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NEWS

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CHICAGO DAILY NEWS

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PRESIDENT IS KILLED

Texas Sniper Escapes; Johnson Sworn In

See historic front page on 29

*Probe
of JFK
slaying
goes on*

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Washington volunteer investigators still pursuing facts to get at 'the full story'

JFK slaying probe goes on

By Larry Finley
Staff Writer

WASHINGTON—“No, no, no. I didn't say that Teddy Kennedy will be assassinated. I said that he will be assassinated if he is the Presidential candidate.”

There was no hint of emotion in the voice of Bernard Fensterwald Jr. as he dropped the jolting prediction into the conversation.

Murder, conspiracy and political corruption are routine shop talk in the Washington offices of the Committee to Investigate Assassinations, an independent alliance of disbelievers still probing the assassinations of President John F. Kennedy (Nov. 22, 1963), Robert Kennedy (June 5, 1968) and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (April 4, 1968).

About 100 persons throughout the country do volunteer research for the organization. Another 900 or so are on the mailing list. The membership includes lawyers — such as Fensterwald — journalists, lawmen and many amateur researchers and detectives.

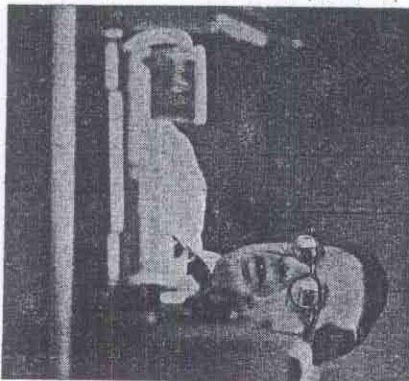
The committee is slowly and methodically gathering and piecing together facts surrounding each of the historic killings with the hope, that some day the full story will be known.

IN THE EARLY AFTERNOON of Nov. 22, 1963, word that President Kennedy was dying in a Dallas (Tex.) hospital began to shake the nation.

“When I heard the news, I was standing on the steps of the Capitol, not wanting to believe what I heard,” recalls Fensterwald. In less than 10 seconds that day, Dallas ceased to be “Big D, little a, double-l, a, s” and became the dead-end street for the New Frontier.

A new President with a Texas drawl tried to reassure the nation, a nation that soon would be told that an unknown left-winger with \$21.45 surplus rifle — Lee Harvey Oswald — had killed the leader of 200 million.

But the answer was too simple in a complex world. A survey by the Presidential Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence in 1969 determined that 62 per cent of the population did not believe Oswald acted alone.



Bernard Fensterwald in Washington office. “We know there was a conspiracy.”

At first Fensterwald believed. But then in 1967, his lawyer-investigator mind began to absorb the huge Warren Commission Report, the result of the official investigation of the Presidential assassination. In the Warren Report, Fensterwald saw too many unanswered questions, too many conflicting stories, and most disturbing, too many conclusions which were never acted at all by a commission filled with top legal minds.

A FAMILIAR FACE IN THE halls of Congress, Fensterwald turned to his many senatorial friends, hoping for a new investigation.

“The Senate felt about looking into it like they did about the bubonic plague,” he remembers. “The major problem is one of physical and political fear. Many people here, who may not have liked Kennedy, have at least agreed with us that the Warren Commission wasn't just full of mistakes.”

So in 1969 the Committee to Investigate Assassinations was formed in an effort to combine all available knowledge on the assassination under one umbrella organization of volunteer lawyers, writers, amateur detectives and researchers.

A meeting of Fensterwald and his friends takes on all the aspects of a strange sort of Bible class, but the chapters and verses they quote are from the Warren Report.

Only one question stops Fensterwald cold—“If Lee Harvey Oswald was not the lone assassin, who killed John Kennedy?”

“Oh no, I'm not going to speculate on who did it, who was behind it,” Fensterwald said. “But, you can bet it was someone in the U.S. government.”

“We know there was a conspiracy,” Fensterwald says flatly. “It involved very sophisticated people. The gunman involved were professional killers, who do their job and then disappear.”

A FREQUENT VISITOR IN Fensterwald's office is Harold Weisberg, not a member of the committee but an expert on the three assassinations and the author of a half dozen books on the subject, including the best seller “Whitewash.”

“To ask who did the killing you must first ask the lawyer's question of ‘who benefited?’” Weisberg said. “There were major changes in Vietnam policy after the assassination. There is a good deal of evidence that Kennedy was ready to get out of Vietnam.”

“I think it was linked to Vietnam and the Cold War,” he added. “There are a couple of things not generally known. Kennedy was dealing with Castro in Cuba and with China to ease tensions with the Communists.”

ON NOV. 29, 1969, PRESIDENT Lyndon B. Johnson signed
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A brother's tribute

Head bowed, Sen. Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.) pays a silent tribute before the grave, and eternal flame, of his brother, the late President John F. Kennedy, at Arlington National Cemetery Monday. It was eight years ago Monday that President Kennedy was assassinated. (AP)

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Executive Order 11130 appointing the Warren Commission to investigate the JFK assassination and ordering all government agencies to provide whatever help needed.

In the next 10 months, the commission of politicians and attorneys reviewed thousands of interviews and tons of documents, under the direction of Supreme Court Chief Justice Earl Warren. Their conclusion was basically the same as the story millions of Americans had already been told. Acting alone, Lee Harvey Oswald fired shots which killed the President and wounded then Texas Gov. John Connally from a sixth-floor window in the Texas School Book Depository.

