

ATLAS
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WHY WAS JFK SHOT?

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Hints, reports and direct charges of dark, deep and devious plots have flowed over the pages of the European press since the day John Fitzgerald Kennedy was killed. Possibly the most bizarre story of a "plot" to kill Kennedy was told to Bob Dirix of Spécial, the new Brussels weekly, by a frightened Belgian sailor.

PRESIDENT JOHN FITZGERALD KENNEDY had been killed. The policeman, Tippit, too. Lee Oswald had been Jack Ruby's victim. The American newspapermen Bill Hunter and Jim Koethe, who had been present at a meeting in Ruby's house the day before the assassination in Dallas, had also vanished from this world! Hunter had been killed, and Koethe had been beaten so badly that he died. Dorothy Kilgallen, the last journalist to have talked privately with Jack Ruby after Kennedy's death, was found dead under mysterious circumstances.

Since the night of September 4-5, 1963, this anguished man seated facing me, knows that everyone connected in the slightest way with the Kennedy assassination, or who may know a little too much, has been condemned to vanish. He, too, knows too much!

Why, then, does he want to talk? Because he wants all the facts to come out. Because neither the White House, the F.B.I. nor Robert Kennedy, to whom he has been sending urgent letters for the last three years, have ever given him the slightest chance to speak out. And because, until now, too many untruths have been written about John Kennedy's mysterious death.

He told me: "The world must learn . . . this extraor-

dinary, complicated truth which throws a different light on the affair."

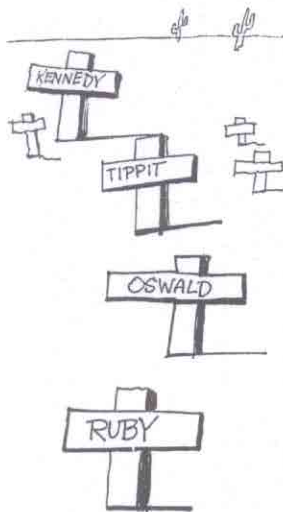
The reader will understand that I cannot reveal the identity of this man. I shall limit myself to stating that he is a Belgian seaman, married, with children, who lives somewhere in the province of Antwerp. I met him accidentally through a friend. It happened during the time when *Death of a President* was causing so much excitement in New York. . . .

The whole world knows how John Kennedy was assassinated. The whole world also knows what the Warren Report has to say about the alleged killer or killers. But here I tell why Kennedy was murdered and what was the real reason for the plot. . . .

On the evening of September 4, 1963, the seaman, whom I shall call "Peeters," was having a drink in the "Koetsierke," one of his hangouts. Suddenly five noisy foreign sailors entered. They had obviously drunk a lot and seemed determined to keep right on drinking.

At a certain moment the five newcomers recognized a seaman from Hamburg whom Peeters also knew. He introduced Peeters to one of the five who was leaning against the bar.

Our friend Peeters was in for a big night. But when,



R. ANGERER IN KURIER (VIENNA)

at 5 a.m., he found himself in a cab that was taking him home after the five others had returned to their ship, he still didn't realize that a completely drunken Russian had told him a secret that could really endanger world peace.

Through the alcoholic haze Peeters saw again the sixth man of that unforgettable night. A strapping, athletic-looking, handsome, blond-haired fellow of about forty. He had constantly stayed near the five others, like an attentive and sympathetic onlooker, but nonetheless had maintained a certain reserve as he downed his drinks regularly.

And the Russian. Peeters clearly remembered the Russian of that night at the "Koetsierke" and the "Stommeleire." A big fellow, almost six feet tall, strong and easy-going, with a reddish face, thick eyebrows and curly, blond hair, very likable and jolly. He was somewhere between forty and forty-five years old. He wore the uniform of a Russian merchant marine officer and was plainly the head of the group. In a spontaneous burst of confidence this "Ivan" had also confessed to Peeters that he was a homosexual and very much wanted to start up a close friendship with his new Belgian friend.

The officer, who spoke Russian with his four companions (and French with Peeters) claimed to know seven languages perfectly: Russian, French, German, Arabic, Spanish, English and American. English and American are very different, he said, and for a foreigner it's a real accomplishment to be able to speak English like a real American . . .

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"Ivan" had five different passports and five names which were just as fake. One of them had been secured from a French consulate. He had shown Peeters a Russian passport with the name of Ivan Kutscharenko, born in Kiev. But when the Belgian sailor had wanted to take a closer look at the documents, Ivan had abruptly put the passport away, saying: "Nothing doing!" His friends also spoke English, but not American. They all claimed to be part of the crew of a Russian ship anchored off Antwerp which was leaving for the United States the next morning.

What revelations had Ivan Kutscharenko made to the seaman Peeters? At a certain moment, floating deep in drunkenness, he decided that the Belgian sailor had become his "number one friend" and, consequently, told the latter how much it hurt him to have to leave in the morning for the United States. Peeters had responded with a remark about Russian-American relations, and Ivan Kutsharenko had launched into a tirade about the dirty war in Vietnam.

