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*The appalling death rate stemming from the tragedy in Dallas  
is much more than a coincidence.*

# THE BIZARRE DEATHS FOLLOWING JFK'S MURDER!

By David Martindale

**R**ose Cherami was not the kind of woman you'd invite to a state dinner at the White House. A junkie and a prostitute, she had been arrested at least 28 times on a variety of charges, using as many as 19 different aliases to try to camouflage her identity.

On November 20, 1963—two days before John F. Kennedy was assassinated—Rose Cherami and a companion were driving back from Florida with a shipment of dope that was bound for a Dallas nightclub owner named Jack Ruby. Rose Cherami never made it to Dallas. Near Eunice, La., she got into a fight with the driver of the car, and after being beaten severely, she was thrown out of the moving auto onto Highway 190, where she was left for dead.

Badly bruised but still alive, Rose Cherami was taken to Louisiana State Hospital in Jackson, where besides recovering from her injuries, she also was suffering narcotic withdrawals. While at the hospital, she told psychiatrist Dr. Victor Weiss, Jr., that President Kennedy was going to be killed during his forthcoming motorcade in Dallas. Weiss ignored her remarks. Heroin addicts say a lot of things when they haven't had a fix. Only later, after he learned of Kennedy's death, did Weiss recall his conversation with the seemingly clairvoyant junkie.

A few days later, Rose Cherami was questioned by

Louisiana State Police. She said she had been a stripper in Ruby's Carousel Club and was forced to smuggle dope for him or else he'd harm her children. Asked if Ruby and Oswald knew each other, she said she had seen them together in Ruby's club on several occasions, and that, in fact, they were even "bed partners."

After she was released, Rose Cherami returned to Texas, only to die mysteriously within two years. On September 4, 1965, her head and the upper part of her body were lying on Highway 155 near Big Sandy, Tex. at 3 A.M. when a car struck her, crushing her skull. After a brief investigation, the police labeled her death an accident.

No one knows why Rose Cherami was lying on the road that night. Few people would have taken note of her death, except that Rose Cherami is only one of dozens of individuals who have died mysteriously since the assassination of President Kennedy. Penn Jones, Jr., the feisty former editor of the *Midlothian (Texas) Mirror*, was the first person to call attention to these strange deaths, and today his list includes well over 50 names. And although some of the victims had only a peripheral connection to the events in Dallas on November 22, 1963, others were either important witnesses or people who knew a great deal about Lee Harvey Oswald or Jack Ruby. Most died within a three year period following Kennedy's death.

Yet according to the Warren Report, Lee Harvey Oswald and *only* Oswald was responsible for the death of President Kennedy. The Commission emphatically denied there was any evidence of conspiracy. But even as the Warren Commission was conducting its investigation, the mortality rate of witnesses began to soar, causing even the most sober observer to wonder whether the ensuing bloodshed was more than just a mere coincidence.

For example, consider what happened to Warren Reynolds. The day of the assassination, Reynolds was at work in his used car lot in Dallas when someone shot and killed police officer J.D. Tippett. Reynolds heard the shooting and shortly afterward, saw a man running down the street carrying a revolver. He pursued the assailant for a block until the man fled out of sight. Within an hour, the Dallas police arrested Lee Harvey Oswald and later charged him with the slayings of both Tippett and Kennedy. Yet two months passed before Reynolds was finally questioned by the FBI. And although he still recalled the incident, he said he was unable to positively identify Oswald as the man he chased in November.

On January 23, 1964, two days after his FBI interview, Reynolds was shot in the temple with a rifle in a basement on his used car lot. Miraculously, he lived. Since nothing was taken, police ruled out robbery as a motive. Shortly after the shooting, authorities picked up Darrell Wayne Garner, who admitted he was at the scene at the time of the shooting. He was held on a charge of assault on murder. Yet on February 5, Nancy Jane Mooney, 23, signed an affidavit saying that Garner couldn't have shot Reynolds, since she was in bed with the suspect at the time of the shooting. On the strength of her alibi and subsequent polygraph test, the charges against Garner were dropped. Interestingly enough, Mooney told Detective Ramsey of the Dallas police she had once worked as a stripper for Jack Ruby.

