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Call this JFK tale

**Page
Six** TM

By RICHARD JOHNSON
with KIMBERLEY RYAN

COMING soon to a video store near you: "I Shot JFK," the story of James Files, 51, a chop-shop operator who is doing 50 years in the state pen in Joliet, Ill., for the attempted murder of two cops.

Files claims he was the marksman on the grassy knoll who assassinated President Kennedy, and that Lee Harvey Oswald was an innocent patsy set up by his CIA handlers.

The convict recounted this outlandish tale in two videotaped interviews to Bob Vernon, a Houston producer who is trying to sell the yarn as a TV special for \$2 million.

"Oswald never fired a shot, my friend," Vernon says. "This is the story of the century. We are going to market this. You've never seen so much truth in your life."

Vernon, who claims to be the man who brought down Jimmy Swaggart, was close to making a deal with NBC for the May sweeps. But the network pulled out after hiring assassination expert Edward Jay Epstein as a consult-

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week's *NEW YORK* magazine

knoll and void

ant. Epstein told NBC that Files was a fraud.

Vernon can explain this. Epstein is "a CIA disinformation specialist." And after PAGE SIX reported on the implausibility of Files' tale last May, Vernon sent a fax calling our report a "hatchet job." "Come on, tell the truth, are you with the CIA?" Vernon asked us. "How much did they pay you? Was it in cash?"

Vernon was particularly upset that we described him as a "mysterious promoter." "There's nothing mysterious about me. I'm as common as dirt," he said.

The conspiracy doesn't end here. Vernon asserts that NBC killed the program under pressure: "I was informed by a fairly reliable source who asked to remain anonymous that a call was made to GE president Robert Wright from 'high up' in the Pentagon and that the caller threatened not to renew several of GE's multibillion dollar government contracts if the program aired."

So now Vernon is looking to get the show on

the air through an independent syndication deal. In the meantime, he's planning to sell it as a home video with a book deal tie-in.

And he's still looking to mine more from Files, and as quickly as possible. "Files has a lot more to tell about the assassination and the CIA. But he won't be around long. He knows too much. The CIA or the mob will kill him. We have really upset some people."

Vernon, who says he's spent \$500,000 and more than 45,000 hours on this investigation, says that he has plenty of corroboration. "We have the CIA pilot who flew in the assassination coordinator. There's not one hole in his story."

The colorful Texan urges reporters to come visit him in Houston and look at his "evidence." He says, "The truth will do you good. It may change your life and the Lord may even consider letting you into heaven when you die. There are no tabloid journalists in heaven, you know. They hang out in hell with the lawyers."