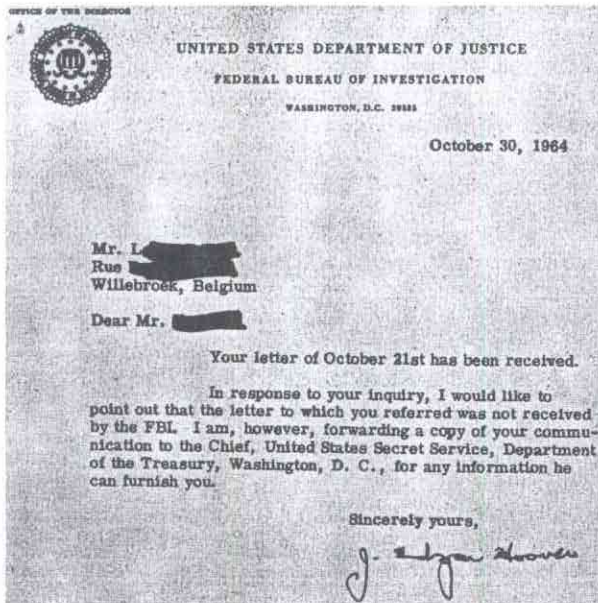
Ivan had smiled mysteriously: "This is 1963 and you think, my dear fellow, that the war in Vietnam is coming to an end. That's completely stupid! Do you want me to tell you something? The Vietnamese war is only a beginning, a prologue. It will become even dirtier and more vicious, not just in Vietnam, but in China and America as well."

"Why 'in China and America as well?'"

"There are three big powers in the world today: Russia, the United States and the Chinese People's Republic. We Russians have decided to become the new and first world power, but we don't wish to get involved in war. We want to get China and the United States to destroy each other. If our plan is to succeed, the Vietnamese conflict must degenerate into an open war between Peking and Washington . . ."

Peeters nodded his agreement while the Russian carried on in this way, but his mind was elsewhere. Peeters didn't have the slightest interest in politics. The Belgian seaman finally replied: "You're boring me . . . you've drunk enough. Just forget it. Besides, Kennedy is a peaceful man. He'll never let himself be dragged into a hopeless war with Red China."

Ivan lapsed into silence for several minutes, then he looked Peeters straight in the eyes and murmured: "I'm going to tell you something, comrade, and it's not a joke. *There will be no Christmas 1963 for John Kennedy . . . By Christmas he will have been buried a long time . . .*" Ivan continued in an even lower voice: "And his successor will do exactly what John Kennedy doesn't want to do: he will expand the war in Viet-



Seaman "Peeters" evidence

nam . . . he will increase the number of Americans in Saigon . . . he will have Hanoi bombed . . . he will provoke China more and more . . . Johnson and his friends are looking for war, and that's what we desire . . . Kennedy must disappear from the stage . . ."

"That's sheer nonsense, Ivan!"

"Well, you can believe me. Everything has been set up, every step has been taken to silence the assassin . . ."

At that point Ivan Kutscharenko tore a button from his uniform and gave it to Peeters, saying: "A souvenir from me. A sign of our friendship . . ."

The next day, the Belgian seaman happened to be in the harbor district again and saw the blond athlete who had been at the "Koetsierke" and the "Stommeleire" the evening before and had watched them. The man came over to Peeters in a friendly way and asked him to have a beer. He was very pleasant, immediately ordered a second round, and openly tried to get Peeters drunk. "Tell me," he asked, laughing, "what did that drunken Russian say to you last night?" "Oh," replied Peeters, "we were loaded. You know . . . just drunken gab, that's all!"

But the stranger wanted to know more and insisted: "Did the Russian talk to you about his ship? Why did he show you his passport? Do you know his name? Did he speak to you about politics? What was the souvenir he gave you?"

"Why do you want to know all this? I have nothing to do with the Russian. I don't know him. He was drunk and so was I."

"Tell me everything and I'll give you a lot of money."

"Money? Why money?"

"Maybe you'd rather have trouble?"

"I don't want anything. Please, leave me alone . . ."

Peeters tormented himself with questions. How much truth was there in this Kennedy story? Was the American President actually the key figure in an international drama? Did the Russians want to have Kennedy eliminated because he was peaceful and they preferred to see "a warlike Johnson" in his place?

It was a terrifying experience for Peeters, who kept on thinking of Ivan's remarks to the point of sleeplessness. The following weeks were even stranger. The blond athlete followed the seaman everywhere, spied on his slightest actions. Peeters now had his own double. He saw the fellow on the street where he lived, in the harbor, at the local bistro dances, at the soccer stadium. The man was everywhere Peeters was. From time to time he addressed the sailor and tirelessly repeated the same question: What had the Russian said to him, why had Ivan spoken to him in such a frank manner? And just as tirelessly, Peeters gave the same answer: "He said absolutely nothing important to me. Stop insisting like this. It's senseless."

Then, one fine day at the beginning of November, the shadow lost his patience. He turned sharp and menacing: "If you know anything, keep your mouth shut. Understand?" Peeters was unable to reply. By the time he blurted out: "But I don't know anything, leave me alone," the stranger had already gone.