On February 13, 1964, just eight days later, Nancy Jane Mooney was arrested for quarreling with her roommate in a parked car and was taken to the Dallas City Jail at 2:45 A.M. Within two hours, she was found dead, her tattered pants wrapped around her neck, her body dangling limply off the floor of her cell. The coroner ruled her death a suicide. For reasons which remain unclear, the Dallas police never informed either the FBI or the Warren Commission of this bizarre Reynolds-Garner-Mooney chain of events.

Meanwhile, Warren Reynolds, although lucky to be alive, continued to have problems. Three weeks after he was released from the hospital, someone tried to entice his 10-year-old daughter into a car. She refused. On another occasion, someone went to considerable trouble

to tamper with the light fixture on Reynolds' front porch. These events, coupled with his narrow brush with death, had their effect. When he finally testified before the Warren Commission in July 1964, Reynolds now was prepared to say what he refused to say in January—namely that it was Lee Harvey Oswald he saw running past his car lot that day.

Unlike Reynolds, Hank Killam was not an eyewitness to the events in Dallas the day of the assassination. However, his wife, Wanda, did work as a stripper in Jack Ruby's club, and Killam had met Ruby on several occasions. He also worked as a housepainter with a man named Jack Carter. And in one of those curious coincidences which surround the



Dallas patrolman, J.D. Tippett.

Kennedy case, Carter lived at the same rooming house as an employee of the Texas School Book Depository—an employee named Lee Harvey Oswald.

Following Kennedy's death, Killam became increasingly despondent and downright paranoid. His wife told federal authorities that Hank feared someone was trying to kill him. Running for his life, Hank Killam moved to Pensacola, then to Tampa, and finally back to Pensacola, trying to escape what he called "agents and plotters." Every time he took a job, he was fired after authorities hounded his employers. By March, he was quoted as saying, "I'm a dead man. I've run as far as I'm going to run."

At 4 A.M. on March 17, 1964, Hank Killam received a phone call at his mother's home. When he hung up the phone, he dressed and went outside. His mother then heard an auto drive off, and she thought it was unusual since her son did not own a car. Thirty minutes later, two downtown street cleaners heard a loud crash and turned to see a man staggering in front of a broken display window,

blood oozing from his neck. Before the ambulance reached the hospital, Hank Killam bled to death.

Although the coroner ruled that Killam's death was a suicide, his wife was openly skeptical. And little wonder. Few people ever kill themselves jumping through a plate glass window of an empty department store at 4:30 in the morning. Besides, there was only one cut on Killam's body: a three inch deep laceration of the lower left side of his throat. Hank Killam's jugular vein had been cut.

On November 24, 1963, two days after Kennedy was shot and just hours after Ruby had gunned down Lee Harvey Oswald, five men gathered in Ruby's apartment. They included George Senator, Ruby's roommate, Winfred Martin and Tom Howard, attorneys for Ruby, and Jim Koethe and Bill Hunter, both reporters covering the assassination. To this day, no one has discovered the reason for that meeting, let alone what was said. Yet within 18 months, three of the five persons who attended that meeting were dead.

Bill Hunter was the first to die. A reporter for the *Long Beach Independent Press Telegram*, Hunter had flown to Dallas upon hearing of the assassination. Later, he returned to Long Beach where he was a veteran police reporter.

On April 22, 1964, Hunter was sitting in the press room of the Long Beach police station reading a mystery novel when two police officers walked into the room. Without warning, one of the cops shot Hunter in the heart at a range of no more than three feet, killing him almost instantly.

Under questioning, the officer first said he had dropped his gun and it fired accidentally when he picked it up. Yet, since the trajectory of the bullet disproved this account, he later switched stories and said he had merely been practicing his "quick draw" when the gun went off. Both police officers were later convicted of involuntary manslaughter. The sentence was suspended.

