

BITS & PIECES A GREEN BERET ON THE PERIPHERY OF THE JFK ASSASSINATION

by
Daniel Marvin

At the 30th anniversary of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, the predominant media view of the events in Dallas on 22 November 1963 was that the Warren Commission, despite valid criticism of its *modus operandi*, had reached the correct conclusion: Lee H. Oswald acted alone. This, despite the fact that hundreds of books of contrary conclusion have been published. Without doubt, a powerful influence on the media was Gerald Posner's *Case Closed* (1993, Random House). A glib but persuasive work, it purports that an understanding of who and what Oswald was (in short, an extremely violent man with delusions of grandeur) provides the key to comprehending the assassination.

In contrast with Posner, I have concluded from bits and pieces of personal experience, that understanding the CIA will eventually provide true comprehension of the who, how, and why of this most shameful chapter in our history. I am aware that a considerable body of persuasive published evidence already exists linking a CIA conspiracy to Kennedy's death—but little of that evidence is first-hand.

I know what the Company is capable of. Recall what Colonel George White, former OSS, wrote about the intelligence psyche. One of the founders of the CIA, White retired in the mid-1960s and wrote a letter to a friend—in it he said, "I toiled wholeheartedly in the vineyards because it was fun, fun, fun. Where else could a red-blooded American Boy lie, kill, cheat, steal, rape and pillage with the blessings of the all highest?" (This was included in an ABC television show by John Marks in 1979). White is deceased. The CIA is not.

Out of my respect for President Kennedy and because of his respect for the U.S. Army's Special Forces, I volunteered for the "Green Berets" on 22 November 1963 after learning of the assassination. Shortly thereafter I moved my family to Fort Bragg, NC and began Special Warfare School. A few of us volunteered for training not only in guerrilla warfare, but also in assassination and terrorism. I believed that extreme mea-

*Lt. Colonel Daniel Marvin
U.S. Army Special Forces (Retired)*

sures were sometimes necessary "in the interests of national security." Patriotic fervor and a natural bent for danger inspired my automatic acceptance of any action, whether illegal or immoral, necessary to accomplish a mission. The end justified any means. I now know very differently.

The classified training that I received from CIA personnel included film footage and photographs taken in Dealey Plaza, Dallas, on that fateful day, as illustrative of how a national leader could be assassinated and a psychotic "lone wolf" held responsible. I believe the CIA received the Zapruder film from the Secret Service on the day of the assassination. The Secret Service could easily have intimidated Zapruder into instant compliance with such a request (See Philip H. Melanson's article "Hidden Exposure: Cover-up and Intrigue in the CIA's Secret Possession of the Zapruder film" *The Third Decade* Vol. 1 #1, November 1984). It is likely that a distancing of certain powerful, organized crime families from the clandestine operations division of the CIA in the Fall of 1963 took a toll on the availability of MAFIA hit men and placed an immediate demand to draw from some other resource. What better resource than the U.S. Army Special Warfare Center at Fort Bragg and its elite Special Forces—the Green Berets? Certainly some of these same highly trained and motivated unconventional warriors had been tapped in the past when the need arose to terminate someone in a foreign country. The urgency of need is perhaps best evidenced by the refusal of the Miami mob to participate in a hit on President John Kennedy during his scheduled 1 November 1963 visit to Miami. This would have coincided rather dramatically with the assassination of the NGO brothers in South Vietnam. Former US Army Special Forces Captain John McCarthy, who now calls Los Angeles home, was also an assassin trained by the CIA in 1964. He recalled vividly to me one particular experience he had as a Miami police officer. John told me of that failed CIA/Mafia plot and how he'd learned of it straight from the Miami Police undercover officer who had intercepted the call from the company to the family member at the time the hit request was received and refused. I had a similar, but closer experience than John McCarthy in January 1965.

