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Mr. Bernard Fensterwald  
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Dear Bud:

As I promised you in our conversation last week, I'll try to pull together here all I know, suspect or have heard that might be helpful to you in your investigation of President Kennedy's assassination.

First, I'll deal with the Hugh McDonald business. I must emphasize to you that this is not my material, I have no claim to it nor can I vouch for it, but I pass it along to you for whatever leads it may give, whatever use you may be able to make of it. To recap briefly, I at one time got into a deal, which ultimately fell through, with Abby Mann, the Hollywood producer. Abby was toying with the idea of a novel and a film built around the assassination and based on thorough background research, and he brought into the prospective deal Hugh McDonald, who had just retired as the chief detective in (I believe) the Los Angeles sheriff's office. Anyhow, according to Abby, McDonald was very highly rated in the profession; everybody who knew him said he was one of the top sleuths in the country; and McDonald wanted like hell to find out who was behind the plot to kill Kennedy.

On his own, in anticipation of the book-film deal that didn't come through, he went down to Dallas and talked to some of his confreres in the Dallas police department. After he came back, while the deal was still brewing, I talked to him once by telephone from Abby's office. What follows is a digest of what he told me.

This is a quote from my notes. McDonald began by saying: "The main thing I found out is a definite connection and link between the top administration in the White House and Oswald and Ruby." The link, he said, was George S. DeMohrenschildt, a character who has the reek of CIA all about him. DeM. was Oswald's closest friend in Dallas; the one man with whom Oswald ever went places; the one who introduced the Oswalds to the Paynes. DeM., according to McDonald, had a close personal contact with LBJ, also with Ruby.

The Dallas cops, McDonald said, felt that Ruby was telling the truth when he hinted to Earl Warren that, if he could get him out of Dallas, he could reveal a lot. They thought there was a strong possibility that DeM. was the man who set Ruby off in the slaying of Oswald. DeM., said McDonald, is "an odd-ball, born in the Ukraine, a soldier of fortune type; he was in Guatemala at the time of the Bay of Pigs and recently returned from Haiti, where he was just at the time of recent troubles there. He has a CIA stink all about him." (Incidentally, after this, I spent a couple of days reading DeM. testimony, and this all agrees with it and the picture you get from it.)

"The first discussion I had with some friends on the Dallas force was about this guy," McDonald said. "He moves around too freely. He received a \$50,000 grant from Washington right after the assassination to finance a big land-holding in Haiti. He is capable of having engineered everything. Oswald was really hooked up to him.

"DeM. was in Haiti when the assassination took place. The first thing he said was,

"I wonder if Oswald did it." He tells this story on himself now, perhaps to cover up the slip he made. But it is significant that this was his first reaction."

McDonald didn't know details about the \$50,000 grant for the Haitian enterprise or what it represented, but he KNEW, he said, that DeM. got it---and, of course, as the records show, he was right.

"I talked to another officer about the actual assassination," McDonald told me. "He said the first shot definitely came from the Texas School Book depository---and it missed. It struck the curb directly in front of him and threw dust all over him. He was one of the cops riding a motorcycle to the left of the limousine. He thought at first that a grenade had exploded, it went off so close to him, and he tried to tell this to the commission---but they didn't want it. He was never questioned.

"Another officer's statement was reduced to writing, and he was asked to sign it. He wouldn't because his testimony had been changed. He was told that this was the way they wanted it, but he wouldn't approve the false version and never did sign it."

Back to DeM. "DeM. left Dallas five years ago, broke, couldn't pay his rent, left bills unpaid all over the place. Now he seems to be rolling in it. How did he do this in five years?"

SW

McDonald put heavy emphasis on another point. Oswald, as the investigation showed, went to Mexico in September to try to get visas from the Cuban consulate there. The CIA had a plant set up, photographing everyone who went in and out of the Cuban consulate. They got a picture of Oswald going in ~~or~~ or coming out. "But," said McDonald, "the startling thing about this is that the man in the picture WASN'T Oswald. They shut up on this one fast. This leaves the question who was this man. Oswald wasn't that unusual in appearance; a dozen guys might look like him. But the point is the picture shows the wrong man; it had to be somebody beside Oswald." (This, I believe agrees with what you told me you had from Helms.)

McDonald said: "There was no real investigation. The only intent from the first was to prove Oswald was guilty."

BJ

Then he said this: A Dallas detective told him he had seen personal letters that passed between LBJ and DeM. There was nothing vital in them, but they were couched in the friendliest terms, indicating a close association between the two men. Then McDonald said: "I have a good indication that DeM. had two talks with LBJ; he saw LBJ twice in May or June, 1963. At this time, he had been turned down twice by the federal government on the loan he was trying to get for the Haiti enterprise. LBJ turned him down, too, at least to the extent of telling him there was nothing he could do for him because he was only the Vice President, but if he were President, of course, things would be different. The two letters that passed between LBJ and DeM. make reference to these two talks. And they discuss the necessity of bringing Kennedy to Dallas, in which case, DeM. said, maybe something could be arranged." I asked McDonald if he could get photostats of these letters; he said he thought he could---but of course we had to drop it there, and I don't know whether he ever did anything further on the matter.

SW

McDonald said there were many curious facets about Oswald's September 26 trip to Mexico. He believes that Oswald met someone there, maybe his double, but anyhow someone connected with the whole deal because, he said, T.O reservations were made for Oswald's return trip to the U.S. There was some difficulty with the real Oswald at the border. McDonald ~~thought~~ thought that this might have been because "the other Oswald" had already passed through. Anyhow, he says, it is definite that Oswald was taken off the bus and questioned, then released to continue his journey.