Jim Koethe had worked for the *Dallas Times Herald* for two years. He, too, was present at the meeting in Ruby's apartment on November 24, and in collaboration with two other reporters, was writing a book on the assassination.

On September 18, 1964, a witness saw Koethe drinking beer in the patio of his apartment building with an unidentified man. Later that same evening, neighbors heard a disturbance in Koethe's apartment. Three days later, Koethe's body was found on the floor of his bedroom. The apartment had been ransacked, and among the missing items were the notes for Koethe's book. The coroner ruled that Koethe's death resulted from a broken neck bone, possibly the result of a karate chop to the neck.

On September 27, the police arrested Larry Earl Reno for selling some of Koethe's possessions. He was later

charged with the killing, but the grand jury, under secret instructions from District Attorney Henry Wade, refused to return an indictment. Reno was released and Koethe's death remains unsolved.

Tom Howard was Ruby's first lawyer. Flamboyant, hot-tempered, and still smarting from an earlier conviction on income tax evasion, Howard finally left Ruby's case after quarreling with Melvin Belli over Ruby's defense. In 1964, Ruby told another lawyer, Joe Tonahill, "Joe, you should know this. Tom Howard told me to say that I shot Oswald so that Caroline and Mrs. Kennedy wouldn't have to come to Dallas to testify, OK?" Like Hunter and Koethe, Howard attended the same meeting the night that Oswald died.

ren to take him to Washington so he could tell all he knew about the assassination. Warren refused.

No one knows what was discussed during Kilgallen's interview with Ruby; but later in the year, she did release the testimony which Ruby gave to the Warren Commission a full month before it was officially made public. When questioned by the FBI, she refused to divulge her source.

On November 8, 1965, Dorothy Kilgallen was found dead in her apartment. After a week of exhaustive study, the Medical Examiner's Office finally concluded that she died of a fatal combination of alcohol and barbituates. Dr. James L. Luke, assistant examiner, said that although the quantity of each was

assassination expert Sylvia Meagher observes in her book *Accessories After the Fact*, "A wealth of discrepancies, distortions, and omissions impels one to conclude that the official autopsy report is unreliable . . . and that the evidence in fact constitutes proof of a conspiracy."

Lt. William Pitzer was the Navy photo technician who filmed the autopsy of President Kennedy at Bethesda the evening of November 22, 1963. Pitzer was in a unique position to view the wounds inflicted on the slain President and determine whether the shots originated solely from behind, as the Warren Commission later concluded they had. Once the autopsy was completed, Pitzer was debriefed by his superiors in what he later described as "a horrifying experience."



Jack Ruby ..



Tom Howard was Jack Ruby's first attorney.



Veteran journalist, Dorothy Kilgallen.

On March 28, 1965, Howard suffered a massive coronary infection. He was taken to Parkland Hospital where he died 30 minutes after being admitted. Howard was 48 and had had no prior history of heart trouble.

Of all the people who had some connection to Jack Ruby, Dorothy Kilgallen was probably the most famous. A veteran journalist, Kilgallen's "Voice of Broadway" column in the *New York Journal-American* and frequent appearances as a panelist on "What's My Line?" made her a national celebrity. In the spring of 1964, she joined hundreds of other reporters from all over the world who converged on Dallas for the trial of Jack Ruby. Yet as she often did in the past, Dorothy Kilgallen managed to out-scoop them all. Against the strenuous objections of her colleagues in the press, she was granted a 30-minute private interview with Jack Ruby in the office of Judge Joe B. Brown.

Such an interview, conducted in the relative safety of a judge's chamber, was particularly significant since Ruby had long feared that his Dallas jail cell was bugged. In fact, when Earl Warren came to question him there, Ruby begged War-

ren not excessive, the combination had caused "a fatal depression of the central nervous system, which in turn, caused her heart to stop." Although the Examiner's Office indicated there were no signs of violence or suicide, it did say that the exact circumstances of Miss Kilgallen's death were "undetermined," adding that an overdose "could have been accidental."

