

# SETTING THE STAGE FOR THE DEATH OF JFK

PART XVIII IN A SERIES ON THE CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

BY L. FLETCHER PROUTY

**I**t was the spring of 1972, the year the "dirty tricks" business went public with the birth of the Committee to Re-Elect the President (CREEP).

I was one of the founding directors of the League of Families for Prisoners of War in Southeast Asia. This organization of family members of those who were known to be prisoners of war and of those who were missing in action had been started by the Nixon administration to cope with the unusual problems confronting these families and government officials.

It was my role, as a banker, to look after the funds of the league and to help it to raise money for organizational activities. I knew this could be done with the help of the Advertising Council in New York City.

I was also president of the Financial Marketing Council of Greater Washington and a member of the Advertising Club of Washington. An associate told me that he had a friend with White House connections at the Robert Mullen Company, a Washington public relations firm, and that this friend in the Mullen Company was E. Howard Hunt.

This was quite a surprise. I had known Hunt when he was in the CIA and when I was responsible for U.S. Air Force Special Operations, including support of the clandestine activities of the CIA, but did not know that he was with the Mullen Company. I called him in May 1972 and on two different occasions we had lunch to discuss "old times" and the needs of the League of Families.

Each time we met, I would go to the

Mullen Company en route to the Army Navy Club where we had lunch. It did not concern me then that when I would glance into Hunt's office I would see stacks of cartons labeled with the names of various makers of specialized electronic equipment. This seemed a bit strange in a PR firm, but then the Mullen Company, and its newest employee, E. Howard Hunt, were not your average PR types.

You can imagine my shock when I read in *The Washington Post* on June 19, 1972, that some "third-rate" burglars had been caught in the offices of the Democratic National Committee on the ninth floor of the Watergate office complex in Georgetown. There, listed with the names of the Cubans who had been caught, was the "security agent" for CREEP, James McCord. The newspaper also mentioned

that one of the burglars had "a check made out to a local country club [that] had been signed by E. Howard Hunt," along with a telephone number for the White House.

The first account of the Watergate break-in was contained in a tiny item buried on a back page. They were "third-rate" burglars and no one was interested — yet. This sometimes happens in Washington with a breaking story that does not explain itself.

To me, that brief item said much more than its simple content. I knew Howard Hunt and I knew Jim McCord. They were not "third-rate" burglars. They both had been top-flight CIA agents with long years of special experience. Hunt's record went back to the World War II Office of Strategic Services (OSS) and McCord had been a career FBI agent who had been transferred to the CIA to serve with its Office of Security under the famed Sheffield Edwards.<sup>1</sup> There had to be more to that story.

I called a friend who was New York City bureau chief of *The Sunday Times* of London, Stephen Aris. Steve said he and two fellow workers would be on the 5 p.m. Eastern Airlines shuttle.

I met them in the terminal at Washington National and they came out to my house for the evening. We discussed this Watergate development and I put them on the last plane back to New York that

**"... there were those who would not stop at forging official historical records to achieve their goals of destroying the Kennedy record.**

**"This was a role played quite willingly by Howard Hunt, who was as bitter about the Kennedys as was Nixon."**

<sup>1</sup> Sheffield Edwards was a career FBI man who transferred to the CIA with the approval of J. Edgar Hoover and Allen Dulles in order to create the CIA's Office of Security.



night. Steve broke the story in London, and was the first on the streets with a book, *Watergate*. *Watergate* was on its way to becoming a household word; one of the reasons the story broke is outlined below.

The death of President Ngo Dinh Diem of Vietnam on November 1, 1963, had been considered a Vietnamese internal affair during the decade that followed. On September 16, 1971, President Richard Nixon made a statement that revived that event and put it in a different light. Senator Henry "Scoop" Jackson of Washington, a strong possibility as the Democratic candidate against Nixon in 1972, had suggested that the United States might be in a position to exert discreet pressure upon President Nguyen Van Thieu of Vietnam to move toward a more democratic form of government and to settle the warfare in Indochina.

That same day, President Nixon, when questioned by Peter Lisagor of *The Chicago Daily News* about the Jackson statement and about what, if anything, Washington should do in that situation, responded, "If what the senator is suggesting is that the United States should use its leverage now to overthrow Thieu, I would remind all concerned that the way we got into Vietnam was through overthrowing Diem, and the complicity in the murder of Diem, and the way to get out of Vietnam, in my opinion, is not to overthrow Thieu."