Peeters relates: "On board ship I keep the logbook and that's why at home, too, I keep a diary. I wrote down everything Ivan had told me, as well as about the fear into which the stranger's perpetual presence had plunged me. I couldn't stand the strain any longer. My life had become a nightmare. I hid my diary, convinced the stranger would stop at nothing. I no longer slept. I could scarcely eat. I no longer left the house. I didn't dare notify the police. I couldn't ask anyone for help. I felt all alone with my fear. Then, when I was finally certain the stranger had vanished I decided to write a letter to President Kennedy. I wanted to inform him of all the Russian had confided to me and warn him his life was threatened."

Here we reach the climax of the affair. At 9 a.m. on November 19, 1963, Peeters sent off a registered, special-delivery, airmail letter, marked "strictly personal," and addressed to President J. F. Kennedy,

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White House, Washington, D.C. The letter was in French; it said Kennedy's life was in danger and that the writer had been told this by a Russian named Ivan Kutscharenko. Peeters felt like another man after mailing the letter; he had done his duty.

Then came the evening of November 22, 1963, just four days after the seaman had sent his letter of warning. Peeters and his wife were watching T.V. when the blow hit them: the American President had been killed in Dallas, Texas . . .

"I felt as if the floor were slipping away from under my feet," Peeters says today. "I was stunned. The Russian had really told the truth, the plot against Kennedy was not an invention. At that moment I realized I had sent my letter too late . . ."

Peeters wanted to get back his letter. After writing to the Belgian postal service, which remained silent, he addressed an inquiry to the postmaster in Washington on December 18, 1963. He received a reply on January 7, 1964: "The letter had been delivered to the White House a few days after it had been sent." If he wished it returned he would have to present his receipt of registry at the post office. Peeters regained hope. In the meantime he had written to Robert Kennedy, Attorney General of the United States.

On February 6, 1964, he received a letter from the International Administration of Postal Services which made him gasp. Peeters read: "I wish to inform you that registered letter number 417, mailed on November 19, 1963, was delivered to the White House on November 21 and handed over to one of the President's assistants." The President must have read the letter, Peeters thought, because it was a personal and registered letter. *But he hadn't read it!*

On October 21, 1964, Peeters sent a registered letter to J. Edgar Hoover, Director of the F.B.I., asking that his letter be returned to him. He was sure the American Secret Service now had possession of his message. He received a personal letter from Hoover on October 30, which informed the Belgian he had looked into the matter but had never seen the letter to President Kennedy. He added that he had transmitted a copy of the letter the Belgian seaman had written him to the head of the American Secret Service in Washington. Peeters never learned what had happened to his letter of warning to the assassinated President.

The Antwerp seaman Peeters is certain of many things. The plot against John Fitzgerald Kennedy was the work of Communists. At the beginning of September 1963, the Dallas killing was ready down to the

smallest detail. The truth will never be known: anyone having knowledge of the affair must have been definitively "neutralized." The warning letter had arrived in time, but the President had never read it. Why?

Peeters is aware of the gravity of the charges he has made. He said to me: "I'm taking a big risk . . . I also know that my revelation can cause serious trouble for certain people. But the truth must be told."

Now, let us analyze the statements of the Antwerp sailor. There are three possibilities:

1. *This entire affair is just a story concocted by a drunk.* It wouldn't be the first time than an Ivan who has drunk too much has indulged in playing the secret agent and boasted about phony confidential instructions. It sometimes happens that such wild talk becomes a reality; predictions of fortunetellers have turned out to be right. All the rest—the shadowing, the threats—may be the product of Peeters' imagination. Nevertheless, a postal receipt dated November 19, 1963, proves that the Antwerp sailor did address a registered letter to President Kennedy, that this letter was delivered by the Washington post office and that it remains lost.

2. *The Russians did "organize" the assassination in Dallas.* Lee Oswald had lived in the Soviet Union; he could have been in contact with Soviet agents and been forced to act by them. But Oswald was a man who "stood out" a little too much, precisely because he was known to the F.B.I. On the other hand, this neither explains why President Kennedy had no knowledge of Peeters' warnings nor why the letter has disappeared. To accept the Russian hypothesis is to assume that the Soviet secret service has accomplices in the White House. This is hardy possible.

3. *Those responsible for Kennedy's death were not Russians, but Americans.* Ivan carried five passports. Which of them, if any, was genuine? He spoke Russian, but he also spoke American. He claimed to be from a Russian ship, but Peeters had never seen it. It is possible, therefore, that those responsible for the crime wished to pin the blame for President Kennedy's death on the Soviet Union. But in that case, it would have been logical to make a public sensation of Peeters' Communist story. Nothing of the kind happened. Why? The question remains unanswered.

Thus, whichever hypothesis is adopted gives rise to new questions. An Antwerp seaman keeps turning over the whole thing in his mind today. He is convinced he was caught up in the drama, a drama which the historians continue to examine in the hope of discovering an impossible truth.