Yet shortly before her death, Dorothy Kilgallen told her makeup man she was going to New Orleans in five days and "crack the Kennedy case wide open." Unfortunately, she never made it. For that matter, neither did the makeup man. He died shortly afterward. And Dorothy's best friend, Mrs. Earl Smith, died the day after Kilgallen did, of a cause which even the coroner was unable to determine.

Within hours after Kennedy was killed in Dallas, the body of the slain President was flown back to Washington aboard Air Force One and then taken to Bethesda Naval Hospital for an autopsy. Certainly the autopsy performed on Kennedy that night should have been one of the most thorough and exhaustive ever conducted in history. Yet as noted

Afterward, he was repeatedly reminded that he was never to reveal what he saw that night for reasons of national security.

A few years later Lt. Pitzer made plans to retire. He had served 28 years in the Navy and had been offered a \$45,000 a-year post with a network television station. Yet on October 29, 1966, just before he was to make the transition to civilian life, Pitzer was found dead with a bullet in his brain. A gun was found in his right hand, and the coroner concluded that his death was a suicide. Yet according to an anonymous source who worked with Pitzer, the Navy photographer was, in fact, left-handed.

"We were told there was going to be an investigation of his death," said the source, "but we never heard anything. I've always believed he was murdered."

Of course that's what some people thought about Gary Underhill, whose death bore a frightening similarity to Pitzer's. A writer and a researcher in military affairs, Underhill's great-great-grandfather had been a general in the Revolutionary War, and ever since that time, his family remained active in military and political affairs. He was an au-

thority on limited warfare and conventional arms, and frequently did assignments for the CIA.

Soon after Kennedy was killed, Underhill left his home in Washington, D.C., and arrived in New York. There, greatly agitated, he begged friends to keep him out of sight, saying he knew who killed Kennedy. On November 23, 1963, he visited a friend's home in Tom's River, N.J., and told her that "Kennedy's killing wasn't as cut and dried as it seemed." According to the friend, Underhill indicated that a small group in the CIA had killed Kennedy because he discovered a very lucrative business they were running in guns, contraband, and possibly drugs in the Far East. He also told her that he feared for his life, since

compensate for his lack of body hair by wearing a red wig and gluing bits of carpets to his eyebrows, touching them up with mascara. Like his appearance, his interests were equally as bizarre. He was a self-ordained priest in a church of his own creation, a would-be cancer researcher who harbored hundreds of white mice in his apartment, and a roving detective who often used his credentials to find out what other people knew about him. Yet David Ferrie was also a CIA pilot who had flown numerous sorties into Castro's Cuba. And in 1956, he had commanded a Civil Air Patrol unit in New Orleans. One of his students was Lee Harvey Oswald.

In early 1967, Ferrie came under the scrutiny of New Orleans District Attor-

Valle, a friend of Ferrie's in the anti-Castro movement, died a brutal death in Miami. Del Valle's body was found in a parking lot, a bullet wound in the heart, his head split open, apparently with an ax. Later, another friend of Ferrie's, Dr. Mary Sherman, who had assisted Ferrie with cancer research in New Orleans, was also found shot to death. Leaving nothing to chance, her killers then burned her body.

Murders. Accidents. Suicides. Heart attacks.

Untimely deaths occur every day, and they were bound to befall at least some of the people who had a connection with Kennedy's assassination. Yet could the



David Ferrie was a CIA pilot. One of his students was Lee Harvey Oswald.



Rep. Harry Boggs of Louisiana disappeared October 1972.



Clay Shaw (right) was accused and later acquitted of murdering JFK.

they knew he knew what really happened in Dallas. Although Underhill had a reputation for being rational and levelheaded, the talk of a CIA-conspiracy to kill Kennedy was, in 1963 anyway, a bit too wild. Reluctantly, friends concluded he had gone mad.