Nixon had put a match to the fuse and the bomb was certain to explode. The Pentagon Papers had been published by *The New York Times* and other newspapers in June 1971, just three months prior to this exchange, and some of them did appear to show that the Kennedy administration had a role in the overthrow of Diem in 1963. But until this Nixon comment, no public official had ever openly suggested that the Kennedy administration was guilty of complicity in Diem's murder.

It was not long after this press conference that Howard Hunt, then working as a consultant to Charles Colson, Nixon's jack-of-all-trades, mentioned several of the highly classified messages contained in the Pentagon Papers, specifically those that referred to White House action relative to Diem's death. Hunt suggested to Colson that it might be possible to alter those messages, in White House files, so that anyone using them for research would discover that President Kennedy was, beyond doubt, the source of the order to murder President Diem.

Colson, the man who had said that he would walk over his own grandmother if it would help the re-election of Nixon, took no action to stop his crafty consultant from trying to see what he could do with those messages.

These events, among so many others at that time, underscored the nature of the pressures on President Diem in Saigon and President Kennedy in Washington during the fateful month of November 1963. They also demonstrate the deep animosity that existed at that time between Nixon and the Kennedys. As this example shows, there were those who would not stop at forging official historical records to achieve their goal of destroying the Kennedy record.

This was a role played quite willingly by Howard Hunt, who was as bitter

system of community law. This will realize the ideas of the constitution on a scale which the people can understand."

This statement, among others of the same kind, made Diem's position quite clear. His position did not agree with those who wanted to escalate the war in Indochina and who were not at all interested in the introduction of an ancient form of self-government into the battle-scarred countryside.

On top of this came Kennedy's desire to get the United States out of Indochina, as evidenced by the Krulak-Mendenhall visit to Vietnam in September 1963.<sup>2</sup> As a result of that quick trip, Major General Victor H. Krulak, who was well-versed in the situation and a close friend and confidant of Admiral Harry Felt, commander in chief, Pacific Command, was able to



AP/WIDE WORLD PHOTOS



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In 1971, Howard Hunt (left) suggested to Nixon aide Charles Colson (right) that messages in White House files be altered to smear John F. Kennedy. In the words of the author, Colson "took no action to stop his crafty consultant."

about the Kennedys as was Nixon.

By the middle of 1963, in our continuing account of the Vietnam War, Diem had learned to his dismay that his ideals for the long-range Strategic Hamlet program had been shattered by those who saw the hamlets as no more than another step in the "pacification" of the countryside in a warlike manner.

As we have mentioned in an earlier article in this series, Diem had made it quite clear what his goals with the Strategic Hamlet program were: "The importance of the Strategic Hamlets goes beyond the concept of hamlet self-defense. They are a means to institute basic democracy in Vietnam. Through the Strategic Hamlet program, the government intends to give back to the hamlet the right of self-government with its own charter and

provide President Kennedy with all of the data he needed to fit his concept of the Vietnamization of the war and the early withdrawal of all U.S. personnel from the area.

To implement his well-orchestrated plans, Kennedy then dispatched the secretary of defense, Robert McNamara, and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Maxwell Taylor, to Saigon so that they could return from Vietnam with a current report that would be based entirely upon the president's own plans.

The McNamara-Taylor party left Washington on September 23, 1963, for a 10-

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<sup>2</sup> For further information on this, see the December 1986/January 1987 issue of *FREEDOM*.



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General Victor H. Krulak traveled to Vietnam in September 1963 and returned with information President Kennedy needed to flesh out his plan for Vietnamization of the war and withdrawal of all U.S. personnel.

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day whirlwind tour of Vietnam. By October 1963 the level of U.S. forces had reached 16,732, most of whom were non-combatant personnel. A good number were those required to maintain, supply and operate helicopters.

By late summer, and certainly by the time of the McNamara-Taylor trip, closely held plans had progressed for the removal of the Diems from Saigon. Madame Nhu, the wife of President Diem's brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, had left for a trip to Europe on September 9, 1963; another Diem brother, Archbishop Ngo Dinh Thuc, had left on September 7 for Rome.

