

*Copy to = H. WELLSBERG*

# Media Watch: Graff & Posner Spin the Final Report

By Jim DiEugenio

Anyone who thinks that, 35 years after the fact, the John Kennedy murder is not a live issue need only look at the media reception given the issuance of the Assassination Records Review Board's Final Report. On the weekend of the 35th anniversary, Dan Rather hosted a five-minute segment on that final work product which was featured on the CBS Nightly News. That segment featured Board Chairman John Tunheim and fellow Board member Henry Graff. The rather unobtrusive message behind the segment was that there was no mystery left. Our government had now released everything it had and the result did not seriously change the Warren Commission verdict about the culpability of Lee Harvey Oswald. Rather and Graff tried to insinuate that the only records that the Board could not secure were those in Moscow and Minsk which are still held by the governments of Russia and Belaruss. Therefore, if there were any remaining secrets about Oswald and the assassination, that is where they probably are.

Graff's conspicuous presence on this program, and his rather vocal presence at the Review Board's final press conference upon the occasion of the release of its Final Report is telling. As those who have followed the Board's progress from its inception know, Graff was almost nowhere to be seen at any of the Board's public meetings around the nation during its four year tenure. In fact, his absence was so complete that rumors began to circulate about his health. At one point, I even wrote to then ARRB Director David Marwell about the matter. Marwell assured me that Graff's health was fine.

Graff emerged late in the game to put as much spin as possible on the Board's Final Report. At the previously mentioned press conference televised by C-SPAN, Graff strongly stated that their mission was not to aid or abet any kind of "conspiracy theories." That quote was prominently featured in many of the news stories written about that press conference. Probe sources in Washington and our sources inside the Board tell us that it was almost certainly Graff who was behind the Rather report and was instrumental in placing the Russian KGB angle on it. Our sources also inform us that Graff was one of the two Board members who, from the beginning, was pushing for a non-neutral report, i.e. one which

stated that they could find no evidence to challenge the conclusions of the Warren Commission.

As we have noted previously, this fits in with Henry Graff's background as a former Army intelligence officer. And not just a desk officer. Graff was responsible for White House briefings on the famous MAGIC intercepts. MAGIC was the operational name for the division assigned the task of breaking the Japanese secret code, which was eventually accomplished. Graff was also a member of the Air Force Historical Committee from 1972-80. Graff was also an adviser to President Johnson on the subject of the Vietnam War and he wrote a book on Johnson in 1977. He also worked for Time-Life as a historical consultant in their book division. Finally, Graff was a member of the Council on Foreign Relations, that Rockefeller inspired group that is so instrumental in serving as a revolving door between the private sector and the government and advising the State Department and the CIA on policy decisions. (All of the above information was collected in Senate files and published in *Probe* Vol. 1 No. 7.)

Both Graff and fellow Board member Kermit Hall have been most vocal in pushing the public line that the main (only?) reason that millions of pages of documents have been sealed on the JFK case is the powerful grip of the Cold War. In other words, there really was nothing pertinent to the assassination that the government was concealing. It was all a matter of not revealing sources, methodology, and information to our enemies. The intelligence agencies had grown used to this mindset and it hung over into the nineties. Graff, Hall, and the Board have not yet said in public that intelligence agencies have been granted much too much power in classifying information. That Congress has not only let them get away with this, but certain members have actually been active in aiding and abetting this process. So if one carefully measures their rhetoric, Graff and his fellow former Army intelligence colleague, Hall, reflect one side of the debate inside the intelligence community over this particular subject. There are hardliners there who want to hold onto their power to classify documents as much as possible on any grounds. Then there are pragmatists like Hall and Graff who are for

declassification, not because they are genuinely interested in studying and writing about the new records. No, not at all. They want to take away the critics' argument that the reason for all the secrecy is that there are important things that would have affected any reasonable person's view of the assassination in 1963. Graff and Hall know enough to trust their friends in the media to help spin the deceit that there is nothing new anyway, so we can all go back to sleep. In fact, if our sources are correct, Graff actually helped fulfill this objective with the always so cooperative Rather. (I wonder if Rather told Graff what he told former House Select Committee counsel Bob Tanenbaum in 1993: "We really blew it on the Kennedy assassination.")

