

The Assassination of the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., and Possible Links With the Kennedy Murders — Part 4

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"Considering all of the legal difficulties in prosecuting Armstrong, is it any wonder why the FBI, the Memphis police department, and Shelby County Attorney General Phil Canale wanted to forget?"

Was the murder of the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., the result of a conspiracy?

Previous installments of this series described the "eggs and sausage" man, later given the code name of Jack Armstrong, who appeared on the scene the day of the murder. The author concludes that this possible connection with the King murder is more probable than a larger conspiracy.*

Americans have linked Martin Luther King with the struggle for domestic civil rights; not as apparent has been his involvement with activities directed against the war in Vietnam.

Does a murder motive exist in relation to one or both of these issues? How does it relate to other political assassinations in the U.S.?

Background

Jack Armstrong was born in the South. He played football at a Southern university after he was discharged from the Army in 1952. He speaks fluent Spanish and has been quite successful at impersonation. Friends have said he delights in "passing himself off as a debonair Latin, or a dumb Mexican" switching from various accents ranging from Tex-Mex — the linguistic melange of Spanish and English spoken along the Texas-Mexican border — to the more euphonious tones of legitimate Spanish spoken in Mexico City and Costa Rica.

This writer has interviewed several of his former college associates and former Army colleagues, as well as current neighbors of his in a rural area of the Southwest where he now resides.

A prosperous attorney, who played football with Armstrong and double dated with him, claimed to be the closest friend Armstrong had while in college. He said:

"I got several letters from Jack after I got out of law school in the middle 1950's. Most of them came from South America. Several of them came on

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stationary from one of the swankiest hotels in Mexico City. Jack kept telling me in his letters that he had a good thing going for himself down there and kept begging me to go down there and represent him on a full-time basis. He said he could make me rich. He never gave me any specifics about what he was doing and it wasn't until several years later that I found out — both from the lips of Jack and other sources."

Wayne Chastain of Memphis, Tenn., is a veteran newspaper reporter and southern journalist with experience on several metropolitan dailies in Texas including El Paso, Houston, Dallas and San Antonio, as well as on the St. Louis Globe-Democrat and a Memphis daily. He had traveled with Dr. King's entourage on and off for two years prior to the assassination. He had spent the last two days of King's life covering his speeches in Memphis prior to the shooting. He was on the murder scene within 10 minutes after Dr. King was shot. He interviewed eyewitnesses for one of the first comprehensive news accounts to the nation of Dr. King's death. A native Texan and a graduate of the University of Texas with a bachelor's degree in history and political science, Mr. Chastain also spent several months in early 1964 investigating and researching the assassination of President Kennedy, Jack Ruby's link with Lee Harvey Oswald and a group of pro-Cuban arms runners, and other activities related to Kennedy's death. Months before The Warren Commission's report, which was published in the fall of 1964, Mr. Chastain — after exhaustive interviews with hundreds of witnesses — had reached the conclusion that President Kennedy's death was the result of a plot involving paramilitary professionals financed by a group of wealthy, right-wing Texans with the Central Intelligence Agency as well as lower echelon CIA personnel still assigned to the bureau. The present installment is an excerpt from a forthcoming book entitled: *Who Really Killed Dr. King — And the Kennedys? A Disturbing View of Political Assassinations in America.*

Gentleman Farmer

Today, Armstrong is 42. Ostensibly, he is a wealthy gentleman farmer in the Southwest. He plants cotton, soybeans, and raises cattle. He delights in attending cattle auctions and bidding high for prize livestock. He never pays by check, but sends a telegram wire and pays the auctioneer in cash.

He apparently acquired his affluence in the past eight or nine years. He once told some friends in Miami that he made his money in the middle sixties in the computer business in Dallas, Tex. He gave the name of his firm to one person, who later checked, only to learn there was no computer firm by that name in Dallas. Despite a dozen listings in the Dallas city directory of names that are the same as Armstrong's real name, an individual check of each listing indicated that none belong to Armstrong.

Jail?
SF?

Armstrong frequently takes long trips away from home. One lasted as long as six months, the longest lasted a year. Letters addressed to an apartment he maintains in a small town near his ranch came back from the U.S. Post Office with unconventional notations: "Not Deliverable in the U.S. At This Time".

Armstrong's Anti-Racist Attitudes

"Jack always espoused a hard-line, anti-Communist ideology," the attorney friend recalls. "Unlike most persons I knew in college that were addicted to right-wing thinking, Jack was not a racist — he was always defending the rights of Negroes — a radical idea in the deep South in 1954 before the U.S. Supreme Court declared school segregation was unconstitutional. Jack was saying that before the high court ruled, and that was the cause of at least two fights he had in college. He won them both. Also, Jack identified with the Indians and always defended them."

