

JFK's assassination was a conspiracy

By VINCENT J. SALANDRIA

The movie *JFK* has come under fire for pandering to the paranoid fantasies of a young audience, whose nerve endings were feared to have been dulled by years of MTV. It really makes no difference whether or not Oliver Stone and Jim Garrison were looking for their long-lost fathers in John F. Kennedy, or if the movie idealized Garrison, or even if Kevin Costner can act. I can easily demonstrate in plodding prose, without Hollywood's alleged histrionics, that Kennedy's assassination was indeed a military coup.

With not even a twinge of nostalgia for the days of Camelot, I can

Kennedy himself spelled out the scenario that would end his life.

show that the president intended to end the Cold War and eventually pull out of Vietnam, and that, for this reason, the military industrial complex, the generals, admirals and CIA decided to overthrow him.

If the Warren Commission report and its 26 supporting volumes had revealed evidentiary inconsistencies pointing to and away from conspiracy, we would have been able to accept these as natural mistakes. But from the very beginning, the federal government and its Warren report have espoused a lone-assassin theory and have doggedly sought to discredit any evidence that would have indicated a conspiracy. Only a guilty government would take such pains in the face of consistent public disbelief to ignore all evidence of a conspiracy. For if the government were innocent, it stands to reason that the government would have nothing to hide.

Space permits the enumeration of but a small fraction of the bizarre irregularities set forth in the Warren report. Immediately after the assassination, federal authorities had the president's limousine ille-

Lt. Col. Pierre Finck, who was performing the autopsy, to refrain from dissecting the interior of the president's neck, and he was not allowed to track the path of the bullet through the president's body — or, for all intents and purposes to perform an autopsy.

Cmdr. James J. Humes, who prepared the original autopsy notes, certified to burning these documents in his fireplace at home. It is inconceivable that he would have destroyed these precious historical documents without having been ordered to do so by his military superiors.

The Warren Commission never had access to the photographs and X-rays of Kennedy's body. Instead the members chose to rely for positioning the wounds on the autopsy face sheet, the president's clothing and the military's drawings of the wounds. All of these documents were mutually contradictory. I trust that at this late date no one will be gullible enough to accept as authentic X-rays and photographs that the crime's prime suspect may release in the future.

Immediately after the assassination, the federal government determined that Lee Harvey Oswald had killed the president and had acted alone. Before he could testify at his own trial, Oswald was himself killed.

The government has continued to espouse the single-assassin theory despite overwhelming evidence of a conspiracy. The Zapruder film revealed a conspiracy. The eyewitness affidavits of persons on the scene at Dealey Plaza showed a conspiracy. The Secret Service agents assigned to the presidential motorcade spoke of shots from different directions and therefore conspiracy.

The Parkland Hospital doctors and a nurse who examined the president's wounds described wounds that were attributable to bullet strikes fired from different vantage points. The FBI report of the autopsy, which concluded that the magic single bullet had performed no magic and had lodged in the president's back, demonstrated a conspiracy.

Only a guilty government would cling to the single-assassin fiction, which, according to the latest public opinion poll, merely 16 percent of the American people accept. And an innocent government would not criminally tamper with evidence in order to protect the Soviet Union, Cuba, the Mafia, a spinoff from the CIA or a few conspiratorial nuts. An innocent government would have kept all of its options open. Governmental leaders would commit the crime of destroying evidence and obstructing justice only to protect

gally removed from Dallas, the jurisdiction of the crime, washed and repaired, thus destroying vital evidence. Gov. John Connally's clothing was dry-cleaned and pressed prior to being turned over to the Warren Commission.

At Bethesda Naval Hospital several admirals and a general ordered



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themselves.

Sen. Arlen Specter has called the movie *JFK* absurd because it offers the hypothesis that President Kennedy was assassinated by the military-industrial complex. Would Specter consider this hypothesis absurd if Kennedy had himself entertained the same idea?

In his book, *The Pleasure of His Company*, Paul B. Fay, a close friend of the president, recalls that Kennedy told him that the possibility of a military takeover in the United States "was very real. . . ." Using the Bay of Pigs as a metaphor for cowardice vis-a-vis the Soviets that would displease the military, Kennedy lay down the conditions as follows:

- The country would have a young president. President Kennedy was young.
- There would be a Bay of Pigs. There was.
- The military would criticize his handling of the crisis. They did.
- If there was "another Bay of Pigs, the military would then consider overthrowing the elected establishment," the president said. The Cuban missile crisis was a second "Bay of Pigs."
- Finally, the president said, ". . . if

there were a third Bay of Pigs, it could happen." There was a third Bay of Pigs in the form of a nuclear test ban treaty, which "the Joint Chiefs of Staff declared themselves opposed to under almost any terms" Kennedy knew that his efforts to end the Cold War might lead to his assassination. In *A Thousand Days*, Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. recalls that when the president "saw Nixon after the Bay of Pigs, he said, 'If I do

the right kind of job, I don't know whether I am going to be here four years from now. . . . If someone is going to kill me,' he would say, 'they are going to kill me.'"

