

Cooper.

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worth including, please
do that, at chapter
end or an appendix.
Just home from
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ORAL HISTORY 40

INTERVIEWEE: Senator John Sherman Cooper

Cates: Hugh Cates. It's April the 29th, 1971. I'm in the office of United States Senator John Sherman Cooper. Senator Cooper is a Republican from the state of Kentucky. Senator Cooper, would you mind just stating some of your recollections or impressions of the late Senator Richard Brevard Russell?

Cooper: I first met Senator Russell in 1947 when I came to the Senate a two-year term. I was defeated twice. I've been back in the Senate several times. I served for 15 years. I knew him like all senators knew him, observing him on the Floor of the Senate, admiring him for his dignity, for his presence, his authority and his tremendous power and influence in debate. I'll just say commonplace, but it is correct that he's always considered as an outstanding power, force in the Senate.

Cates: Senator, excuse me, I didn't mean to interrupt you, sir, go ahead, sir.

Cooper: He was often...I remember the first...when he first came here he was very courteous to me. He was always very courteous to people. He would listen to their views, unless he...at times he would get a little irritated because they were so...he could tell he thought they were very prejudiced or biased in their views and were not objective. I was much interested in defense matters having served two years on the Armed Services Committee in '53 and '54. When, after development of sophisticated nuclear weapons where it is so difficult to understand what all these weapons were about, when you were not on the Committee. I would ask him, when he was

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Chairman, if I could come to the sessions when Secretary of Defense gave to the Committee his estimate of the defense situations sometimes lasting two or three days. He was always kind, always asked me to come in, and was very grateful for that. I assume the...the period in which I had the closest relationship with him was when both of us served as a...members of the Commission to investigate the assassination of President Kennedy, which, of course, was more popularly known as the Warren Commission. In that year I did get-- 1964--to know him well and to see him in action and in thought.

Cates: Senator, could you comment in certain areas of this investigation maybe something that might shed a little insight into the character of Senator Russell?

Cooper: Yes. That investigation lasted several months in 1964. He was also busy in the Senate. It was an election year, and the investigation took a great deal of time of the members. There were dozens of witnesses, dozens and dozens and dozens of papers we had to read, testimony given by other witnesses which were taken by members of the staff. And then the Commission met often. Our final judgment was unanimous but in making that judgment there were discussions which brought out the strength of mind, the judgment and authority of Senator Russell. If you want me to tell you some of them I can.

Cates: Senator, I wish you would and I might say this and I don't know if it would go into this area or not but if you feel like if anything you might say should not be made public for some time you can so state that and a time seal would be put on it. And it would be honored by the University of Georgia.

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Cooper: No, this is perfectly all right.

Cates: Well, I wish you would go...

Cooper: Most of it's public knowledge...

Cates: I wish you...

Cooper: What isn't, I don't think, do not think anything would affect the findings of the Commission.

Cates: Well, using...

Cooper: But I would say first, Senator Russell did not want to go on the Commission. I...I...I think you would like to know...

Cates: Yes.

Cooper: Personal things.

Cates: Well, I want you to use your own good judgment in saying anything you want to in this area.

Cooper: I remember when President Johnson called me at my hometown in Somerset, Kentucky, where I had left for the weekend and asked me to be on the Commission, and he told me that Senator Russell would be the Democratic member from the Senate. That led me, very persuasively to also be a member of the Commission, because I appreciated his position and his judgment. Senator Russell later told me that he objected very strongly to going on the Commission. He was very busy and also, to be frank, he said he did not care to serve under Justice [Earl Warren]. But as always, his sense of duty and I think patriotism and it was deep in him, led him, as he told me

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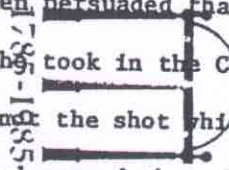
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her very strenuously and his was the most powerful Examination. He was courteous, dignified, but nevertheless he searched for the truth. I will say that we did not get from her any additional information, but I always believed that Senator Russell thought that she had some fact, not necessarily that...that it was anyone else but Lee Oswald responsible, but...but that he had some feeling that she had not told all the facts. I think that was born out in a statement he made a year or so ago in which he said, as I recall, he had not yet been persuaded that we had all the facts. The most compelling position he took in the Commission was this: there was a question of whether or not the shot which struck President Kennedy or one of the shots, had...had passed through Governor John Connally of Texas on the front seat. To...to find that it had passed through both would make the decision somewhat easier in the time frame. It wasn't conclusive. And so there was first...an opinion by most of the Commission that we should say that the shot passed through both President Kennedy and Governor Connally. Governor Connally was a very strong witness. I see now why he has the present opinion in the country that he's a very strong man. He's a very strong witness. He said categorically that he knew it...that the first shot did not pass through him. And he...I remember he said, "I turned my head when I heard the shot. It did come from the direction which you have decided it came from because I'm familiar with firearms. But as I turned again to the left, I felt the impact of another shot." Senator Russell just said, "I'll never sign that report if...if...if this Commission says categorically that the second shot passed through both of them. I agreed with him. I must say he had great influence with me, but I too have been impressed by Governor Connally and so the Commission then did agree that, I cannot recall the exact words, that while there was evidence



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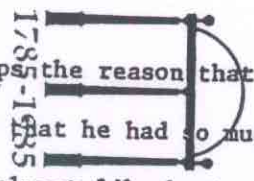
Cates: Senator Cooper, did he have any private conversations with you about this aspect of a possible communist conspiracy, anything that you could divulge at this time?