Armstrong, however, began associating with wealthy right-wing militarists after his discharge from the Army. He partied with many of them who were visiting the U.S. for American military training. He was also a friend — as well as personal pilot — for Castillo Armas, the right-wing dictator of Guatemala, who himself, was mysteriously assassinated in 1955.

Armstrong's Right-Wing Philosophy

Armstrong's fervent right-wing philosophy and ardent anti-Communism were so well-known by his friends that they became perplexed in later years when they learned he had gone to work for Fidel Castro in Mexico City in early 1957. He first worked only as a highly paid gun runner, personally piloting the weapons from black market sources near Philadelphia and St. Louis via a secret airfield near Houston, Texas, then southward to Mexico City. Later, however, he accepted a top command position in the revolutionary army Castro was organizing for the eventual overthrow of the hated Batista regime in Cuba.

Thus, the period between 1957 and 1961 created an anomalous and incongruous chapter in the life of Jack Armstrong. Note this is about the same time his prosperous attorney friend was receiving letters from Mexico City.

"Dinero," Armstrong would reply in later years when friends asked him why he went to work for the

revolutionary Castro, who was aided by the Communists.

The right-wing, anti-Communist Armstrong, working for a revolutionary with a Russian trained Communist for a brother, never made much sense for friends who knew Armstrong in college.

One staunch defender of Armstrong — an "Army buddy" who served with him in Korea — theorized that Armstrong became a paid agent of the Central Intelligence Agency, who assigned him to penetrate Castro's increasingly effective underground. Should the contingency that Castro hoped for — namely, the uprooting and toppling of the Batista regime — ever materialize, the CIA would have a plant right under Castro's nose. This type of contingency planning and infiltration is normal CIA procedure, so goes the theory of Armstrong's Army buddy.

Armstrong cultivated a close friendship with Castro, but developed a deep-seated animosity toward Raoul, Fidel's brother.

American Adventurer in Brazil

In early 1958, the Miami Herald reported an embarrassing incident for the U.S. State Department in Brazil. This was about six months before the overthrow of Batista's regime. The incident arose in Rio de Janeiro when State Department officials discovered the presence of an American adventurer in that city without any evidence of his legally entering the country. The adventurer told an implausible story — unconfirmed to this day — of how two companions and he survived a plane crash in the dense jungles of the immense Brazilian interior. After the crash, he disagreed with the two companions on the proper route to take out of the jungle, so they split the aircraft supplies consisting mostly of champagne and canned goods.

"I ingratiated myself with the Indians I met on the way by sharing my champagne with them," the adventurer said. "I walked out of the jungles drinking champagne and eating canned goods."

Why would such an amusing, but implausible story, create any embarrassment for the state department? Normally it wouldn't, but it seems that the adventurer's presence in the country coincided with the assassination of a Batista dignitary who was visiting Brazil.

Fearing an international diplomatic debacle, the State Department ordered their security agents to take the adventurer into custody. The agents were rushing him to an American ship in a Brazilian port in an embassy limousine when the vehicle collided with a Brazilian taxicab. In the confusion that ensued, the taxicab — with the adventurer inside — fled the scene.

Evidence based on photographs and other information gleaned from the Miami police intelligence division files indicate the adventurer was none other than Jack Armstrong.

A few months later, after the successful overthrow of Batista, Armstrong surfaced again — both in Havana and Miami. Reports indicated he fought beside both Fidel and Raoul in the last days of the crumbling Batista regime. Captured Batista records also indicated that Batista himself had placed a price on Armstrong's head as early as 1957. The right-wing dictator had ordered Armstrong's death by firing squad because of a confidence caper Armstrong had pulled in an elegant gambling casino. The trick

netted Armstrong several thousand dollars at the expense of one of Batista's top lieutenants. Although Armstrong was taken into custody shortly after the incident, there was no explanation as to how he eluded the firing squad and escaped to Mexico. More about the confidence caper later.

A CIA Infiltrator?

In the first few months after Castro established control in Cuba, Armstrong had his own plane. He flew from Havana to Miami almost daily and his movements attracted the attention of the Intelligence Division of the Miami Police Department. The Intelligence Division is probably one of the most sophisticated of all city police departments in the nation (see "Computers and Automation" issue of May, 1970 and Richard Sprague's article on how the unit penetrated a plot to assassinate President Kennedy in Miami in early November, 1963 — three weeks before Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas).