There is another aspect of Graff's appointment that should not go unmentioned in light of his late-in-the-game actions. Graff was the only member of the Board who was not selected from the lists proffered to President Clinton by the groups of historians, lawyers, and archivists back in late 1993. That is, he was a discretionary appointment, one of Clinton's own. Further, the actual enabling legislation only recommended that Clinton choose his panel of five citizens from the lists. Clinton could have chosen five people who did not appear on any of the lists. The fact that in the one instance he did so he came up with Graff either tells us something about Clinton or reveals that someone was carefully filling his ear with an agenda to pack the Board with the far off end result in mind.

It's not like Graff and Hall were hiding something. As our readers know, we pointed out that Graff was less than candid about his predisposition on the Kennedy case in his answers to the Senate Oversight Committee (*Probe* Vol. 2 No. 3). When asked to relate any oral or written public statements he had made on the JFK murder, Graff left out a long quote in his book *The Modern Researcher*. In that long reference, Graff strongly implied that he endorsed the views of John Sparrow who had made some disparaging remarks about the Warren Commission critics in his 1968 book *After the Assassination*. When we pointed this out to him, Graff tried to state that the quote did not deal directly with the Kennedy case but to the general problem of evaluating his-

*continued on page 5*

## Media Watch

continued from page 3

torical evidence. We find it interesting that in illustrating the problems of evaluating evidence, Graff would apparently approve of an author was clearly going after the early critics and he would then choose not to reveal that to the body that was voting on whether to consent to his appointment to the Board. One of the first criterions for his approval was whether or not he was neutral on the assassination.

As for Hall, it now seems the proper time to relate an anecdote about his early encounter with ace Oswald researcher John Armstrong. When Hall was an administrator at the University of Tulsa, John Armstrong, also an Oklahoma resident, went down to visit him in order to advise him on important documents related to Oswald. This was right before Hall made his infamous comments in the *Tulsa World* praising Gerald Posner's *Case Closed* (*Probe* Vol. 1 No. 7). Armstrong informed Hall about the witness reports that put Oswald in North Dakota in the early fifties, a place where the Warren Commission said he never was. Hall replied that he was already aware of the little known North Dakota sighting. Sensing that Hall was dissembling in order to suggest he knew much more about the case than he actually did, Armstrong decided to test Hall's real knowledge of the case. Armstrong replied that he then must also have heard of the reports of Oswald sightings in Utah too. Lawyer-historian Hall fell for it. He said he had heard of those non-existent reports. This is the man who writes long articles in law journals defending the efficacy of the Warren Commission and its analysis of Oswald.

Henry Graff had some predictable allies in his effort to control the reception of the Board's Final Report. As we explain elsewhere in this issue, William F. Buckley has been a longtime professional colleague of Howard Hunt. In the 10/14/98 issue of *Conservative Chronicle*, Buckley published a short essay on the impeachment proceedings presided over by Henry Hyde. About halfway through the piece, Buckley drops in the following:

The confusing direction of the current investigation lies in its endorsement of the idea that there is ambiguity sitting around of critical nature. The same day Mr. Hyde's concessions were publicized, a committee of scholars announced that they were closing their six-year investigation of the murder of John F. Kennedy. Their conclusion is that Lee Harvey Oswald probably did it and did it alone. That finding is as old as the Warren Commission's finding, filed in September 1964.

That paragraph is four sentences long. It

contains four deceptions. First, the Review Board has not been around for six years. They were sworn in in 1994. Second, their function was not to investigate the murder of President Kennedy. It was to release from government vaults as many documents as possible pertaining to the assassination. Third, thanks to Judge Tunheim, the report wisely avoids making any judgment about who was responsible for the crime. Fourth, ambiguity has abounded in this case precisely because there has been such a dichotomy between what the official pronouncements have been and what the state of the evidence shows. Thanks to the Board, that split is even wider. (I won't even comment on the ridiculousness of Buckley's implicit comparison of Clinton's alleged perjury about an affair with the crimes of murder and treason.)

