

WARREN HINCKLE

JFK assassination: Wherein lies truth?



"HOW COME Senator Ted Kennedy does not tell who killed his brother? The Warren Report was the coverup, not Watergate."

— Michael E. Desmond,
Parkmerced

DURING THE '60s, when I was editing Ramparts magazine, I discovered a sure way to goose newsstand sales: put a Kennedy on the cover. The dead ones sold better than the live ones.

Public interest in the assassination of President John F. Kennedy and distrust of the official explanation remains a vital sign of the national curiosity. Since the Warren Commission presented its lone-assassin thesis in 1964, public opinion polls have registered an unflagging disbelief in that verdict. Most people think Kennedy was killed by a conspiracy. The sentiments expressed by Michael E. Desmond of Parkmerced Towers were typical of the letters and telephone calls following a report in this space last Sunday regarding the latest Kennedy conspiracy news: a claim by the son of a Dallas policeman that his dad had been one of three men shooting at President Kennedy in Dealey Plaza on Nov. 22, 1963.

The column registered less-than-blind enthusiasm from Bay Area Kennedy assassination experts on the Dallas claim staked by Ricky Don White, an unemployed salesman of oil equipment, on the murderous marksmanship of his late cop father, Roscoe, whose diary is said to contain proof of conspiracy. Examiner readers had their own theories of the assassination: One suggested it had to do with JFK's views on the silver standard.

An often-heard refrain about the assassination is that the truth will never be known until the files of the Warren Commission are unsealed at a date sufficiently far into the future as to qualify for science fiction, circa A.D. 2039. Robert Gardner Raftel, a JFK assassination researcher in Berkeley, put a match and powder to that shibboleth.

Raftel said that more than 90 percent of the

Warren Commission files have already been made public through Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) lawsuits filed by assassination researchers.

He then laid out the following scenario: that the government has done all it can toward resolving the nettlesome questions about the Kennedy assassination, and that the question should be mercifully put to rest on the basis of the best evidence available.

Raftel said that after all these years the government now has vastly more information about the assassination locked up than it did at the time of the 1964 Warren Commission Report.

The irony is that the researchers' lawsuits dislodged sufficient information from the files of the Warren Commission to intensify the questioning of its arbitrary conclusions and to prompt congressional probes, culminating in a reopening of the case by the House Assassination committee in 1976. This was propelled by the findings of a subcommittee of the famous Church Committee — which investigated the domestic doings and Mafia-related assassination plots of the CIA that the CIA had withheld key files from the Warren Commission, impeding its investigation. Hearings by Bay Area Congressman Don Edwards also established that the FBI had destroyed evidence related to the investigation.

During the House Assassination Committee probe in 1977-1978, the FBI released some 100,000 pages of its Kennedy assassination files and researcher Raftel trudged through them all.

"But the House Assassination Committee got 300,000 pages of CIA files and an additional 300,000 pages of FBI files on the assassination — and those files are now sealed for 50 years," Raftel said.

Raftel said freedom of information lawsuits cannot penetrate these core assassination files because the records of Congressional investigations, like some papal writ, are immune from FOIA suits.

The bureaucratic rationale for keeping these files off-limits to the very researchers who forced the reopening of the assassination case is to protect intelligence agency "assets" and methods.

Raftel is no conspiracy monger. He recently shot down a press report that George Bush was a CIA agent in 1963 and was involved in the assassination investigation. Raftel showed that what Bush did do was telephone the FBI and suggest that a right-wing Houston Republican who was a political enemy should be considered as suspect in the Kennedy killing. If Oswald was the lone assassin or, as the House Committee concluded, the mob did it, why is every agency of government with a need to know about the Kennedy assassination straining to suppress the facts that would support such elementary conclusions?