

THE FUEL THAT FIRES THE JFK CONSPIRACY HYSTERIA

By Robert P. Gemberling

During the past few months there have been several journalistic endeavors shown on television with complete disregard for known facts developed during the assassination investigation. The current JFK conspiracy hysteria has been fueled by such programming, and has made former Texas Governor John Connally look like a prophet.

In 1966 Governor Connally said a probe should be made of "journalistic scavengers" who challenge the motives and findings of the Warren Commission. He stated: "I suspect that a searching investigation into their credentials will divulge that their motives have political overtones, and that their views have been given prominence out of proportion to their value."

On February 5, 1992, the "Inside Edition" program aired on Channel 5 (NBC) at 6:30 PM. The host, Bill O'Reilly, spent the entire 30 minutes interviewing Sylvia Odio. She revealed that in late September, 1963, three men came to her Dallas apartment seeking her assistance in soliciting funds for the Cuban Revolutionary Junta (JURE), an anti-Castro organization. She remarked these men appeared to be familiar with the fact her father was imprisoned in Cuba. She described two of the men as Cuban or Mexican. She claimed the other man was an American, who spoke very little Spanish. She identified this third man as Lee Harvey Oswald. Mr. O'Reilly elicited from Odio that she had been interviewed by the FBI about her belief Oswald was one of the three men who visited her, but the FBI did nothing with her information.

Apparently no investigation was conducted by "Inside Edition" before airing this interview with Odio. A simple check of the Warren Report would have revealed on pages 321 to 324 the information furnished to the FBI by Odio, and the FBI's investigation into her allegations, is summarized.

The true facts are that Sylvia Odio was interviewed twice by the FBI. Her identification of Oswald as one of the three men visiting her was supported by her sister. The FBI conducted investigation in Dallas and other cities, and identified the three men, who visited Odio on September 26 or 27, 1963, were Loran Eugene Hall, of Johnsandale, California, a participant in numerous anti-Castro activities; Lawrence Howard, a Mexican-American from East Los Angeles, California; and William Seymour, from Arizona. Hall, when interviewed on September 16, 1964, said Seymour was similar in appearance to Oswald, and spoke only a few words of Spanish, as did the man identified by Odio as Oswald.

Other investigation by the FBI established Oswald was enroute by bus from New Orleans to Laredo, Texas, via Houston, on September 25 and 26, 1963. According to Mexican immigration records Oswald crossed the border at Laredo to Nuevo Laredo, Mexico, between 6:00 AM and 2:00 PM on September 26, 1963, and returned to the United States on October 3, 1963. It is possible Sylvia Odio was sincere in her belief Oswald was one of the three men who visited her, and may still stand by her 1964 statements. A thorough FBI investigation, however, disproved her allegations. Two FBI reports, containing 46 pages of investigative results into Odio's remarks, were disseminated to the Warren Commission, and fully support the summary contained in the Warren Report.

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The movie JFK also made reference to Oswald's visit to the apartment of Sylvia Odio, and indicated information furnished by her was ignored by the FBI.

Channel 5's newscast on February 5, 1992, portrayed friends and acquaintances of the late Captain Will Fritz, Dallas Police Department, as saying the FBI instructed the Dallas Police Department to halt its investigation, when Captain Fritz was about to obtain a confession from Oswald. This newscast contained remarks that recently released records of the Dallas Police Department, and in Washington, had resulted in Channel 5 "cracking the case".

The Warren Report, on page 199, reflects Oswald was interviewed for approximately 12 hours during the period 2:30 PM, November 22, 1963, to 11:15 AM, November 24, 1963, by various members of law enforcement agencies. At no time did Captain Fritz indicate he was about to get a confession. Oswald lied to Captain Fritz just like he did to other interrogators. Oswald was in custody of Captain Fritz and the Dallas Police Department during this entire period. Oswald was never taken into custody by Federal authorities, because he had not violated any Federal law. He had been charged with the murders of Dallas Police Officer J. W. Tippet and President Kennedy, both Texas state charges. There is little doubt Captain Fritz would never have endeavored to move Oswald shortly after 11:15 AM, November 24, 1963, if he was about to obtain a confession. To think otherwise would be an insult to the memory of an outstanding Dallas Police Captain.

Immediately after the assassination of President Kennedy, an Executive Order was issued by President Johnson instructing the FBI to coordinate the investigation, and take custody of the physical evidence. That is exactly what the FBI did. There is little doubt this put the Dallas Police Department in a precarious position, when they were investigating two state murder cases within their jurisdiction.

The NBC Today Show on February 7, 1992, portrayed host Bryant Gumbel in a brief interview of Oliver Stone from Buenos Aires, where he was promoting his JFK movie. Stone said the CIA orchestrated Oswald's visit to Russia as part of the CIA plot to assassinate JFK. Perhaps the brevity of this interview, and time restraints, did not permit Mr. Gumbel to thoroughly examine such statement. The true facts are that Oswald went to Russia in October, 1959, before Kennedy was nominated or elected President, and left Russia in June, 1962. If Stone's statement is true, the CIA had to know, prior to October, 1959, that Kennedy would be nominated and elected President in 1960.

