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MARIANNE MEANS' WASHINGTON

BY MARIANNE MEANS

WAS CASTRO BEHIND JFK ASSASSINATION?

WASHINGTON (KFS) — Former President Lyndon Johnson told me not long before he died that he believed Cuban Premier Fidel Castro was behind Lee Harvey Oswald's murder of President John Kennedy.

Johnson, then a retired private citizen, swore me to secrecy. But I break the confidence now because Johnson's opinion appears to debunk the current speculation that the Central Intelligence Agency might somehow have been involved in the Kennedy assassination.

The former President said that he firmly believed Oswald was acting alone in pulling the trigger. But Johnson also believed that Oswald did such an outrageous deed because he was under either the influence or the orders of Castro.

Says No More

Although I asked for more information, Johnson did not explain the basis for his conviction. He only said that he understood Castro wished to have Kennedy killed because he believed that Kennedy had ordered the CIA to kill him. And Johnson declined, with a shake of his head, to tell me if that suspicion of Castro's had been an accurate one, or even if Johnson himself knew whether it was.

Johnson was convinced that the Warren Commission report was accurate, insofar as it went. But he obviously doubted that the full truth had come out.

The former President confided these thoughts to me in a long, rambling conversation during a private visit to his ranch about a year before he died. He was in a reflective mood, and enjoyed reliving vicariously the days of his Presidency. (I had been assigned to cover the White House during most of that period and had been in the White House motorcade in Dallas when Kennedy was killed.)

Johnson said he was disturbed by the periodic efforts of amateur sleuths to keep controversy over the assassination alive. "Some people even think I directed it," Johnson sighed. "It is a lucky thing I was there in the motorcade and could have gotten it too."

For the past month, the White House commission investigating the CIA has been looking into allegations that the Agency was a party to the Kennedy assassination. The group, chaired by Vice President Nelson Rockefeller, officially announced last week that it has been unable to find any evidence to support those allegations.

"Thus far we have not found any credible evidence that the CIA was involved as a party in the assassination," commission executive director David Belin said.

Gregory's Allegations

The allegations were raised primarily by comedian Dick Gregory, who contended that E. Howard Hunt, a former CIA agent, convicted two years ago of conspiring to carry out the Watergate bugging plot, was present at the scene of the assassination. Hunt denied this in testimony before the commission and produced witnesses to the fact he was in Washington on the day Kennedy died.

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The CIA, however, did have some knowledge of Oswald prior to the assassination, because he was an ex-Marine who had lived for some time in the Soviet Union and was therefore a security suspect. CIA operatives in Mexico were also supposedly aware of Oswald's movements there.

Two months before the assassination, Oswald appealed to the Cuban embassy in Mexico City for permission to visit that country. Thus there is established evidence that Oswald was at least interested in Cuba, if not under its influence.

During the period while he was trying to go to Cuba, Oswald might have been told by a Cuban activist that Kennedy intended to have Castro assassinated and in his own demented mind taken on the chore of killing Kennedy first. Or it is possible he was assigned the task by a Cuban official in return for some future reward.

Or it is possible that Oswald decided to kill Kennedy for no other reason than that he was nuts.

I do not know whether Johnson based his opinion about Castro on special intelligence he would not reveal, or simply on an experienced political hunch. In any case, the commission ought to find his views interesting.

Distributed by King Features Syndicate

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April 18, 1975

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