While McNamara and Taylor were traveling, the elaborate "Report to the President" was being written, illustrated and bound in leather in the Pentagon under the direction of General Krulak in close coordination with the White House and with Bobby Kennedy in particular.<sup>1</sup>

By the time the travelers returned to Honolulu for a brief respite, the report had been flown to them for their study and eventual delivery to President Kennedy on the White House lawn as they stepped out of their helicopter after the

<sup>1</sup> The author was chief of Special Operations in the Krulak office (Special Assistant for Counterinsurgency and Special Activities) at that time, and was one of the writers of the McNamara-Taylor report to President Kennedy.

jet flight from Honolulu.

By this time, President Kennedy had reached the decision that the United States should do all it could to train, equip and finance the government of South Vietnam to fight its own war, but that this would be done for someone other than Ngo Dinh Diem. Kennedy had decided to withdraw 1,000 American personnel from Vietnam by the end of 1963 as a measure of his intentions, and to have all U.S. forces home by the end of 1965.

On the same day that the president received this report, General Tran Van Don had his first "accidental" meeting with the CIA's Lieutenant Colonel Lucien Conein at Tan Son Nhut airport in Saigon. This was a meeting of great significance, and one that to this day has never been properly explained.

General Don was the commander of the South Vietnamese army. He had been born in France, educated in France, and had served in the French army during World War II.

The man he met that day at the Tan Son Nhut airport, Conein, was born in France, raised and educated in the United States, and served with the French army at the outbreak of World War II. He escaped from Europe early in the war and was recruited by the OSS. His OSS duties took him to China, from where, at the close of the war against Japan, he traveled to Hanoi with Ho Chi Minh and Colonel Vo Nguyen Giap. In 1945, an enormous shipment of American arms from the unneeded stockpiles on Okinawa was shipped to Hanoi and transferred to Ho Chi Minh. On September 2, 1945, backed by the United States and supplied with its arms, Ho Chi Minh proclaimed the independent government of Indochina. Conein played an important part in that action.

Then, nearly 20 years later, in 1963, it was this same Conein — one of the CIA's most valuable agents in the Far East — who was designated to meet with his old friend of 18 years, General Tran Van

**"Kennedy had decided to withdraw 1,000 American personnel from Vietnam by the end of 1963 . . . and to have all U.S. forces home by the end of 1965."**



General Tran Van Don, commander of the South Vietnamese army, had secret meetings with his friend, the CIA's Lieutenant Colonel Lucien Conein, to arrange for the ouster of Ngo Dinh Diem.

Don, to arrange for the ouster of President Diem. Only 10 years earlier, it had been General Edward G. Lansdale and Conein who had done so much to get Ngo Dinh Diem started as the newly assigned president of an odd piece of real estate then being established as the country of South Vietnam.

Conein's task was to stay close enough to key Vietnamese to assure them of the support of the United States and to be able to keep Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge and Conein's own CIA associates well enough informed so that both sides could coordinate their moves to oust President Diem and his brother, Nhu.

The plan had been carefully drawn to leave Diem no alternative to leaving once it got under way. There was much discussion and much argument among those in the Kennedy administration who knew of the president's intention to oust Diem. Some of this was welcomed in order to cover the true details of the plan. With Madame Nhu and Archbishop Thuc already in Europe, Diem and his brother were to follow to attend a meeting of the Inter-Parliamentary Union in Belgrade, Yugoslavia.

On November 1, 1963, an airline jet arrived at Tan Son Nhut; the brothers left the Presidential Palace and were driven to the airport. They actually boarded the plane. Those who were monitoring this important departure at Tan Son Nhut were stunned to see Diem and his brother emerge from the aircraft, return quickly to their car and race back to the palace. As a result, the carefully orchestrated evacuation plan broke down and Ngo Dinh Diem and his brother were murdered.



There have been many accounts of this coup d'etat, and many were created in order to cover the real plan and to protect those Vietnamese who had worked closely with the administration. It is clear that there was little gunfire, as would have been characteristic of a violent coup d'etat. Diem and his brother were killed by one man in a military vehicle. There was some looting and destruction, yet for the most part the transition was relatively quiet.