Kennedy nonetheless continued to try to end the Cold War. In his American University speech in June 1963 he committed himself to an enduring peace:

"Not a Pax Americana enforced on the world by American weapons of war . . . not merely peace for Americans, but peace for all men; not merely peace in our time but peace for all time."

Theodore C. Sorensen in his book *Kennedy*, wrote:

"He anticipated that an increased stabilization of the arms race and an easing of East-West tensions would enable him to devote a larger share of expenditure increases to domestic and particularly urban needs. This trend was already reflected in his forward budget planning for 1964."

An escalation in Vietnam was certainly not compatible with Kennedy's words and budget. William Atwood, the U.N. ambassador, tells us that Kennedy authorized him late in November 1963 to explore the normalization of relations with Fidel Castro. This was put on hold when Kennedy was struck down.

Quod erat demonstrandum.

Vincent J. Salandria, a Philadelphia lawyer, is a longtime friend of former New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison. He has written extensively criticizing the Warren Commission report.

Kennedy was no dove; he wanted a victory

By HENRY W. BERGER

Oliver Stone portrays President John F. Kennedy's assassination as the result of a plot engineered by a self-interested all-star cast of military, political and corporate leaders opposed to his alleged efforts to pull the United States out of Vietnam.

This picture is seductively appealing to conspiracy lovers and to those whose only exposure to the assassination history will be the compelling version in Stone's motion picture production. It is also attractive to those wanting to believe that Kennedy was an anti-Cold War liberal who, if he had lived, would have prevented America's subsequent agony in Vietnam.

The historical record to date, however, simply will not sustain the fiction that JFK sought exit from Vietnam on any terms less than victory. Stone's claims for a planned Kennedy withdrawal and reversal of the policy by Lyndon B. Johnson, a key participant in the supposed murder conspiracy, rests primarily, if not entirely, upon two National Security Action Memos, NSAM 263 and NSAM 273.

NSAM 263, issued with Kennedy's approval in October 1963, authorized the withdrawal of 1,000 U.S. military personnel from South Vietnam by the end of the year with the possibility that two years later the "bulk" of remaining U.S. forces could also be removed. According to Stone, four days after Kennedy's death, Johnson undermined and canceled JFK's policy of de-escalation via NSAM 273 after consultations with the Joint Chiefs of Staff, headed by Kennedy's favorite general and key consultant on Vietnam, Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor, whom the late president had appointed in 1962.

The fact of the matter is that NSAM 263 was approved by Kennedy on the illusory assumption that victory in Vietnam was at hand, a conclusion loudly proclaimed in a well-known report delivered to the president on Oct. 2, 1963, by Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara and none other than Taylor. Both men were at the time

unabashed hawks on the war.

South Vietnamese troops were to be trained to assume the advisory and combat responsibilities from the Americans. Part of the motivation for announcing the proposed pullout of U.S. forces was to induce the South Vietnamese to mount the necessary effort to prosecute the war, a war Kennedy was convinced should be won and believed was being won.

In the wake of Kennedy's assassi-

nation and after meetings with the same advisers JFK consulted, Johnson endorsed NSAM 273, which repeated Kennedy's Vietnam directives, including the projected U.S. force withdrawals, while reiterating that "the central objective of the United States in Vietnam [is] to win the contest against the externally directed and supported communist conspiracy."

The reversal of the U.S. military withdrawal strategy by Johnson on which Stone places so much weight came as a direct result of revelations that optimism about the way the war was going was totally unwarranted. Evidence for this revised view began to emerge in the

*He sent Americans
into combat for the
first time in South
Vietnam.*

aftermath of the Nov. 1-2 coup (sanctioned by the Kennedy administration) against the South Vietnamese Diem-Nhu regime but was only confirmed when McNamara visited South Vietnam following Kennedy's assassination and reported to Johnson on Dec. 21, 1963, that there had been "significant deterioration in the war since the preceding summer."

But Kennedy was no dove and had himself dramatically escalated America's intervention in Vietnam. He tripled military assistance to South Vietnam, increased the number of Americans from 658 to nearly 16,000, allowing significant numbers of them to participate in combat for the first time, authorized assistance to South Vietnam to engage in covert raids against the north, launched the ill-conceived strategic hamlet program, approved the introduction of defoliants and herbicides into the war, and rejected the advice that the United States seek a political solution to the conflict.

There indeed are unanswered questions about Kennedy's tragic death, and all relevant records concerning the assassination should be opened. But no one will ever know what he would have done in Vietnam had he lived. One thing, however, is certain: Kennedy did not die because he was abandoning the war in Vietnam. He was trying to win it.

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