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The headlines are very familiar: "Assassination Probe Witness Found Dead," "Key Witness In Trial of Former Spy Is Found Dead," "Ex-intelligence Analyst Accused of Spying Found Dead." It was Penn Jones, Jr. who was one of the first researchers to link what appeared to be the random deaths of JFK assassination witnesses into a coherent, and sinister, pattern. In the dozen or so TV and radio shows in which I participated around the time of the twentieth anniversary of the assassination of President Kennedy, the most frequently asked questions were: first, "Who did it?" and second, "What about the mysterious-deaths theory?"

As Attorney David Belin, former Warren Commission counsel and staunch defender of non-conspiracy theories, is fond of pointing out: "People die, people do get into accidents, die naturally." But the pattern of mysterious deaths goes far beyond the 17 material witnesses who died within three years of the JFK assassination--five by "natural" causes; 12 by accident, suicide, or murder--and beyond the continuing demise of JFK witnesses and investigators extending beyond the first three years.

Consider, for example, the fate of potential witnesses for the House Assassination Committee's reinvestigation of the JFK assassination. In 1977 alone, five key witnesses died. All had important knowledge concerning one or more of the following interrelated areas: CIA links to Oswald, possible CIA complicity in the JFK assassination, CIA-anti-Castro plots and operations against Castro. All met their demise before the House Committee could question them about the above topics.

The ill-fated class of '77 included:

--George de Mohrenschildt, who had extensive ties to both CIA and Army Intelligence and who had worked for the Agency For International Development, a notorious CIA front. De Mohrenschildt was Oswald's friend and patron in Dallas and, many think, "babysat" Oswald for American intelligence. The House Assassinations Committee tracked de Mohrenschildt down in Florida and called to arrange an interview. Just hours after this call, he was found shot to death through the mouth with a 20-gauge shotgun. It was ruled a suicide [See Marian Kester's "Better Red Than Ed: Reflections on "Who is Edward Jay Epstein?" in this issue].

--William Sullivan was the assistant FBI director who, under Hoover, oversaw much of the Bureau's investigation of the JFK assassination, conducted for the Warren Commission. In 1975 Sullivan had told another Congressional committee that, regarding a possible relationship between Oswald and the CIA: "No...I think there may be something on that, but you asked me if I had seen anything. I don't recall having seen anything like that, but I think there is something on the point..It rings a bell in my head." In July of 1977, the 65-year-old Sullivan was shot to death in the woods near his Sugar Hill, New Hampshire home. In what was ruled a hunting accident, Sullivan was walking through the woods at daybreak to meet two hunting companions when he was mistaken for a deer by a young hunter who shot him, killing him instantly.

--Carlos Prio, the millionaire former President of Cuba who was heavily involved in CIA-sponsored anti-Castro activities and who had been linked in testimony to Jack Ruby, allegedly committed suicide one week after George de Mohrenschildt. Prio was found slumped in a chair outside the garage of his home in Miami. There was a pistol beside him.

--Charles Nicoletti, who reportedly had been involved in CIA assassination conspiracies against Castro, was found shot dead in a burned-out car in Chicago. This occurred the day after the House Assassinations Committee began efforts to find Nicoletti in order to set up an interview.

--William Pawley, a wealthy adventurer and friend of CIA Director and Warren Commission member Alan Dulles, had once owned an airline and a bus line in Cuba before the Castro takeover. Pawley was active in generating political and financial support for anti-Castro activities and reportedly had also been involved with the CIA-sponsored overthrow of the leftist government in Guatemala in 1954. Like de Mohrenschildt and Prio, Pawley was ruled by authorities to have shot himself. There were other murders, attempted murders, suicides, and accidents which befell persons possessing the same kind of knowledge as the class of '77. These occurred both before and after 1977. But the pattern of 1977 is the most striking.

Intelligence-related mysterious deaths also appear in smaller cluster. In 1982-83 ex-CIA agents Edwin P. Wilson and Frank E. Terpil were charged with illegally aiding Libyan terrorists by providing arms and expertise [See "The Secret World of Frank Terpil" in this issue]. Two potential witnesses against Wilson and Terpil died, as did another man who was indicted for selling secrets to Wilson. Rafael Villaverde, an anti-Castro Cuban who allegedly had met with Wilson in Geneva to discuss a purported assassination plot, was killed when his boat exploded in the Bahamas. Bahamian authorities ruled that there was no foul play. Former CIA man Kevin Mulcahy, a key witness who had blown the whistle on Wilson and Terpil and had provided the information which started the federal investigation, was found dead outside his Virginia motel under bizarre circumstances which will be discussed later. Waldo F. Dubberstein, an ex-intelligence analyst indicted for selling secrets to the Libyans through Wilson, allegedly shot himself to death.