Evidence began to mount that Armstrong was not what he appeared to be, that is, a dedicated, loyal supporter of Premier Castro. Perhaps, the old Korean War buddy was right — Armstrong was a CIA infiltrator into the Castro camp.

Or an alternate theory, the one supported by Armstrong's own explanation, is the "disillusionment theory" — that is, that Armstrong went to work for Castro because he thought he would replace Batista's dictatorship with an American-style democracy, and that he broke with Castro when he saw the Communist elements of Castro's underground take over the regime.

At any rate, the Miami police intelligence unit, working with the Florida Attorney General's office, began rounding up groups of active Castro agents in Miami, including Armstrong, when evidence emerged that suggested a massive kidnapping plot of several escaped Batista officials from the Miami area. The scenario called for transporting the kidnapped victims back to Cuba for the benefit of Castro's firing squads.

In the massive investigations that followed, Florida officers discovered Armstrong had strong ties with both the FBI and CIA. For policy reasons, they dropped charges against him, especially after one strange incident in a Dade County courtroom where Armstrong was literally and bodily seized from state officers by FBI agents as Armstrong was being carried before a state judge for arraignment on a conspiracy to kidnap charge.

A Con Artist

Another paradoxical facet of Armstrong's dossier during these years is that interspersed with his activities as a gun-running soldier of fortune are several incidents in which he was accused of swindling wealthy persons out of large sums of money by means "get rich schemes".

Two significant facts emerge concerning these series of alleged confidence games: one is that Armstrong was never convicted; and second, the indictments were always the products of seemingly aggressive U.S. Attorneys who, somehow, always lost interest in the cases once the indictments were publicly announced. Thus, the cases never came to trial.

These facts led one Miami police intelligence agent to suspect that the indictments were brought

for one singular purpose — to create a cover whereby Armstrong could penetrate Castro's underground as a soldier of fortune discredited by his own government. Also, recall Batista's charge of swindling against Armstrong, and death sentence that was never carried out. Was Armstrong really an anti-Batista man?

It is important for the reader to remember Armstrong's alleged predilections for confidence capers and his ideological leanings.

What Role did Armstrong Play in King's Death?

Assuming Lloyd Jowers, his waitress, Thompson, and the two ministers properly identified Armstrong as the man they encountered in the episodes related in Parts 2 and 3, the questions naturally emerge:

- What was a man with a penchant for international exploits doing in Memphis on the day King was killed?
- Did his presence suggest he played a role in King's death — either as a conspirator or a principal actor?

Let's first explore a theory that would absolve Armstrong of any complicity in the planning and execution of King's death, but would nonetheless assign him a role — perhaps a collateral one — in the drama that culminated with King's assassination.

I alluded in Part 2 to a high ranking police official who told me in confidence that Armstrong was acting as an undercover informer for both the FBI and Army counter-intelligence. I never divulged the identity of this police official — either in print or orally to anyone else — but later he denied, again in private, ever making any such statement to me.

Let's explore a theory that would assign Armstrong such a role. If Jowers properly identified Armstrong as the "eggs and sausage man," then we know Armstrong was in Memphis on the day King was killed. We would know he was within a half block of the Lorraine Motel where King was killed, at least an hour and a half before the fatal bullet was fired.

If Armstrong were an informer for the FBI and Army counter-intelligence, then this might mean he had been assigned to follow King and remain undercover as a way of ferreting out any plans to kill King. Thus, knowing King was staying at the Lorraine, Armstrong's presence in Jim's Cafe would not be hard to understand.

His return trip the next morning and his subsequent arrest could be explained this way. Rather than overtly sever his relation to the underworld by going directly to either the Memphis police department and the Federal building where the FBI offices were located, Armstrong had to create a subterfuge where he would be arrested — similar to the ruse used by Lee Harvey Oswald in New Orleans when he was arrested by police in 1963 during a pro-Cuba demonstration in the Latin Quarter¹ so he could confer with his FBI agent-baby sitter at a private room in the New Orleans jail. While in custody at the Memphis police station, Armstrong could pass on information to whoever was his FBI baby sitter in Memphis. (Baby sitter denotes the agent who has several paid informers assigned to him and it is his duty to collect their messages and confer with them from time to time.)

Why?
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The reason the two plainclothesmen seemed interested in the "eggs and sausage man" after King was killed, and asked Jowers to call him if he returned, was that they needed to confer with him to see if he had any information as to the identity of King's slayer.

Also, this may have explained the personal irritation of the "eggs and sausage man" when he went to the wall where the telephone was installed, and never used it.² Could he have been looking for a number that was supposed to have been left there for him to call?