"This is MOST IMPORTANT," McDonald said. "The Dallas cops feel that Oswald probably did fire at General Walker. But they doubt this was a serious assassination attempt. They think that Oswald may have been sold on the idea of firing at Walker, simply as a warning, and that he may have been sold exactly the same idea on November 22."

McDonald believed that Oswald might have fired the first ~~shot~~ warning shot that missed and that on this signal, someone else fired from a lower level, perhaps from the third floor of a building behind the School Book Depository, where, as you recall, a mysterious arrest was made immediately after the shooting. Incidentally, this would agree with the point I've tried to make time and again that the angle of the first shot through the President's back and neck was a straight line, or even a slightly rising angle, NOT a downward angle of some 18 degrees as it would have to be from Oswald's window. I assume you have my own stuff on this.

McDonald continued by saying that this reconstruction of the case explained Oswald's reaction after the shooting in the only way that made sense to him. "He acted like a man in a panic," McDonald said. "His actions were completely irrational. He acted like a person in a complete panic."

McDonald said that the Warren Report on Oswald's flight to his rooming house, the time it took, etc., was solid. He said he had doubted this himself, but he had traveled the route to test it and decided that, even with traffic conditions what they were in Dallas that day, the time ~~element~~ element was solid; Oswald would have had time to do all it is said he did.

Dallas detectives told McDonald that throughout his questioning Oswald just kept insisting that he never shot the President. This was all that they could get out of him, just this steady insistence he didn't do it.

McDonald returned to the DeM. theme. He emphasized that a lot of evidence showed Oswald and DeM. were very close; "DeM. was the very kind of person Oswald would have liked to be," he said. He thinks DeM. may have sold Oswald on the idea that he could become a partner with him in the Haitian scheme. DeM., McDonald said, was terribly upset, he learned, when DeM. discovered that Oswald had run home and told Marina all about the attempt to assassinate Walker.

This about winds up what I dragged out of McDonald except for a couple of things. Had our deal gone through, the first thing he wanted to do was to take off for Helsinki. Just why he felt this was so terribly important, he didn't tell either Abby or me, and we couldn't understand it, except that I deduced McDonald thought for some reason that he might be able to discover in Helsinki just how Oswald got into the Soviet Union, that there was some thread there he thought would be revealing. McDonald also said that a key to the whole thing was Marina---"and the only way to get the truth out of that bitch would be to get in bed with her." And he also said he'd like to get DeM. alone on a picnic, or something, and hold his head under water until the SOB told the truth.

Now let me deal with a few other matters.

I emphasized to you the other night that my suspicious nose tells me Howard Brennan might be a key to this whole thing. I've mentioned this to others, and if you have my Nation articles on the assassination, you'll see that I put a pretty strong ~~spotlight~~ spotlight on Mr. Brennan. The point is this: if the assassination was a plot (as I think almost everyone except CBS, The New York Times, J. Edgar Hoover, LBJ and other leading lights of the Establishment now agrees it was), then there was one vital ingredient, one essential: attention had to be focused---and focused damn fast--- on Oswald. As you know, the motorcycle cops and others in the motorcade ran up the

-4-

grassy knoll and started hunting behind that fence and in the parking lot, a most ticklish spot, and they were called off quickly because attention had been focused on the depository. According to all the evidence, the one man who did most to focus attention there was Brennan, the steelworker who, from his testimony, obviously holds right-wing beliefs about the menace of the domestic Communist conspiracy. Brennan was sitting on the little concrete mall in Dealey Plaza and immediately after the assassination he ran up to a cop and gave a very close description of the man he'd seen in the window. Brennan had Oswald's height right to the inch and was close enough about his general appearance to give the radio alarm that went out a very accurate cast.

Now the point is this: either Brennan could actually see all he says he saw, or he couldn't see one damn thing. The evidence, I think, is quite conclusive that he couldn't see at all what he says he saw, and I'm told that, in the Warren investigation, they took him back to the very spot, had him look up at the window---and you just couldn't see anything more than a vague shadow behind it. (It was, therefore, impossible for Brennan to have given legitimately the precise description of Oswald that he did, and this leaves only the other alternative, as I see it, that he was planted there for a purpose, that he was one of the actors who played a key role in the plot---the role of fingering quickly the right guy, the guy who was meant to be caught. As I told you, Sylvia Meagher mentioned to me once, when we discussed this on the phone, that she had a vague recollection of having heard somewhere (and she ~~couldn't~~ couldn't recall just where at the time) that Brennan had moved from Dallas and suddenly come into some money. If so, it would be damned interesting.

I could go on, Bud, but this, I think, is enough for now. For your information, I am also enclosing the carbons of two letters I wrote Carey McWilliams, editor of The Nation, on December 3 and December 14, 1963. Reading them over, though some of the information we were given at that time turned out to be inaccurate, I think I can pat myself on the shoulder as having been a pretty damned perceptive guy. And I think some of the reasoning in these memos, some of the points they stressed, might still be of some interest and help to you now. Of course, it all went to waste at the time; neither Carey nor any other editor or publisher would listen---nobody wanted to believe the reality of our age which, I think, has become more obvious with the assassinations of Dr. Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy. Anyhow, after you've finished with these memos, would you see that I get them back? They are the only copies I have, and I just might have some use for them some day.

Best of luck on the project.

Yours,

*J. Reed*