Because so many of the mysterious deaths relate to the CIA's turf, it is instructive to examine the state-of-the-art regarding the technology of murder. The agency has gone to considerable effort to discredit the mysterious death theory. One 1967 memo from CIA headquarters to station chiefs provides detailed instructions as to how to refute

JFK-assassination conspiracy allegations aimed at the agency. Regarding mysterious deaths, it counsels:

Such vague accusations as that "more than ten people have died mysteriously" can always be explained in some more rational way: e.g., the individuals concerned have for the most part died of natural causes; the Commission [Warren Commission] staff questioned 418 witnesses (the FBI interviewed far more people, conducting 25,000 interviews and reinterviews), and in such a large group, a certain number of deaths are to be expected. (When Penn Jones, one of the originators of the "ten mysterious deaths" line, appeared on television, it emerged that two of the deaths on his list were from heart attacks, one from cancer [Jack Ruby], one was from a head-on collision on a bridge, and one occurred when a driver drifted into a bridge abutment.)

Yet, since the 1950's, the CIA had been researching and developing a wide range of termination techniques, many of which were designed to avoid detection. There were pills containing liquid botulinum toxins, which, when tested on monkeys, could not be detected in post-mortem examination. Testifying before the Church Committee in 1975, CIA Technical Services Division Engineer Charles Senseney, good-naturedly known among some of his colleagues as "Mr. Death", revealed some of the agency's exotic TSEP technology ["termination with extreme prejudice" - intelligence jargon]. There was a "nondiscernible microbiodiocularator" (poison dart) which could penetrate clothes and skin without the victim feeling it. The dart itself would dissolve after injecting a lethal poison which would leave no trace. The agency developed a "noise-free disseminator" with which to fire the dart--accurate up to 250 feet and completely silent. Although the existence of a P.E.P. pill (pulmonary-embolism-causing pill) has been widely acknowledged within clandestine culture for some time, the CIA

has never admitted to having developed one.

CIA scientists painstakingly extracted poison from Alaskan butter clams. The stockpile of toxin was stored in a building near the State Department in Washington, D.C. There was enough to kill 14,000 people if administered orally; 50,000 if dart launchers were used. For demises in Asia and Africa, the agency had a good supply of cobra venom on hand.

In the early 1960's the CIA also created its "Health Alteration Committee" within its Executive Action Unit (set up to assassinate foreign leaders). The Committee had at its disposal the vast array of "debilitating" or "incapacitating" substances developed in CIA labs--fevers, smallpox, vomit-inducing agents.

In the 1950's the agency pursued the development of the "Manchurian Candidate," the programmed behavioral-research czar, conducted a little experiment for his colleagues. Allen hypnotized one of his secretaries and put her into a deep trance, instructing her to remain asleep. He then hypnotized a second secretary and told her that if she could not wake the first secretary, her rage would be so great that she would not hesitate to kill. Allen left a pistol near his programmed assassin (the second secretary). Though she had earlier expressed a fear of firearms, the second secretary was unable to wake her colleague and pointed the gun at her and pulled the trigger. Of course, Allen had the good taste not to load the gun. When he brought the women out of their trances, neither of them remembered anything.

There is a clandestine-culture shibboleth: "Give us the coroner and we'll control the city." Even better than controlling the coroner himself is to control the best evidence on which he will reach his conclusion as to the cause of death. One declassified CIA document, a letter from a consultant (whose name is deleted) to a CIA officer described only as "Bill", reveals that Bill had asked the consultant's advice on a particular "problem." Says the consultant:

You will recall that I mentioned that the local circumstances under which a given means might be used might suggest the technique to be used in that case. I think that gross divisions in presenting this subject might be:

- (1) bodies left with no hope of the cause of death being determined by the most complete autopsy and chemical examinations
- (2) bodies left in such circumstances as to simulate accidental death
- (3) bodies left in such circumstances as to simulate suicidal death
- (4) bodies left with residues that simulate those caused by natural diseases.

As the letter goes on to describe, not all techniques for achieving the above results are at a Bondian level of technological sophistication.

There are two other techniques which I believe should be mentioned since they require no special equipment besides a strong arm and the will to do such a job. These would be either to smother the victim with a pillow or to strangle him with a wide piece of cloth such as a bath towel. In such cases, there is no specific anatomic change to indicate the cause of death ...

The above memo destroys the credibility of the CIA's contention that mysterious deaths can be explained away as accidents or as naturally caused. Take the case of Jack Ruby. On March 19, 1965, Ruby remarked to CBS-TV that he wished to be removed from Dallas and placed under federal jurisdiction. He used the words "complete conspiracy" in reference to the JFK assassination, stating: "If you knew the facts, you'd be amazed." On December 7, 1966 a Texas court granted his appeal for a new trial to be conducted outside of Dallas (in Wichita Falls). Only three days later, Ruby was diagnosed as having lung cancer after being taken to the hospital for what was thought to be pneumonia.