Furthermore, it was implied in class that Agency people at Bethesda Naval Hospital could control "final" results (autopsies?) when necessary. [I have a suspicion that Colonel Pierre A. Finck, who participated in the JFK autopsy, was a Company "plant," because of his role in the cover up of the wrongful imprisonment of my Green Beret colleague Captain John

McCarthy (see Charles Morgan, Jr.'s *One Man, One Voice*, 1979, Holt, Rinehart, & Winston). Although McCarthy was trained as an assassin, his imprisonment at hard labor for life on 30 January 1968 (reduced to hard labor for 24 years by the Secretary of the Army on 24 September 1969) was for a murder he did not commit. Finck's obfuscation of autopsy records in both the JFK and McCarthy cases has to be more than mere coincidence.]

Some of us shared the "gut" feeling that our CIA instructors at Fort Bragg had first-hand knowledge of the JFK assassination. It was a sobering thought—particularly so in view of my motives for joining the Green Berets. During a coffee break one day, an instructor casually remarked on the "success of the conspiracy in Dallas," tending to confirm our suspicions that the President's murder was conceived, executed, and covered up by high-level echelons within our government. I attempted to rationalize this by believing that there had to have been compelling reasons, with no evil intent as such on the part of loyal Americans who deemed it necessary, at significant risk to themselves, to wrest the White House from one ill-equipped to lead in troubled times. Before a year was out, I would have the opportunity to strengthen my belief that it was indeed a government conspiracy that targeted and dealt with this President who threatened their continued control over a broad spectrum of world-wide events by means of covert actions.

In the Fall of 1964, Green Beret Master Sergeant Joseph Hill and I were selected to test secret equipment at Natick Laboratories near Boston. On our first evening there in late November, 1964 we ate dinner in uniform at a large and fancy motel close to the laboratory, our observations generating suspicion that it was a hang-out for the local Mafia. In fact we there met the son of a Boston "family" don. As Frank Sinatra crooned on stage near our table, a man who had been secretly furnishing drinks to our table, once confronted by me as to why he was furnishing the free drinks, introduced himself, saying that he had simply observed our camaraderie. Having never before seen an officer and a sergeant treat each other as equals, he wanted to anonymously express his approval. I told him that Green Berets were different, that sergeants and officers had to live, eat, work, and fight as a team, but that they all knew who was in charge.

He invited us to join him.

One thing led to another, and Joe and I then engaged in a little game of subterfuge: could we infiltrate the Mafia and lead

them to think that it was part of our mission in Massachusetts? It was common knowledge in Mafia and CIA circles that Green Berets were tapped by the Company to terminate selected "targets" in foreign countries, whereas the Mafia provided the CIA's pool of able assassins for hits in the U.S.

As we carefully sized up our table guest and he cautiously responded to our questions, seemingly endless intervals of quiet contemplation eventually resulted in a sense of trust and camaraderie. His attention was visibly piqued when I detailed some aspects of my special training in assassination and terror techniques.

Actual testing at Natick Laboratories involved parachuting with the new hardware, evaluating it and designing modifications that might take days or weeks to engineer. We would return to Fort Bragg and await recall to Natick. While in Massachusetts Joe and I cultivated the new relationship, spending several evenings with our mafioso "friend." Were it not for Joe's professionalism, he might well have fallen in love with our host's sister; love at first sight with the daughter of a Mafia don was a potentially dangerous complication! We presumably passed muster on the third successive visit at the son's home on 6 January 1965 as we were invited to meet the "family" don himself the next evening at his home. After a generous steak and trimmings, he passed cigars around and told us of their need for a good hit team to eliminate competition. He clarified this meant we'd be dealing with people trying to "invade" their territory, that we would not be asked to snuff out any cops. Would we be interested? Shown a matched pair of silenced pistols, I know I fantasized for a moment or two what that kind of life would be, but thought better when the reality of my wife and three daughters came back into focus. I knew Joe was thinking hard too, so I just reached out and grabbed his huge wrist as if to let him know I'd made the decision and that I'd handle the situation. I felt it wise to move quickly and decline the offer on the spot rather than push our luck in this dangerous ruse of our own making.

