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BACKGROUND

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WASHINGTON.

NO, NO, NO, I didn't say that Teddy will be assassinated. I said that he will be assassinated if he is the Presidential candidate."

There was no hint of emotion in the voice of Bernard Fensterwald Jr. as he dropped the jolting prediction into the conversation.

Murder, conspiracy and political corruption are routine shop talk in the Washington offices of the Committee to Investigate Assassinations, an independent alliance of disbelievers still probing the killings of President John F. Kennedy (Nov. 22, 1963), Robert Kennedy (June 5, 1968) and Dr Martin Luther King Jr. (April 4, 1968).

About 100 persons throughout the country do volunteer research for the organization. Another 900 or so are on the mailing list.

The membership includes lawyers — such as Fensterwald — journalists, lawmen and many other amateur researchers and detectives.

The committee is slowly and methodically gathering and piecing together facts surrounding each of the historic killings with the hope



Lee Harvey Oswald after his arrest in slaying of President John F. Kennedy. Case is still being investigated.

Assassination Is Their Business: Probers Seek the Final Answers

that some day the full story will be known.

In the early afternoon of Nov. 22, 1963, word that President Kennedy lay dead in a Dallas hospital began to shake the nation.

"When I heard the news, I was standing on the steps of the Capitol, not wanting to believe what I heard," recalled Fensterwald.

A new President with a Texas drawl tried to reassure a nation that soon would be told that an unknown left-winger with a \$21.45 surplus rifle — Lee Harvey Oswald — had killed the leader of 200 million people.

But that answer was too simple in a complex world. A survey by the Presidential Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence determined that 2 percent of the population did not believe Oswald acted alone.

At first Fensterwald believed. But then in 1967, his lawyer-investigator mind began to absorb the huge Warren Commission Report, the result of the official investigation of the assassination.

In the Warren Report, Fensterwald saw too many unanswered questions, too many conflicting stories, and most disturbing, too many basic questions that were never asked by a commission filled with top legal minds.

A FAMILIAR FACE in the halls of Congress, Fensterwald turned to his many Senatorial friends, hoping for a new investigation.

"The Senate felt about looking into it like they did about the bubonic plague," he remembered. "The major problem is one of physical and political fear. Many people here, who may not have liked Kennedy, have at least agreed with us that the Warren Commission wasn't just full of mistakes."

So in 1968, the committee to investigate assassinations was formed in an effort to combine all available knowledge on the assassination under one umbrella organization of volunteer lawyers, writers, amateur detectives and researchers.

A meeting of Fensterwald and his friends takes on all the aspects of a strange sort of Bible class, but the chapters and verses they quote are from the Warren Report.

Only one question stops Fensterwald cold — "If Lee Harvey Oswald was not the lone assassin, who killed John Kennedy?"

"Oh, no. I'm not going to speculate on who did it, who was behind it," Fensterwald said. "But, you can bet it was someone in the U. S. Government."

"We know there was a conspiracy," Fensterwald says flatly. "It involves very sophisticated people. The gunmen involved were professional killers who do their jobs and then disappear."

A frequent visitor in Fensterwald's office is Harold Weisberg, not a member of the committee but an expert on the three assassinations and the author of a half dozen books on the subject, including the best seller, "White-wash."

"To ask who did the killing, you must first ask the lawyer's question 'que bono?' or 'who benefits?'" Weisberg said.

"There were major changes in Vietnam

policy after the assassination. There is a good deal of evidence that Kennedy was ready to get out of Vietnam.

"I think it was linked to Vietnam and the Cold War," he added. "There are a couple of things not generally known. Kennedy was dealing with Castro in Cuba and with China to ease tensions with the Communists."

On Nov. 29, 1963, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed executive order 11130 appointing the Warren Commission to investigate the JFK assassination and ordering all government agencies to provide whatever help needed.

