

A BOOK FOR TODAY

What Was Lee Oswald's Motive?

By REED J. IRVINE

THE ASSASSINATION OF JOHN H. KENNEDY, THE REASONS WHY. By Albert H. Newman. Clarkson N. Potter, Inc. 621 pages. \$10.

Any reader of murder mysteries knows the importance of establishing a motive in determining the identity of the murderer. It has been recognized for some time that one of the serious weaknesses of the Warren Commission Report was its failure to show clearly why Lee Harvey Oswald wanted to kill John F. Kennedy.

Albert H. Newman, a veteran journalist, recognized that the failure of the Warren Commission to establish a convincing motive for Oswald's action was responsible for much of the suspicious reaction to the commission's conclusions.

Newman has written this book to show why Lee Harvey Oswald tried first to murder Gen. Edwin Walker, a passionate advocate of the far right in

political philosophy, and then murdered President Kennedy, who represented a very different segment of the political spectrum. In doing so, he has produced a brilliant piece of detective work, one that would do credit to a Perry Mason or Sherlock Holmes.

Like any great detective, Newman recognizes the importance of trying to understand exactly how the mind of the murderer functioned. This requires careful examination of all the factors that influenced his thought and action. Newman set out to obtain as accurate a picture of the way Oswald thought as he possibly could. He did this by sifting with great care the mass of material assembled by the Warren Commission and by adding to this analysis of the material that Oswald was reading and listening to with his short-wave radio.

Developing a very credible map of Oswald's mind, Newman deduces how his overt acts were triggered by what he read in the papers and by what he heard on the radio. Oswald's consuming interest in life was politics, or more specifically the politics of Marxism. While the Warren Commission suggested that he was motivated to kill the President by his maladjustment to his environment, his hatred for American society, his desire to be a great man and his commitment to communism, it failed to make a credible case for any of these factors as motives for murder.

Newman painstakingly unravels the mystery of Oswald's peculiar conduct from the time he returned from the Soviet Union in June 1962 until he was shot down by Jack Ruby on Nov. 24, 1963.

Newman clearly establishes the fact that Oswald, after his 32-month sojourn in Soviet Russia, became a devotee of the Trotskyite brand of communism. He was disillusioned with communism as he had seen it in Russia, but Marxism remained his religion. He tried to join the Trotskyite Socialist Workers Party, and he subscribed to its publication, *The Militant*. He came to share its ardent admiration of Fidel Castro.

Newman shows, quite persuasively, that Oswald's deci-

sion to murder Gen. Walker was triggered by Walker's strongly hawkish position on Cuba and his designation by the Communist press which Oswald read as America's leading "fascist."

Newman develops some interesting evidence that Oswald had several accomplices in his effort to kill Walker. For example, a snapshot that Oswald made of Walker's home in preparation for the murder attempt shows an automobile, and for some reason Oswald made a hole in the picture to obliterate the license tag. The inference is that Oswald was driven to the Walker residence by an accomplice, since he himself had no car and could not drive. Newman does not think these presumed accomplices were involved in the attack on President Kennedy, but he strongly criticizes the Warren Commission for not doing more to try to establish their existence and their identity.

The Warren Commission did not attach the same significance to Oswald's attack on Walker as does Newman. Newman shows that many of Oswald's seemingly inexplicable actions fit into a carefully conceived plan to murder Walker, flee to Cuba and be accorded a hero's welcome for having done away with this leading "fascist." Newman is convinced that Oswald continued to plot the murder of Walker even after his initial unsuccessful attempt. In fact, he believes that after killing the President, Oswald set out with his pistol to shoot Walker. By sheer chance police officer J.D. Tippit ended up being shot by Oswald instead.

But why the murder of John F. Kennedy? Newman shows that Kennedy too was a great enemy of Fidel Castro's. Shortly after Oswald returned to the U.S., the Cuban missile crisis broke out. The outcome was a defeat for Castro. Radio Havana was constantly heaping abuse on the United States and its President.

Newman points out that the Warren Commission was so unconcerned about the kind of ideas Oswald was ingesting that they did not even establish the fact that the radio he owned was capable of picking up the nightly broadcasts from Cuba. Oswald's radio did have a shortwave band, Newman discovered, and his habits suggested that he listened to Ha-

vana regularly. If he missed Castro's bitter diatribes against the U.S. and its leaders on the radio, he could frequently read them in full in *The Militant*.

There is a weakness in Newman's presentation in that it is not clear what led Oswald to abandon his long-range plan to kill Walker and escape to Cuba in favor of a plan to kill both Walker and Kennedy with almost no hope of escape.

I think Newman did not give adequate attention to the contents of *The Militant*, Oswald's favorite reading matter.

He should have noted that this publication was not only publishing Castro's inflammatory denunciations of Kennedy, but it was also caricaturing

Kennedy as "a determined partner" of Mississippi Sen. James Eastland and as one who was "clinging" to the "Dixiecrats."

Newman suggests that the only thing Oswald had against Kennedy was his Cuba policy, but *The Militant*, which strongly influenced Oswald's thinking, played on many keys to inspire hatred of the President. And strangely, Newman, for all his attention to detail, overlooked a very significant passage from a Castro speech printed in a copy of the *Militant* that was found among Oswald's possessions. Castro said: "With the rifle and the work tool, the work tool and the rifle, with these both we

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must bring about our victory."

Newman points out that Oswald once told a friend that in reading the Communist papers you could tell what they wanted you to do by reading between the lines. Here was his idol, Castro, denouncing John F. Kennedy and in the same speech suggesting the use of the rifle to achieve victory. There was surely a message there for expert rifleman Lee Harvey Oswald. At least, that was the way he took it.

Even if one does not accept all of Newman's deductions and theories, his book makes highly interesting reading. It

is a valuable contribution not only for the light it sheds on the slaying of John F. Ken-

nedy, but for its demonstration of the impact that ideas have on human conduct.