This interpretation may absolve Armstrong of any complicity in King's death, but it does not explain the re-appearance of Armstrong in Memphis five days later as Benavides and Bonnevecche. How could Armstrong — by making these impersonations — be aiding law enforcement officers in the investigation of King's death?

No, this theory has to be rejected unless one would ascribe a more sinister duty to the role of undercover agent — such as an "agent provocateur". One would have to adopt the theory this writer rejected in Part 2 — namely, the FBI planned and carried out the assassination of King.

A compromise theory would have been that Armstrong indeed was acting as a bona fide agent of both the FBI and Army intelligence, and exploited his clandestine and convenient status — without authority from either agency — to assassinate King upon orders of a third superior.

The Decoy Theory

Another theory is that Armstrong served as a decoy — either with or without knowledge of the identity of King's actual assassin. According to this theory, Armstrong's role was to scatter false clues and drag red herrings across the investigative trail while the real assassin escaped the country.

Also, Armstrong's role was to implant the idea of either a racist or mafia-like motive in the minds of his listeners. Note, Benavides' almost casual reference to Thompson of his visit to Doyle Ellington, grand dragon of the KKK in Tennessee; and Bonnevecche's theory that Mafia had killed King under a murder contract let by a jealous husband.

Also, it could have served a second purpose of setting the stage for a Mafia motive behind the impending assassination of Robert F. Kennedy six weeks later, after the California Democratic Primary.

Why would these motives want to be implanted in the public's mind?

If one returns to the third conspiracy possibility on the right — a thesis thoroughly explored in Parts 2 and 3 — then one can understand why it would be paramount that a racist or Mafia motive had to be implanted in the public's mind to distract from the "national security" motive of the professional paramilitarists — an establishmentarian clique³ that cuts across the military-industrial complex, including the State Department, the Central Intelligence Agency, and powerful private interests that have a vested stake in continuing the cold war mentality in the nation.

But what if the decoy tactic backfired? What if it were so successful, it led to the arrest of Armstrong and his subsequent indictment as King's killer?

Wouldn't Armstrong — much like James McCord as one of the Watergate defendants — be tempted to blow the whistle on his co-conspirators and perhaps name some higher-ups?

When one studies Armstrong's psychological profile, one perceives a daredevil streak in Armstrong — a perverse pleasure in setting himself up in physical situations that threaten him with danger.

Recall the Brazilian caper and the subsequent involvement in the conspiracy to kidnap Batista supporters in Miami and fly them to the Castro firing squads in Cuba. (Recall also the fact that Armstrong played a probable role as FBI and CIA informant in exposing the kidnap plans.)

Also, observe that Armstrong — if he did play both the role of Benavides and Bonnevecche — had astutely constructed an almost impregnable defense along the way of implanting racist and mafia motives in his listener's mind.

If Thompson became a prosecution witness, Armstrong's attorneys could attack Thompson's testimony on three grounds:

1. Inadmissibility of testimony that would breach the attorney-client privilege. If this ruse failed, then:
2. Armstrong could not have been the man who visited Thompson because his physical description did not fit a "blond Latin". Benavides was also a man of Latin American characteristics: the name, the accent, etc. Armstrong, on the other hand, was 100 per cent American, no accent, etc.
3. Even if the jury were to believe Benavides was Armstrong, then Thompson's testimony itself would tend to exonerate Armstrong because Benavides vehemently insisted that he did not kill King, but that his friend Pete did. Besides, Benavides said he "never hired his gun out to kill Niggers".

If the two ministers were witnesses for the prosecution, their testimony also could be attacked as inadmissible because of the "privileged communication" defense accorded to professional-client relationship. Again, if the court ruled that such a defense was not applicable under those circumstances, they would attack the ministers' testimony as failing to incriminate Armstrong on two grounds:

First, Bonnevecche said he was in St. Louis on the day King was killed.

Second, Bonnevecche said his friend Nick killed King, not himself.

If Thompson and both ministers were all prosecution witnesses, note how a successful and skilled defense attorney could pit their testimony against one another. Thompson would say Benavides was a blond. The two ministers would say he was dark, of Italian-Portuguese lineage.

Considering all of the legal difficulties in prosecuting Armstrong, is it any wonder why the FBI, the Memphis police department, and Shelby County Attorney General Phil Canale wanted to forget that Tony Benavides or J. Christ Bonnevecche ever visited Memphis?

Location and identification of Benavides-Ronneveche — and subsequent indictment of Armstrong as a co-conspirator in the slaying of King — loomed as a Pandora's Box for the prosecution. Once that box was opened, an apparent open and shut case against James Earl Ray would become less perfect.