But, first I used this opportunity to pose a question that had been in my mind for some months: had the don been approached by the CIA prior to the Kennedy killing? Pausing to weigh his answer, he said that somebody in the Company had asked if he wanted a part in the hit. He told me he'd refused to participate, telling me as he'd told the caller, he "had no problems with the Kennedy's in Massachusetts."

I told the don we'd better pass on his offer. I just didn't think it wise for me with a wife and three children to take on that kind

of work at this time in my life. Different doing it to protect our national security. Joe just nodded, not really having to say anything as I'd already got us off the hook—almost. We had yet to deal with the fact that we had each learned of the other's activities. Fortunately for Joe and me it appeared that the don and his son respected us or perhaps feared what we could do to them as much as we feared the possible consequences of their anger. The "reach" of the family was not to be underestimated here in the United States. But, we had no problem. It was a gentlemen's parting except that we recognized the value of silence in these matters and the four of us swore by a blood oath never to disclose the others' identities. I have lived by that oath.

Late in the afternoon, on Saturday, 29 October 1966 Lieutenant Commander William Pitzer was found dead in his office at the Bethesda Naval Hospital where the autopsy on President Kennedy had been performed three years earlier. With a gunshot wound to the right temple, Dr. Pitzer's death was officially ruled a suicide, but family and friends found this verdict impossible to accept, not least of all because his widow knew better. In January 1995 Mrs. Joyce B. Pitzer told me unequivocally that she knew her husband "had parts of the autopsy that they wanted destroyed." She was speaking of our government wanting the autopsy photos he'd taken of JFK on 22 November 1963 destroyed. She told me that her husband "refused to do this." Instead of the United States Navy assisting Mrs. Pitzer to get to the bottom of her husband's violent death, they ruled it suicide. She knew different, but the Navy refused her access to the autopsy of her husband. Instead, she told me, "After his death, four of the Navy Intelligence were here at the house. They told me not to talk." She clarified that, saying, "and for 25 years I did not really discuss this." Even after a quarter of a century had passed, Mrs. Pitzer told me of how "Several of the Captains and one of the Admirals told me when Livingstone was writing the book [High Treason 2]—to stay out of it."

Mrs. Pitzer is worried that the Navy will take away her survivors benefit pay if she talks about this incident or asks too many questions. During my first conversation with her on 5 January 1995, Mrs. Pulitzer told me "we have wondered, if more were said about this, if my compensation might be stopped." Joyce Pitzer is 80 years old and, I firmly believe, a very frightened woman, and a true patriot. She deserves straight answers from the U.S. Navy.

In the Fall of 1993, while watching a documentary on the JFK assassination, I was stunned to see the name of William

Pitzer flash across the screen in a list of violent de putatively linked with the cover up of a conspiracy. Se that name jolted my memory back to the first week of Aug 1965 at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Colonel Clarence Patten, commanding officer of my unit, the 6th Special Fo Group, summoned me with instructions to meet a "Compa man in an area adjacent to headquarters. Another Green B Captain named David H. Vanek (with whom I had ta assassination training) joined me outside the building and walked together, asking each of the other what this was about. Neither of us had an inkling except that it must b covert mission of some sort. Not far, perhaps a hundred yar and in the shade of some nearby pine trees, a slender man about 5'10" waited. Dressed casually in short sleeves, li slacks and sunglasses appropriate for the August heat, flashed his ID and took me aside. Would I terminate a m who was preparing to give State's secrets to the enemy— traitor in the making? Assuming that the "hit" would be Southeast Asia somewhere I said "sure." After all—that what I was trained for. And I'd already volunteered for and w on orders (See Hqs., DA Special Orders No. 173 dated 30 Jun 1965) to join the 5th Special Forces in South Vietnam December 1965. In the interim I would attend an eight wee military government course at Fort Gordon, Georgia. Once Vietnam, I could easily go to whatever foreign country wher Pitzer was to be dealt with. Travel was available using th CIA's own air assets, Southern Air Transport or Air America. asked who the traitor was and I was told he was a Navy officer —a Lieutenant Commander William Bruce Pitzer. The agen told me that Pitzer worked at Bethesda Naval Hospital. He said nothing of a link with the JFK autopsy and I just assumed that Pitzer was one of those sorry types that went wrong and was going to sell secrets to our enemy. The job had to be done at Bethesda before the man retired from the Navy. I really didn't care about killing Pitzer, but I wasn't about to do tha sort of thing here in the U.S.A. and from the beginning it wa understood that we would be used overseas—not on our home turf. So—I refused the mission after he'd already tol me the guy's name which is not a good thing. The agen seemed irritated sure enough but he'd goofed and he knew was "one of their's" and when we parted he and I both knew that the name would be as good as forgotten by me. I sur wouldn't want to compromise a plot to rid our military of a traitor, would I?