Twenty-eight days after the diagnosis, Jack Ruby died, the victim of a particularly virulent form of lung cancer. But was it natural?

During the 1950's the CIA developed cancer-causing drugs for use in political assassination--drugs that would produce what appeared to be "natural" death. A 1952 agency memo reports on the cancer-inducing uses of beryllium: "This is certainly the most toxic inorganic element and it produces a peculiar fibrotic tumor at the site of local application. The amount necessary to produce these tumors is a few micrograms." The same memo talks of the possibility of developing techniques for getting beryllium into the victim's lungs by having it be inhaled in small doses.

Another "naturally caused" death is that of Kevin Mulcahy, the ex-CIA man who broke the Company's code, its oath of silence, by turning in Wilson and Terpil for allegedly selling American military hardware and technology to Libya. Mulcahy had reportedly become obsessed with the case--pushing federal prosecutors to take action, prodding the press, conducting a one-man investigation. The case was due to come to trial and Mulcahy was to be a key witness for the government. Rearing for his life, he had gone underground for extended periods--changing addresses, telephone numbers and even identities.

On October 26, 1982 Mulcahy's body was found outside a rural motel cabin in Bowman's Crossing, Virginia (90 miles from Washington). Mulcahy, an allegedly heavy drinker, had been reported by another motel resident as drinking heavily shortly before his death. Authorities at the scene speculated that Mulcahy had tried unsuccessfully to get into his cabin but was locked out and eventually succumbed to exposure (the overnight temperature dropped to the low 40's). The storm door to his cabin was open but the main door was locked and his keys were apparently inside. His body was discovered by another motel guest at 8:05 A.M. Mulcahy was found in a sitting position with his back to the door. He was wearing a wool suit. His pants were down around his ankles.

An autopsy was performed. Fairfax County, Virginia medical examiner Dr. James C. Beyer concluded: "The manner of death [is] determined to be natural." The cause: bronchial pneumonia complicated by emphysema and liver problems. Toxicology tests were all negative. Federal investigators found no evidence of violence.

The precise interface of Mulcahy's numerous maladies remains baffling to the medical layperson, whether or not it was really understood by the authorities. But the implication of the finding is clear: Mulcahy was too drunk to pull his pants up, break into his cabin, or seek help from other guests; so he remained outside all night, where the chilly temperature exacerbated his pneumonia (or caused it?) and, because of complications created by emphysema and liver problems, he died from it. Maybe. But in the letter to CIA officer Bill, the previously quoted consultant had some ideas about putting victims literally on ice as well as figuratively.

If an individual could be put into a relatively tightly sealed small room with a block of Co2 ice, it is highly probable that his death would result and that there would be no chance of the circumstances being detected...If it were possible to subject the individual to a cold environment, he would freeze to death when his body temperature reached about 70 degrees...

Then there are the "suicide" cases. "Self-inflicted" gunshot wounds seem to predominate among assassination-related, CIA-related cases--ex-CIA agent Gary Underhill, who claimed to know who was responsible for killing JFK; Dallas Deputy Sheriff Roger Craig, who saw a man who looked like Oswald fleeing the Texas School Book Depository after the real Oswald had left the scene; George de Mohrenschildt, William Pawley, Carlos Prio (all of the class of '77); and Waldo Dubberstein, indicted in the Wilson-Libyan case. The shotgun is the weapon used most frequently in these cases. It is supposedly the weapon of choice for a suicide because the massive damage it

inflicts insures that death will result, rather than painful survival. But the shotgun is also the weapon of choice for sophisticated simulations of suicide: it leaves a less-precise wound track, thus reducing the possibility that the angle would argue against suicide, and it can obliterate a local confusion inflicted in the same area where the gunshot wound is to be inflicted.

CIA experimented extensively with shotguns in Vietnam. Some of its Black Squads used silent shotguns to hunt Vietcong. A murder manual read by a soldier of fortune types discusses the simulation of suicides in shotgun deaths:

A large rubber mallet would also pack sufficient wallop but cause little surface damage to the head and neck. [The victim could be knocked unconscious, then shot].

If the subject cannot be shot at point blank range and suicide is to be indicated, fire a blank cartridge at the entrance wound from less than twenty inches away. Such a shot will cause powder burns and residue consistent with a close range wound.

By filling a shotgun barrel with water and firing same by means of a blank cartridge at the subject's head, the hydrolic effect will cause explosive decapitation. There are no pellets to be traced and the sound of the discharge is effectively silenced. Since this technique has been used for suicides in the past, it would tend to indicate as much to those concerned.