(Part 5 next month: "Conspiracy clues the FBI forgot or ignored")

Footnotes

1. Harold Weisberg. Oswald in New Orleans: Case for Conspiracy with the CIA (New York: Canyon Books and Book Distributing Co.), pp. 46-51. Weisberg convincingly develops the thesis that Oswald was not only on the payroll of the CIA at the time of John F. Kennedy's death, but also on the FBI payroll as a secret informer. Thus, this explains how Oswald had the private number and license plate number of a key FBI agent written in his notebook at the time he was apprehended.
2. Warren Smith. Saga Magazine (October, 1969). Smith purports to have an inside version from Ray himself that Ray was supposed to go to Jim's Cafe and write a room number down — the room he would be in upstairs. Ray, however, his penchant for blunders still intact, went to Jim's Place, two blocks down the street, and wrote the room number on the wall by a telephone number there. The real Raoul was supposed to go to Jim's Cafe, get the room number off the wall, and go up to the room where Ray would have left the rifle to kill King. According to Smith's theory, Ray was only a delivery boy for the murder weapon and was supposed to have left the room after he delivered the bundle. Raoul then killed King, and left the bundle outside to "frame" Ray, according to the Smith thesis.
3. Col. Fletcher Prouty. The Secret Team (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc.), p. 2.

Unsettling, Disturbing, Critical . . .

Computers and People (formerly Computers and Automation), established 1951 and therefore the oldest magazine in the field of computers and data processing, believes that the profession of information engineer includes not only competence in handling information using computers and other means, but also a broad responsibility, in a professional and engineering sense, for:

- The reliability and social significance of pertinent input data;
- The social value and truth of the output results.

In the same way, a bridge engineer takes a professional responsibility for the reliability and significance of the data he uses, and the safety and efficiency of the bridge he builds, for human beings to risk their lives on.

Accordingly, Computers and People publishes from time to time articles and other information related to socially useful input and output of data systems in a broad sense. To this end we seek to publish what is unsettling, disturbing, critical — but productive of thought and an improved and safer "house" for all humanity, an earth in which our children and later generations may have a future, instead of facing extinction.

The professional information engineer needs to relate his engineering to the most important and most serious problems in the world today: war, nuclear weapons, pollution, the population explosion, and many more.

BURNSIDE — Continued from page 9

services at our busy check-out terminals. Additional terminals are being installed by area as rapidly as training and marking status permit. We completed the installation by January 15, 1974, and thereby, are in a position to record the fiscal inventory through the system. For us, the much heralded gamble was not a gamble at all, because: (1) we were ready and knew what we wanted; (2) Sweda and Kimball were ready and willing and able to deliver it; and (3) our people and theirs worked well together and understood one another.

Management Information System

We do not know much about the widely discussed question of merchandiser attitudes or resistance to usage of management information. The kinds of information generated for merchandisers by our system through the logging and inquiry print-out capacity of the powerful Novas, and the speeded-up main frame messaging and reporting are pretty difficult to resist or fail to use to advantage. If we have one weak link in the system, it is the teletypewriter inquiry and reporting, which is being worked to death. But we have substantially completed the design of the total merchandising data base; with key punching relieved of the daily sales input chore, we will not be long in having the whole system up on the main frame configuration, for scope inquiry and purchase order generation and calculated replenishment, with daily updating from the P.O.S. logging tapes.

We would do it over again the same way tomorrow. Our magnetics are working well — our people and our customers both like them. We are not unduly impressed by the Systems Specification Committee opting for an optical font standard. If optics were so superior, it is hardly likely that the major national credit cards and airlines would be using magnetics for localized customer identification, or that IBM (who has probably forgotten more about optics than most others know) would have magnetized Delta Distance for its retail applications. An optical font may help solve the problems of source marking discipline of the big three catalog houses. But they are still going to have an expensive big bad time reading it at the point-of-sale, and in our opinion it is no solution for the universe of general merchandise retailers and suppliers. In this climate, its low density is an insufferable weakness. We, of course, need a computer-activated magnetic encoding and marking device for merchandise identification. After waiting eight years for the P.O.S. system we wanted, we can probably get along while that is being developed.

The Cost Appears Competitive

We have pretty much covered the "why and when" as we lived it. The "how much" we have scarcely touched on except to say we considered our cost competitive. The question is complicated, of course, by considerations such as how ready you are in-house, in terms of system and people, what your marking practices and costs are, how you are handling credit authorization, how much sophistication and back-up you require and what frills you would like et cetera.

For what we did, including telephone communications, but not including cost of marking or offsets from economics in main frame, key punching or paper saving, figures about \$1,200 per terminal. But don't figure on getting very much for a bunch of 1950 mechanicals. Sears are giving them away. □