**The drift of Posner's column should serve as a weather vane for the informed reader. Blaming the Kennedys has now become a large part of the most current phase of the suppression of truth about the assassination. That seems to be the way to circumvent this new and explosive evidence. It will not work on those who are informed. Will it work on the public at large?**

Buckley's protégé, George Will, chimed in in the 10/12/98 edition of *Newsweek*. Will started off his column by saying that secrecy "helped produce Oliver Stone, the paranoid whose 1991 movie *JFK* found a mass audience for the notion that the assassination of President Kennedy was the work of a vast right-wing conspiracy." He went on to write that the Board had now released four million pages of documents that "do nothing to contradict the conclusion that Kennedy was killed by Lee Harvey Oswald." Incredible how Will, within two weeks of the Board's extinction, could read and digest those 4 million pages. That's a feat that not even a single member of the Board could accomplish.

The major part of Will's column was devoted to a discussion of Daniel Moynihan's recently published book, *Secrecy: The American Experience*. In a bit of unintended irony, there have been for years unconfirmed reports that Moynihan was asked by Bobby Kennedy to do a small private investigation of his brother's murder back in 1964. Moynihan, his finger in the wind, has adjusted his position on the as-

sassination, as he has on most issues, and will neither confirm nor deny the rumors. In televised interviews about his book, he has stated that one of the reasons he wrote the book was because a large majority of Americans believe the silly idea that the CIA was somehow involved in the murder of President Kennedy. So Senator Moynihan becomes one of those who pontificates on a subject about which millions of newly declassified documents exist. Has he read any of them?

But even before George Will and Bill Buckley came Tim Wiener and the *New York Times*. Wiener got the jump on the rest of them by writing his column before the Board actually closed down. His story was published on September 29th, the day before the Board closed shop and two days before their final press conference. The first sentence of his column read as follows:

There is no second gunman, no assassin skulking on the grassy knoll, no vast conspiracy.

Talk about a breathtaking opening. Wiener is clearly insinuating that the Board has come to a conclusion about Oswald and the murder. That is a false insinuation. And it leads us to ask just where he got this information. If he actually had read the report (which is unlikely), did he deliberately misrepresent it? If he did not read it, who fed the willing Wiener this disinformation? And why did he print it without checking it out?

This discussion would be incomplete if it did not include a mention of the ubiquitous Gerald Posner. Posner wrote a one page essay in the same issue of *Newsweek* in which Will's comments appeared. To read it is to realize that Posner, in keeping with the establishment agenda, has now shifted his sails slightly. In 1993, he was the point man in the campaign to reinstate the lone gunman thesis and to portray Oswald as a psychopathic commie killer. This was clearly a furious reaction to the furor created by Stone's film. Now, in keeping with the modifications of Seymour Hersh, Gus Russo, and Max Holland, he blames the victims for both the murder and the cover-up. This even extends to the criminal circumstances surrounding the autopsy.

In a wild assertion, Posner writes that the reason that the autopsy photographs don't show "blood or opening cavities" is "that the Kennedys merely wanted sanitized images for possible public release." There is no credible evidence that the Kennedys controlled anything that happened in the autopsy room that night. (For a full discussion of this oft-repeated canard, see Harold Weisberg's *Never Again*, especially the Afterword.) But Posner is desperate to distract the reader because reports about Chief Counsel Jeremy Gunn's milestone in-

continued on page 36

# Matthews

continued from page 27

eyes, Oswald is still a communist and Castro sympathizer, but the Agency should have kept tabs on him and his murky ties to communist states.) By leaving Helms out of his discussion, Matthews neuters Haldeman's already diluted drift.

But Matthews did even more. In 1993, he had interviewed Haldeman for his twin biography and when he asked him about that particular episode in *The Ends of Power*, Haldeman denied writing it. Haldeman told Matthews that the section was his co-author's idea, Joe DiMona. At this point a curious, fair, professional journalist would have tried to get into contact with Mr. DiMona. Matthews did not. He concludes that Haldeman is being truthful.