The agent then simply turned around and walked over to

meet Captain Vanek who was waiting just out of earshot and I headed back to my office. Whether or not that agent offered Vanek the same mission or whether or not he accepted the mission is only for him to say; I have neither seen him nor heard of him these past twenty-nine years. My numerous attempts to locate Vanek through the Department of the Army Veteran's Services Directorate in St. Louis, were met with a 15 December 1994 response that their office had "been unable to identify a record of service for the person concerned." Not true. On 23 December 1994 I asked in writing for Senators Kennedy, D'Amato and Moynihan to investigate this possible cover-up action. To date, there has been no substantive reply from any of the Senators. It appears that, when there is alleged illegal CIA involvement, even Angels fear to tread.

In May 1965, Cambodian Crown Prince Norodom Sihanouk severed diplomatic relations with the U.S., and permitted Hanoi to expel Cambodian authorities from a strip of territory along the border with South Vietnam, thereby establishing sanctuaries on Cambodian soil for the Viet Cong. On Christmas day 1965, shortly after my arrival in Vietnam, I volunteered to lead the first covert, independent incursion into Cambodia to neutralize the sanctuaries. My force was comprised of American and South Vietnamese Special Forces "A" Teams and 792 irregular fighters from the militant Hoa Hao Buddhist Sect.

On 10 June 1966, CIA field operative McKem flew into my camp in An Phu district, due west of Saigon and near the Cambodian border. McKem met with me and my counterpart, ARVN Major Phoi Van Le, and outlined a special mission to us: ambush and kill Sihanouk while laying suspicion at the feet of the North Vietnamese. I accepted the mission, but with the condition that the CIA persuade President Johnson to tell the American people about the sanctuaries, and officially ratify our cross-border pursuit of the enemy so that we could have available to us medical evacuation, artillery, and close air support. McKem knew, and I knew, that President Johnson himself tacitly allowed our enemy its sanctuaries, even against the wishes of South Vietnamese Premier Nguyen Cao Ky. McKem was well aware that I was unbending in this request of my Commander-in-Chief; I explained that we had already buried 200 of our Hoa Haos, slaughtered by enemy forces operating out of the sanctuaries.

Five days later, McKem returned to An-Phu with the message that my demand had been denied. In response I aborted the assassination mission and sent the CIA man packing. His

last words were, "You can't fight the system, Captain, you know you can't win."

An apocalyptic period followed. Premier Nguyen Cao Ky threatened our Vietnamese irregulars with courts-martial and over a three day period I was thrice ordered to bring my A Team out of An-Phu. But to have done so would have meant abandoning the people we were there to help. Furthermore, it could have been a ploy to get me out in the open on the river, ripe for ambush. I refused each order and my men also chose to stay with the Hoa Haos of An-Phu.