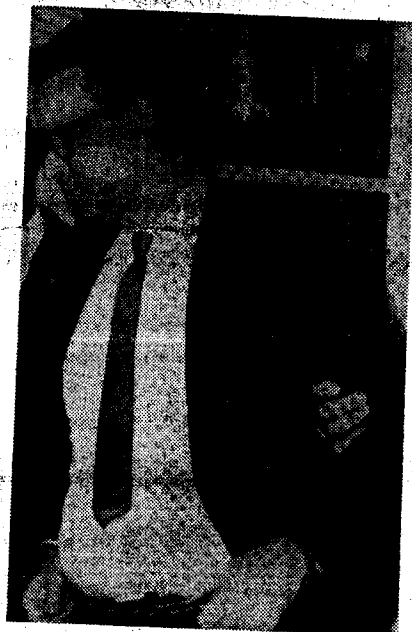
In the next 10 months, the commission of politicians and attorneys reviewed thousands of interviews and tons of documents, under the

direction of Supreme Court Chief Justice Earl Warren.

THEIR CONCLUSION was basically the same as the story millions of Americans already had been told. Acting alone, Lee Harvey Oswald fired shots which killed the President and wounded then Texas Gov. John Connally from a sixth-floor window in the Texas School Book Depository.

But not even all of the commission members agreed. In 1970, the late Sen. Richard B. Russell (D., Ga.) told a radio interviewer, "I think that someone else worked with him (Oswald)."

Sen. Russell said that it was he who insisted that a disclaimer sentence be added to the



James Earl Ray, convicted slayer of Martin Luther King.

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—Bernard Fensterwald Jr.

report stating that if either Oswald or Oswald's killer, Jack Ruby, had any help; the commission had no evidence of it.

A CBS television interview with former President Johnson was edited last year for "national security" reasons. Unconfirmed published reports stated that the deleted material dealt with Johnson's doubts that Oswald acted alone.

"None of the commission people will discuss this matter at all now," Fensterwald added. "I couldn't even get to see Warren. I once tried to give him a letter in the case. Warren's clerk told me that he did not even receive mail on the matter."

Fensterwald is well equipped for his investigator's role. He was named counsel to a Senate subcommittee investigation of government invasion of privacy. He served as an aide to the late Sen. Estes Kefauver (D., Tenn.), the late Sen. Thomas C. Hennings (D., Mo.) and former Sen. Edward Long (D., Mo.)

A few blocks from Fensterwald's law office are the aging offices where the committee carries on its work. File cabinets with heavy locks line one wall. Stack of papers, books and file folders fill the office.

THERE ARE MANY PEOPLE who would probably be interested in those files. They contain extensive information on nearly all the names involved in the three assassinations, as well as minute details on the killings themselves.

"The huge amount of suppressed information is important," committee attorney James Lesar said. "It would give answers to some very basic questions. But the answers also would be very bothersome to some government people. We're fighting this thing in the courts now, but the judges aren't very receptive toward our point of view."

Lesar believes that the three killings have now legitimized assassination as a way of political change in America. A means by which one bullet can neutralize millions of ballots.

The committee is frequently lavished with

crackpot stories from obvious mental cases. Other stories are just as phony but are told by people with enough intelligence and knowledge to make them plausible.

Living in a world of presidential plots, conspirators in high places and hired assassins provide all the ingredients for a case of paranoia to those with more nervous dispositions.

"You have to live with that sort of thing," Fensterwald explained. "It doesn't bother me much anymore."

Why does an attorney with a wealthy background and a Harvard education continue to investigate killings that the government considers closed?

"I knew the Kennedys and admired them," he said. "It's all rather egomaniacal, I guess. But someone has to do it. There are at least three or four potential presidential candidates who believe in what we're doing, but won't admit it publicly."

"The answers are there. We just have to find them. You can see patterns forming in the three assassinations. Things are becoming clearer. For the first hour after the (John) Kennedy assassination, the country was immobilized. Lyndon Johnson was terrified. We weren't on the scene then. No one was really prepared for it."

"Now we know what to look for. One more major assassination and the whole thing will break wide open."

"This time we'll be there."