Coroners and constables, even competent ones, do not automatically view intelligence-related deaths through a Bondian lens. Armed with toxicology tests which are no match for the exotic, concealed toxins developed by intelligence laboratories, they bumble about looking for signs of a struggle, evidence of a break-and-enter, a suicide weapon in the left hand of a right-handed victim, garrowing marks on the neck of someone who supposedly shot himself to death. Finding no such clues--clues which professionals at TWEP are unlikely to leave--local

authorities will rule suicide. Forensic science is far behind high tech TWEP in terms of technological sophistication.

Moreover, even in the face of conflicting data as to the cause of death and even when there is cause for suspicion, authorities will often scratch their heads for only a brief moment, shrug, then rule death by suicide or natural causes. The death of David Ferrie is a case in point. Ferrie was a CIA contract agent and aide to New Orleans crime boss Carlos Marcello. He was also an associate of Lee Harvey Oswald and was seen with Oswald by numerous and credible witnesses only two months before the JFK assassination. In 1967 Ferrie was one of the main targets of New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison's assassination probe. Garrison was about to have Ferrie brought into court when Ferrie's body was found in his apartment. The cause of death was deduced to to be "natural"--a massive brain hemorrhage.

The same day that Ferrie died, one of his associates, Eladio Del Valle, a prominent anti-Castro exile, was found dead in Miami. Del Valle had been shot at point-blank range and his skull was split open. Was somebody terminating certain members of one of the CIA's anti-Castro networks before Garrison could question them? If so, whoever eliminated Ferrie couldn't seem to decide whether the indications should be suicide or natural causes.

Near Ferrie's body were not one but two notes indicating suicide (presumably, the authorities deduced that Ferrie left them because he was about to use the power of negative thinking to induce his naturally caused brain hemorrhage). Both the notes were typed and so were the signatures. Empty and half-empty medicine bottles were strewn around the apartment, but all toxicology tests were negative.

In ruling suicide, authorities are much more comfortable if they can unearth evidence that the deceased was plagued by "depression." The evidence is almost always there, but not necessarily because the depression caused the suicide. Most of these cases involve people with intelligence connections

who possess dangerous knowledge and who are about to be questioned by a court or an investigative body. Such persons would be expected to become morose, edgy, and fearful because they know what a dangerous and vulnerable position they are in, and they also know the ruthlessness and sophistication of the people who might want to silence them. Maybe this alone is a motivation for suicide, but there is a striking pattern in which the "suicide" often occurs just before the individual is to speak on-the-record to authorities. Is it because this is the most painful moment for the individual, or because it is the point at which the individual must be silenced by those whom his knowledge threatens?

George de Mohrenschildt, whom many believe was Oswald's intelligence baby-sitter, apparently did have psychological problems. But he was not hesitant to talk about the JFK case and had granted an interview to an independent researcher on the same morning on which he got a call from the House Assassinations Committee, setting up his first interview. He received the call with apparent tranquility. After all, it could hardly have come as a surprise to him that he would be called before the Committee. But that afternoon he allegedly shot himself with a shotgun.

The case of Waldo Dubberstein is similar. The former Defense Department intelligence analyst was indicted by a federal grand jury for selling military secrets to Libya through ex-CIA agent Edwin Wilson. As a result of the indictment, Dubberstein faced the possibility of fines (\$80,000) and prison (57 years). He was 75 years old and had a bad heart. Dubberstein was found in a sitting position in the basement storage area of his Arlington, Virginia apartment. He had been shot in the head. A shotgun and several shells were nearby. "It appears to be a suicide," said police officer Randall Bertsch--no sign of a struggle or of foul play. On the day of his death, Dubberstein was scheduled to appear before the grand jury that had indicted him, to answer questions--to speak on the record. The implied motive for the "suicide"

was to avoid this painful experience and/or to avoid spending his last years in jail. But his poor health might have gained him a postponement of a trial or of prison. Even without a postponement, his trial and appeals could easily have taken several years, during which he would remain free. But the man who only four years earlier had allegedly traveled under cover to Tripoli, Libya on five occasions to sell secrets supposedly killed himself rather than face questions from a grand jury.

It is clear that any witnesses with knowledge relating to a legal proceeding or an official investigation dealing with an assassination case or with CIA operations should be treated by authorities as members of an endangered species, and should be given extraordinary protection as soon as they are identified as potential witnesses. In the meantime, for those people who have a special knowledge of Oswald's relationship to American intelligence, of renegade CIA networks, or of CIA anti-Castro operations, a survival manual (to be consulted whenever the next official probe is initiated) should read, in part:

A. Don't buy a shotgun. If you own one, make a conspicuous display of selling it.

B. Don't order room service or fast-food deliveries. Remember Fidel Castro bringing his own supply of live chickens when he visited New York? He knew what he was doing.

C. In addition to a bulletproof vest, wear two pairs of long thermal underwear--to ward off hypothermia.

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