On 18 June, the directive went out from the South Vietnamese high command to attack our camp. American advisors with the ARVN regiment were told that I was a "renegade Green Beret Captain leading the Hoa Haos against the Saigon government."

Thus, I, nine other American Army Green Berets, and more than 500 South Vietnamese irregular fighters faced certain death or capture at the hands of a CIA-directed "friendly" regiment of 1,500 heavily armed men. Americans killing Americans, South Vietnamese killing South Vietnamese—all to prove the ultimate power of the Company?

Word of these developments was hurriedly conveyed by convoluted means to Major General Quang Van Dang who moved expeditiously to wrest control of the situation from Premier Ky. General Dang briefed his senior U.S. advisor Colonel William Desobry and both were soon in Desobry's chopper on the way to An-Phu. Mere minutes prior to battle engagement, the U.S. advised ARVN regiment was ordered back by General Dang to its home-base in the Delta area. A blood bath was avoided.

General Dang's personal knowledge of CIA activities in Vietnam adds credence to Agency culpability in political assassinations in general, and specifically in relation to South Vietnam's President Ngo Dinh Diem who was killed in a coup d'etat just three weeks before President Kennedy's death.

Former South Vietnamese Ambassador Bui Diem's book In the Jaws of History (1987, Houghton-Mifflin Co.) tells of how the CIA's Colonel Lucien Conein gave the "green light" for the coup. As a member of the Joint General Staff, Dang witnessed the CIA's clandestine operations specialist Conein's day-to-day involvement in tactical planning of the coup with General Duong Van (Big) Minh and his generals. President Diem and his brother were summarily executed, officially by order of Big Minh—with no loose ends, and no CIA ties to the assassination of the Head of State.

In 1989 the CIA's Thomas Polgar related to me that upon return to Agency headquarters in Langley, Virginia, after the fall of Saigon in 1975, he was instructed to turn in any and all personal and other papers relating to his service as Station Chief in Vietnam (Jan. 72 – Apr. 75) and that "there would be no after action report and no release of any information of any kind to anybody." Polgar added, "It was as if the CIA had been in South Vietnam merely to gather intelligence!" To me—an almost perfect cover up of a (foreign) president's assassination.

The CIA's one-time Angola Task Force Chief John Stockwell writes in "The Praetorian Guard" (1991, South End Press) about CIA Saigon Station Chief Ed Lansdale and "Three-fingered Lou" (Lucien) Conein's involvement with French Intelligence and the Sicilian Mafia in arms-for-drugs operations in the Vietnam/Laos mountains. The French-born Conein was awarded the Napoleon Eagle and the Corsican Cross; Conein boasted that these accolades provided access to the Corsican Mafia's highest councils. There is an interesting link here—Corsican hit men, contracted by La Cosa Nostra, have been implicated in the JFK assassination (see the documentary video "The Men Who Killed Kennedy," 1992 G&G Communications, Producer Nigel Turner).

When retired Air Force Colonel L. Fletcher Prouty, a man of unimpeachable integrity, speaks, I listen—as should the American public. In the early 1960s, Colonel Prouty was the liaison officer between the U.S. Air Force and the CIA in their cooperative U-2 spy plane operation. At the 1994 National Conference of the Coalition on Political Assassinations, Colonel Prouty stated that Ed Lansdale, whom Prouty once worked with on a day-to-day basis, was present in Dealey Plaza when President Kennedy was assassinated. Prouty was certain in his own mind that Lansdale controlled the three tramps' activities. A source of my own, who must remain anonymous, has told of the presence also of Lucien Conein in Dallas that same day.

If the CIA played a role in the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, and I believe that it did, the implications for our country are truly profound. Truth, Freedom, and Justice have been callously ground in the dirt. Even the very suspicion of CIA involvement in the assassination should be sufficient motivation for our political leaders to do what is necessary to release all official assassination records, and let the chips fall where they may. If Oswald, the "lone nut," did the dirty deed all by himself, what possible threat would release of files pose to national security?