The three part segment of Chief Correspondent Mike Snyder, titled "JFK - The Final Chapter", shown on Channel 5 News on February 24, 25 and 26, 1992, was another prime example of poor journalism fueling the fires of JFK conspiracy hysteria. Of course, this was "ratings week" for newscasts. The "hype" for this three part segment, before, during and after its running, included such remarks as "blew the lid off the JFK investigation", and "caused the FBI to reopen its investigation".

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Snyder said he had hard evidence that proved there was a conspiracy to cover up what happened on November 22, 1963. He remarked Harold Weisberg had made available a copy of a memorandum dated November 26, 1963, from Deputy Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach to President Johnson's Press Secretary Bill Moyers. Mr. Snyder showed one sentence of such memorandum, to the effect that "The public must be satisfied that Oswald was the assassin; that he did not have confederates who are still at large; and that the evidence was such that he would have been convicted at trial." Snyder then included his own interpretation of this memorandum that an FBI report could be used to convince the public there was no conspiracy.

There is a paragraph in Mr. Katzenbach's memorandum immediately before the above quoted sentence, which reads: "It is important that all of the facts surrounding President Kennedy's assassination be made public in a way which will satisfy the people in the United States and abroad that all the facts have been told, and that a statement to this effect be made now."

Mr. Moyers has also expressed his opinion of Mike Snyder's "JFK - The Final Charter" by calling it "scurrilous journalism". Certainly, Mr. Moyer's and Mr. Katzenbach's appraisal of the meaning of such memorandum would appear to be warranted, rather than only Mr. Snyder's interpretation of it.

Harold Weisberg, the source utilized by Mr. Snyder, has authored several books critical of the Warren Commission. In 1975 Weisberg said he had evidence the Warren Commission prejudged the case. He alleged an outline of the Warren Commission's Report, submitted to Chief Justice Earl Warren in January, 1964, established the conclusion was determined before the investigation began. Surely, Mr. Snyder and Mr. Weisberg are aware the investigation began on November 22, 1963.

For Mike Snyder to claim he "caused the FBI to reopen its investigation" is somewhat presumptuous. During my 13 years (1963 - 1976) of active handling of this case, new information, which appeared to be credible, was furnished FBI Headquarters for dissemination to the Department of Justice.

Special Agent in Charge Dick Revel, of the Dallas FBI Office, appeared on Channel 5 News on February 27, 1992, following Mr. Snyder's revelations. He pointed out the FBI was endeavoring to obtain the film of Charles Bronson, which had been mentioned by Snyder, for scientific analyses using techniques not available in 1963, when the FBI had an opportunity to view such film. I am confident the results of such analyses will be made public when completed. Mr. Snyder has already told the public such film possibly shows three men present on the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository just before the shots were fired. Surely, the public would prefer to wait for scientific analyses by experts as to what this film actually shows, rather than rely on the presumptive conclusions of Mike Snyder.

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Television and newspaper reporters have recently jumped on the Dr. Charles Crenshaw bandwagon to promote the sale of his book, "JFK: Conspiracy of Silence". Such free publicity has indicated Dr. Crenshaw is promoting the theory President Kennedy was shot from the front, and there was more than one assassin.

Dr. Crenshaw's comments on television, and newspaper reports of interviews with him, cause me to seriously question his claims. I was not at Parkland Hospital on either November 22 or 24, 1963, but a number of highly qualified investigators from local and Federal law enforcement agencies identified the medical personnel who treated the President, and put his body into a casket. Dr. Crenshaw was not among those identified and was not interviewed.

Furthermore, on November 24, 1963, immediately after Oswald was shot, the late FBI Special Agent in Charge, J. Gordon Shanklin, immediately dispatched two FBI agents to Parkland Hospital, with instructions to endeavor to obtain a dying declaration from Oswald. These agents were dressed in surgical clothing, awaiting permission to enter where Oswald was being treated, when they were told he had expired. Mr. Shanklin was ordered to do this by FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, in response to a request from the White House. I consider it much more likely President Johnson would have made such request through Mr. Hoover, than, by telephone, to a third-year resident physician at Parkland. It is also unlikely he would have done both.

Another reason I question Dr. Crenshaw's statement about receiving a telephone call at Parkland Hospital from President Johnson on the morning of November 24, 1963, is that it was common practice, when President Johnson called anyone not known to him, to habitually identify himself as: "This is your President", without using his name. When he called someone he knew, it was his practice to say: "This is Lyndon". The logs of telephone calls from the White House fail to confirm a call was made to Parkland Hospital. None of the doctors treating Oswald have publicly stated their recollection as to whether Dr. Crenshaw made any statements to them about receiving a call from the President.

Are we to believe President Johnson may have made such a call from some telephone booth? Did Dr. Crenshaw feel slighted he was not interviewed about his role on the trauma team treating the President on November 22, 1963, and Oswald on November 24, 1963? Is his book, and its promotion, his way of getting the attention he feels he did not receive in 1963?

Famed attorney F. Lee Bailey once said: "Certified rumors are better than facts."

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(Robert P. Gemberling of Dallas was the Special Agent of the FBI who coordinated the assassination investigation in Dallas under the direction of the late J. Gordon Shanklin.)