Still visibly upset, Underhill eventually returned to Washington, D.C. On May 8, 1964, his body was found in his apartment with a bullet wound in the head. According to Police Chief John Clayton, there was a pistol in his right hand. Yet at least two people who first examined the body said that Underhill had been shot behind the left ear, the bullet traveling from left to right through his brain. Nevertheless, after conferring with the homicide squad, the coroner eventually ruled the shooting a suicide. A prominent Washington-based editor, who was a friend of Underhill's, later charged the Washington police with bungling the investigation, adding that it was hard to believe they could have been so stupid.

Perhaps the most colorful of all the characters to surround the investigation into Kennedy's death was David Ferrie. A victim of alopecia, Ferrie tried to

ney Jim Garrison, who was preparing to launch his own investigation into the Kennedy assassination. Eventually, Garrison picked up Ferrie for questioning, quizzing him about his whereabouts the weekend of November 22, 1963. Garrison was convinced that Ferrie had been targeted to fly the getaway plane for the conspirators. Reasonably certain that he would turn state's evidence, Ferrie was released and allowed to return to his apartment.

A few days later, on February 21, 1967, Ferrie's body was found by a youth who police said was a friend of Ferrie's and one of his co-workers. An unsigned suicide note was discovered in the apartment, but only part of the text was ever released to the public. Reports still differ on whether the note was handwritten or typed.

In any event, Coroner Dr. Nicholas Chetta ruled that Ferrie died of a ruptured blood vessel which caused a hemorrhage in his brain. The death was labeled a suicide, although the coroner gave no hint as to how Ferrie had managed to induce such a massive hemorrhage.

That same day, Eladio Cerfino del

appalling death rate stemming from the tragedy in Dallas actually be nothing more than a bizarre coincidence?

In 1967, an actuary commissioned by the *London Sunday Times* was provided with a list of 17 individuals who had died mysteriously since the assassination. Based on the facts supplied, he computed that the odds against these persons all being dead within three years were *10,000 trillion to one!*

Yet to this day, the defenders of the Warren Report (including Gerald Ford who served on the Commission) insist that Oswald acted alone and that there was no conspiracy. But if, in fact, there was no conspiracy, then something awfully strange happened to many of the people who were connected to the events in Dallas. As Penn Jones points out, even if three-quarters of these mysterious deaths were unrelated to the assassination of Kennedy, then what about the others?

Why were they silenced? Who chose to silence them? What did they really know?

Unfortunately, a corpse reveals few secrets. On the other hand, a trail of corpses can often speak volumes.

## AND THE LIST GOES ON . . .

Besides the individuals already mentioned, at least a dozen others have died under similarly strange circumstances. They include:

### **EDDY BENAVIDES**

**DIED: February 1964**

Domingo Benavides was the closest witness to the Tippett slaying. When first questioned by authorities he said he did not think that Oswald was the killer. Two months later, someone shot and killed his look-alike brother, Eddy Benavides, possibly in a case of mistaken identity. The killer was never found.

### **ALBERT GUY BOGARD, 41**

**DIED: February 14, 1966**

Bogard was the salesman at Downtown Lincoln Mercury in Dallas who testified that a few weeks before the assassination, a man resembling Oswald and using Oswald's name took a high-speed test drive in one of Bogard's cars. The real Oswald did not know how to drive. After Kennedy's death, Bogard was severely beaten and hospitalized. Later, he was found dead in his car in Hallsville, La., a victim of carbon monoxide poisoning. His death was listed as a suicide.

### **HALE BOGGS**

**DISAPPEARED: October 16, 1972**

A United States Senator from Louisiana, Boggs had been a member of the Warren Commission. A week before he vanished, he publicly voiced his skepticism of the Warren Report and called for a new investigation into Kennedy's death. Boggs was flying in a small plane from Anchorage to Juneau, Alaska when his aircraft disappeared in rugged terrain.

### **LEE BOWERS, 41**

**DIED: August 9, 1966**

A tower switchman for the Union Terminal Co. at the time of the shooting, Lee Bowers testified he saw three cars enter the area behind the picket fence in Dealey Plaza shortly before the killing. He also saw a flash of light near the grassy knoll at the time the shots were fired. Bowers died in a single-car crash when his auto went out of control near Midlothian, Tex. On the way to the hospital, Dr. Ray Bohl, the attending physician, noted that

Bowers seemed to be in a strange kind of shock, the likes of which Bohl had never seen before.

