many things—the fact that he (Oswald) was at Minsk (in the Soviet Union), and that was the principal center for educating Cuban students . . . some of the trips he made to Mexico City and a number of discrepancies in the evidence, or as to his means of transportation, the luggage he had and whether or not anyone was with him—(that) caused me to doubt that he planned it all by himself," he said.

Russell appeared to be in accord with the commission's conclusions that Oswald was the man who fired the shots at Kennedy, and that he acted alone. "I think that any other commission you might appoint today would arrive at that conclusion," he said.

Due to his doubts that Oswald planned the act alone, Russell said he insisted on a disclaimer sentence in the final report before he would sign it. That sentence in the report, which was issued in September, 1964, says that "because of the difficulty of proving negatives to a certainty the possibility of others being involved with either Oswald or (Jack) Ruby cannot be established categorically, but if there is any such evidence it has been beyond the reach of all the investigative agencies and resources of the United States and has not come to the attention of this commission."

The majority of the seven-member commission, headed by then-Chief Justice Earl Warren, "wanted to find" that Oswald planned and acted alone, Russell said.

Some 25 hours of interviews, which constitute the most extensive memoir yet available on the long public career of the 72-year-old Georgia senator, will be condensed to three one-hour programs for broadcast in Atlanta Feb. 11, 12 and 13.

Cox Broadcasting Co., owner of the Atlanta station, will present 30 minutes of program highlights at a Washington Hilton reception here Feb. 10. The members of the U.S. Senate, senior members of the House, administration officials, family and friends of Russell are being invited. Though the senator has been in ill health with emphysema and lung cancer, it is expected that he will attend.

Now president pro tempore of the Senate and the chairman of its Appropriations Committee, Russell has granted only rare interviews during recent years. None of those published have delved so deeply into his relationship with Lyndon B. Johnson, his Senate protege and later his close friend in the White House.

The relationship between the two men has been "one of the most peculiar in American history," say the Georgian in the taped interviews, evidently referring to their division of opinion on civil rights and many issues in later years which somehow did not prevent a continuing close friendship.

After Mr. Johnson became President, he would frequently summon his old friend and Senate mentor to the White House in the evenings. "I'd go down and we'd have a highball and eat supper and talk about things and people," the senator recalled. "He was always interested in people and what they were doing, the people up there on the Hill, without getting into any arguments about the matters that we differed over . . .

"He would call me about things, well, like the Dominican incident and things like that, the Panama Canal controversy. He never did stop advising with me on things like that. It was just on these domestic spending issues that he made so many mistakes . . . (he) made every conceivable mistake almost from the standpoint of administration and organization," Russell said.

Both Russell and Mr. Johnson were strongly opposed to U.S. military intervention in South Vietnam when it was first proposed in 1953. Once the U.S. became committed, Russell said in the taped interviews, he could not criticize Mr. Johnson for sending additional forces.

"My complaint with him was not for sending others in, but because we didn't go on and win the day by closing up the ports of North Vietnam. He let the timid souls in the State Department talk him out of that," said the senator. "He could have ended that war in six months any time."

Associated Press

Sen. Richard B. Russell, member of the Warren Commission that investigated the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, will expound his own views of that tragedy in a television interview in Atlanta.

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