Cooper: No, I think we...we...mentioned that in our report. We found no evidence of that at all. No, he never did...he never did...he never did give any strength to that idea.

Cates: Do you feel like perhaps the reason that President Johnson wanted Russell on that Commission was that he had so much confidence in Russell that he felt like that it was almost like having himself on the Commission?

Cooper: Oh, yes, he wanted him on there I'm sure first because of his... he knew his powerful mind and good judgment. And also I'm sure because he believed that...that with Senator Russell's presence on the Committee it would give great credibility to the work and decision of the Commission. You know the Commission was attached and all kinds of... statements were made about its work and...and I talked to him about that from time to time, and he would kind of laugh about that and say, "Well, I read what those men have said, three or four of them," but he said, "They didn't make any independent investigation of their own they just took our work, the Commission's work, and picked holes in it." And now he had...he had such good sense, good judgment, such fairness, too.

Cates: Senator Cooper, this is an excellent example of how you worked with Senator Russell. The two of you working together on a project. Can you recall anything else that comes to mind at this time of how you might have worked together in the Senate? I notice that at one time you're...maybe



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ASSASSINATION COMMISSION
MEMORANDUM FOR JMC & BGR
9/16/64

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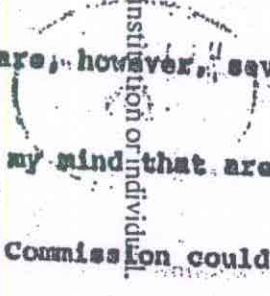
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While I join with my colleagues in the finding that there is no clear and definite evidence connecting any person or group in a conspiracy with Oswald to assassinate the President, there are some aspects of this case that I cannot decide with absolute certainty due to the fact that any such evidence, if it exists, is beyond the reach of the Commission or the investigative agencies of the United States. There are, however, several bits of evidence that have raised questions in my mind that are not answered or explained by any evidence the Commission could procure.



Among these are the extent of Oswald's associations and connections with the large number of Cuban nationals who were students in the educational institutions in Miami during his residence there; the nature and extent of his relationship with foreign nationals who may have had a purpose in Washington to kill the President of the United States; the scope and number of communications he may have had with

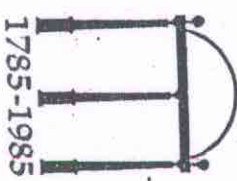
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such persons after his return to the United States and a detailed account of all of Oswald's movements, contacts and associations his secret visit to Mexico a few weeks before the assassination the President. The inability to gather all evidence in these cases as well as a number of suspicious circumstances deduced from the record as made to my mind preclude the conclusive determination that Oswald and Oswald alone, without the knowledge, encouragement assistance of any other person, planned and perpetrated the assassination.

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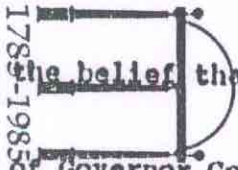
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I do not share the finding of the Commission as to the probability that both President Kennedy and Governor Connally were struck by the same bullet. The expert testimony based on measurements and surveys, including reenactment of the motortrip of the Presidential party on that fateful November 22nd presents a persuasive case. However, the movement of one of the victims by either leaning forward or to either side or rising a few inches from his seat would have made a considerable difference in the mathematical computations.



I join my colleagues in the belief that three shots were fired but, to me, the testimony of Governor Connally that he heard the first shot fired and strike the President, and turned before he himself was wounded makes more logical a finding that the first and third shots struck the President and the second shot wounded Governor Connally. Reviewing the Zapruder film several times adds

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to my conviction that the bullet that passed through Governor
Donnelly's body was not the same bullet as that which passed through
the President's back and neck.

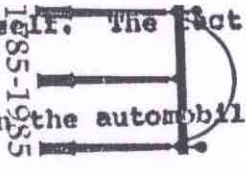
In addition, from carefully examining the site where the
tragedy occurred, I am convinced that any marksman firing from
the sixth floor of the Texas Schoolbook Depository Building who
could shoot with the deadly accuracy which caused the wounds suffered
by President Kennedy would have been highly unlikely to have fired
a shot that completely missed the other occupants of the President's
automobile or the automobile itself. The fact that no trace of a
third bullet was found either on the automobile or several feet of
paved street on each side of the Presidential car is to me convincing
evidence that all three shots fired by the assassin found their
targets in the bodies of the President and the Governor of Texas.

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All of the evidence assembled indicates that he was
unsuccessful in all of his attempts.

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The lack of ability to explore fully and completely every lead and suspicion generated by the evidence is sufficient basis to preclude me from sharing in a categorical finding that Oswald planned and perpetrated the assassination without the knowledge, encouragement or assistance of any other person.

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