### **DR. NICHOLAS CHETTA, 50**

**DIED: May 25, 1968**

Chetta was the New Orleans coroner who died as mysteriously as many of the victims he viewed in the morgue. Chetta had performed the autopsies on Ferrie and Dr. Mary Sherman, as well as on Robert Perin, a CIA operative who many believe did not really die at all. Less than a year after Chetta died, Prof. Henry Delaune, Chetta's brother-in-law who assisted with many of Chetta's autopsies, was murdered with a handgun on January 26, 1969.

### **REV. CLYDE JOHNSON, 37**

**DIED: July 23, 1969**

Rev. Johnson was to have been one of the key witnesses at Jim Garrison's trial of Clay Shaw in New Orleans. Like both Ferrie and Shaw, Johnson was an admitted homosexual, and planned to testify that he attended parties at which Shaw, Ferrie, Ruby, and Oswald were present. On February 18, 1969, Johnson was beaten so badly he was unable even to talk. A few months later, he was shot to death near Greensburg, La.

### **EARLENE ROBERTS, 60**

**DIED: January 9, 1966**

The housekeeper at the rooming house where Oswald lived, Roberts testified that Oswald had stopped there between the time that Kennedy and Officer Tippett were killed. Her testimony was considered crucial since it cast considerable doubt on the Warren Commission's assumption that Oswald had enough time to walk to the site where Tippett was slain. After being hounded into virtual seclusion by the police following her testimony, Earlene Roberts died of a heart attack.

### **JACK RUBY, 55**

**DIED: January 3, 1967**

Nightclub owner and small time hood, Jack Ruby managed to sneak into the basement of the Dallas police station and murder Lee Harvey Oswald before a national TV audience. Ruby lived for three years after the shooting, always in the custody of Dallas authorities. In December 1966, Ruby entered the hospital with cancer and died a few weeks later of a blood clot to the heart.

### **HAROLD RUSSELL, 53**

**DIED: July 23, 1965**

Russell worked at Warren Reynolds' used car lot the day of the assassination, and like Reynolds, saw a man flee the Tippett scene with a revolver. After returning to his home in Davis, Okla., Russell attended a party in which he began to act strangely, saying he should be hidden and that he would be killed. When the police arrived to subdue him, an officer struck Russell in the head with his revolver. He died a few hours later in an Oklahoma hospital.

### **CLAY SHAW, 60**

**DIED: August 15, 1974**

A wealthy businessman with CIA ties, Shaw was accused and later acquitted of conspiring to murder John Kennedy. In January 1974, former CIA man Victor Marchetti revealed that during the Garrison investigation, Richard Helms had instructed his CIA subordinates to give Shaw "all the help he needs." In February 1974, Shaw was hospitalized for a blood clot. A few months later, he was found dead in his home. His body was embalmed so quickly Parish Coroner Dr. Frank Minyard was unable to determine the exact cause of death.

### **WILLIAM WHALEY, 60**

**DIED: December 18, 1965**

Whaley was the Dallas cabdriver who said he took Oswald from a site not far from Dealey Plaza to his rooming house shortly after the assassination. His testimony before the Warren Commission was riddled with contradictions, and he even told the Commission staff that "a good defense attorney could take me apart." Whaley died in a head-on collision while driving his cab. It was the first fatality of the City Transportation Co. in 37 years.

### **JAMES WORRELL, 23**

**DIED: November 23, 1966**

A spectator in Dealey Plaza the day of the assassination, Worrell told the Warren Commission he saw a man rush out of the side entrance of the Texas School Book Depository shortly after the killing. The man did not resemble Oswald. Three years later, Worrell lost control of his motorcycle as he was rounding a corner, and was thrown head first in a concrete curb. He died of severe head injuries.