But not even all of the commission members agreed. In 1970, the late Sen. Richard B. Russell (D-Ga.) told a radio interviewer, "I think that someone else worked with him (Oswald)."

Sen. Russell said that it was he who insisted that a disclaimer sentence be added to the report stating that if either Oswald or Oswald's killer, Jack Ruby, had any help, the commission had seen no evidence of it.

A CBS TELEVISION INTERVIEW with former President Johnson was edited last year for "national security" reasons. Unconfirmed published reports in the New York Times stated that the deleted material dealt with Johnson's doubts that Oswald acted alone.

"None of the commission people will discuss this matter at all now," Fensterwald adds, "I couldn't even get to see Warren. I once tried to give him a letter on the case. Warren's clerk told me that he did not even receive mail on the matter."

Fensterwald is well equipped for his investigator's role. In 1965 he was counsel for a Senate subcommittee investigation of government invasion of privacy. He has served as an aide to the late Sen. Estes Kefauver (D-Tenn.), the late Sen. Thomas C. Hennings (D-Mo.) and former Sen. Edward Long (D-Mo.).

In 1967 Life magazine printed an article linking Long to the Teamsters Union and implied a less-than-ethical connection. Long lost a later re-election bid. Fensterwald believes that one of the agencies he and Long had been investigating leaked some of the information used in the story.

A FEW BLOCKS FROM Fensterwald's law office are the aging offices where the committee carries on its work. File cabinets with heavy locks line one wall. Stacks of papers, books and file folders fill the office.

The top of one of the file cabinets is scarred where part of the locking system had been ripped away. Committee research director Robert Smith explained:

"Oh that. There were some break-ins in the building. Nothing is missing. I think they were just curious about the locks and wanted to see what was inside."

There are many people who would probably be interested in those files. They contain extensive information on nearly all the names which are involved in the three assassinations, as well as minute details on the killings themselves.

Mention any name in the three killings and Smith or committee attorney James Lesar soon produces a stack of information. Most of the names are committed to memory, enabling Smith and Lesar to cite where they are in the 26 volumes of Warren Commission testimony and evidence, or in the scores of books written on the subject.

"The huge amount of suppressed information is important," Lesar said. "It would give answers to some very basic questions. But, the answers would also be very bothersome to some government people. We're fighting this thing in the courts now, but the judges aren't very receptive

towards our point of view."

Bullets vs. ballots

Lesar believes that the three killings have now legitimized assassination as a way of political change, a means by which one bullet can neutralize millions of ballots.

A red, white and blue poster hangs on one wall of the committee offices. Superimposed over an American flag is a quote from a speech made in Dallas in which then Vice President Johnson was defending President Kennedy:

"Once you pick him and you're flying across the water in bad weather, don't go up and open the door and try to knock him in the head. He's the only pilot you have and if the plane goes down, you go down with it. At least wait until next November, before you shoot him down."

"Is that for real?" Smith was asked.

"What, the quote? Yes, he said it. Of course it was just his unfortunate way of saying things. He was talking about the election, not Dallas. Just a coincidence."

SOME COINCIDENCES, such as the poster, are easily discounted. Others take hours of research.

"We have the information to show how to assassinate a President," Fensterwald said. "But we get led down the garden path very often. We've had more crap, bum steers and junk. This is really a job of correlating what we have and understanding it."

The committee is frequently lavished with crackpot stories from obvious mental cases. Other stories are just as phony but are told by people with enough intelligence and knowledge to make them plausible. It's very easy to create a conspiracy theory, but very hard to prove one.

Living in a world of presidential plots, conspirators in high places and hired assassins provides all the ingredients for a healthy case of unhealthy paranoia to those with more nervous dispositions.

"You have to live with that sort of thing," Fensterwald explained. "It doesn't bother me much any more."

From his Senate investigations of government snooping, Fensterwald has an intimate knowledge of microphones that listen through walls and telephones that monitor conversation in a room even while sitting on the receiver.

ALTHOUGH FENSTERWALD DOES NOT fear for his own life, he has set aside some cash in case he disappears suddenly or dies under mysterious circumstances. Some of the committee's "hotter" information is also hidden away.

Knowing what the government can do if unchecked—and what it has done in the past—has made Fensterwald a bit cynical about the whole entrenched network of nonelected "public servants" without whom no President or Senator can function. They are the men, he said, whose dirty linen and incompetency is seldom brought into the glare of publicity or the regular judgment of the ballot box.

Why he presses probe

Why does a promising attorney with a wealthy background and a Harvard education continue to investigate killings that the government considers closed?

"I knew the Kennedys and admired them," he said, staring out the window at downtown Washington. "It's all rather egomaniacal, I guess. But someone has to do it. There are at least three or four potential presidential candidates who believe in what we're doing, but won't admit it publicly."

"The answers are there. We just have to find them. You can see patterns forming in the three assassinations. Things are becoming clearer. For the first hour after the John Kennedy assassination, the country was immobilized. Lyndon Johnson was terrified. We weren't on the scene then. No one was really prepared for it."

"Now we know what to look for. One more major assassination and the whole thing will break wide open."

"This time we'll be there."