Gary Aguilar was a bit more skeptical. He got in contact with DiMona who was fairly easy to find. DiMona told him that it was "preposterous to think that Bob Haldeman" would allow him to invent information "or erroneous theories to be published in a book under his name." DiMona added that "all of the information in the book came from Bob." He was in no position to create meetings with Helms and Nixon. Further, the book was edited with a fine tooth comb and Haldeman altered many things in it on the way to completion, but he did not touch that episode. DiMona explains Haldeman's later disavowal as part of his well-known effort to mend his shattered relationship with Nixon late in life by taking back the anti-Nixon parts of his provocative book.

DiMona's arguments are logical, credible, and provable since he told Aguilar that he still has memoranda on the editing of the book. Matthews chose to ignore this important rejoinder. He opted to leave DiMona holding the bag, while keeping Nixon and Haldeman in the clear, and Helms out of the picture. It fits in with his lament for those "golden" Bush years. ♣

# Final Report

continued from page 3

JFK Act, omitted testimony that NARA later found was directly relevant to the Kennedy assassination. For nearly two years, SSCI did not explain this omission. Under pressure from the Review Board, SSCI came up with microfilm transcripts of several of the related records. The Review Board was not entirely satisfied:

While the SSCI had been successful in obtaining the microfilmed transcripts requested by the Board, the Review Board remained concerned that the original hardcopy transcripts for this testimony, and any accompanying materials, had not been located by the SSCI or otherwise accounted for.... Although microfilm copies of this testimony were available, the Review Board specifically asked the SSCI to explain the absence of the hard copy files, particularly since they were a discrete and significant body of records relating to the Kennedy assassination. At the time of this Report, the SSCI could not explain the absence of these original transcripts (and perhaps accompanying materials) relating to the Kennedy assassination.

## The Road Ahead

With the release of literally thousands of new documents, many of which have never been examined by any official investigation, according to the Review Board, the serious inquiry into this case is still only beginning. And while many records have been lost or destroyed, clues to their existence, such as the reference to a "Harvey Lee Oswald" file, remind us that there are many mysteries to unravel, and the government will likely never step up to the plate to complete this task that should have been as all-important and all-consuming as Congress' recent interest in the activities of the current president. Surely the assassination of a President and prominent leaders such as Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy deserved a professional investigation. To date, the history of this case has been left to the victors. Now, at least, those who care about the truth have a far richer assortment of data to mine, thanks to the efforts of the Board. ♣

# Media Watch

continued from page 5

vestigation of the autopsy have now been circulating in the mainstream press. So he has to obfuscate the main point, namely that the wounds are not in the places that the witnesses and the medical personnel saw them in. As Harrison Livingstone recently wrote about Posner, "What he cannot explain and does not bother to address is why the wounds are not in the same place in the photos as they were described in the autopsy and by witnesses. Along with the doctors, he dismisses the FBI men as well." Livingstone is referring to the fact that the two FBI agents at the autopsy, James Sibert and Frances O'Neill both told Gunn that the photos don't depict what they saw that night. Posner also dumps in the further fantastic assertion that the Kennedy family swore the Bethesda autopsy personnel to secrecy. This is incredible even for Posner. As newly released House Select Committee documents plainly show, to get the medical personnel from Bethesda, Maryland to talk, the Committee had to go to the Navy in order to release them from their vow of secrecy.

The drift of Posner's column should serve as a weather vane for the informed reader. Blaming the Kennedys has now become a large part of the most current phase of the suppression of truth about the assassination. That seems to be the way to circumvent this new and explosive evidence. It will not work on those who are informed. Will it work on the public at large? Posner is hoping it does. Will the Kennedys speak out against this new propaganda blitz? Will they call a press conference and say that they have done nothing to alter the poses in these autopsy pictures and they did not guide any of the technicians in their professional functions that night? It would greatly help. Or will they leave it to *Probe* and people like Weisberg to try and square the story with the record? ♣

CTKA  
P.O. Box 660488  
Arcadia, CA 91066-0488

Please note the expiration date of your subscription on the label below.

BULK-RATE  
U.S. POSTAGE  
**PAID**  
Culver City, CA 90230  
Permit No. 113

SEND TO:

MR. HAL VERB  
PO BOX 421815  
SAN FRANCISCO CA 94142-1815

Last issue will be: 7/22/99

34