By the latter part of 1963, President Diem and many of his top aides and elite guards were hated by the populace, particularly by the Buddhists. After Diem's death, his followers were tracked down and killed wherever they could be located before order could be restored under the new president, General Duong Van "Big" Minh, himself a Buddhist.

This writer was on duty in the Joint Chiefs of Staff section of the Pentagon on the day of the coup d'etat. My immediate boss, General Krulak, knew the full details of the plan, approved by President Kennedy, to remove Diem from the scene by flying him and his brother out of Saigon. Krulak remained in contact with the White House as developments in Saigon were relayed. I can recall clearly the absolute shock in our office when it was learned that Diem had not left on the proffered aircraft for Europe; there was grave concern over where he and his brother had gone and what they had hoped to do, alone, in that hostile city.

President Diem was too much of an idealist to understand that once he and his brother had prepared to leave Saigon his closest associates and his palace guards would flee before they could be rounded up and slaughtered. They were hated. Diem did not realize that once they were seen to leave for the airport, they would no longer have any protection in the city of Saigon.

It was some time before the news became known that Diem had fled to Cholon and had been captured and killed there. This news was flashed around the world; this was the story that everyone heard. They never heard of the flight to Europe that Kennedy had planned for them.

Thus it was that the file of routine cable traffic between Washington and Saigon eventually became known with the release and publication of the Pentagon Papers. This is how it happened that Howard Hunt was able to locate certain top-level messages to and from the White House and Ambassador Lodge



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*Senator Mike Gravel: "The Pentagon Papers reveal the inner workings of a government bureaucracy set up to defend this country, but now out of control. . . ." This June 29, 1971, photo shows Senator Gravel reading from a summary of the first volume of the Pentagon Papers in a Senate hearing room.*

in Saigon that contained information referring to "highest authority." That was the cable traffic code for President Kennedy.

None of these messages contained any reference to a plot to kill President Diem and his brother, and none of them came even close to such an eventuality. Concealed within these messages were carefully worded phrases that gave Ambassador Lodge the information he needed in order to direct all participants into action and to begin the careful removal of the two brothers to Europe by commercial aircraft.

According to information that came out during the Watergate hearings, those files that had been forged to smear President Kennedy had been put in Hunt's White House safe where they remained

until discovered by the investigators much later.

There is much about this episode that has become important upon review. There are those who have been so violently opposed to Jack Kennedy and all that he stood for that they have stooped to all kinds of sordid activities to smear him while he was living, to attack his brother Bobby while he was still alive, and to hound Senator Edward Kennedy to this day. Nixon's gratuitous reference to Kennedy's "complicity in the murder of Diem" after a decade of silence on that subject speaks for itself. The efforts of Howard Hunt and Chuck Colson (both employees of the White House at the time) to dig up old files in order to smear the memory of President Kennedy provide another example.

In an ominous way, the Pentagon Papers and Watergate episodes were cut from the same fabric and, most importantly, were a direct outgrowth of the nationwide dissatisfaction with the Vietnam War.

Because the development of the war in Indochina had been spread over so many years, since 1945, and because most of the events that brought about this terrible form of modern genocide in the name of "anti-communism" or "containment" were buried in deep secrecy or not even

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available in written records. Robert S. McNamara, then secretary of defense, directed, on June 17, 1967, that a task force be formed to collate and study the history of United States involvement in Vietnam from World War II to the present.

This project, which produced thousands of documents of all kinds from many sources, was the primary source of that group of more than 4,000 documents that were surreptitiously released to various news media and called the Pentagon Papers.

Almost four years later, on June 13, 1971, *The New York Times* started the serialization of the Pentagon Papers that had been made available by Daniel Ellsberg.

Few people have been able to articulate that event more accurately than the then-senator from Alaska, Mike Gravel: "The Pentagon Papers reveal the inner workings of a government bureaucracy set up to defend this country, but now out of control, managing an international empire by garrisoning American troops around the world. It created an artificial client state in South Vietnam, lamented its unpopularity among its own people, eventually encouraged the overthrow of that government, and then supported a series of military dictators who served their own ends, and at times our government's ends, but never the cause of their own people."

In his brilliant introduction to "The Senator Gravel Edition" of *The Pentagon Papers*, he included an extract from the works of H. G. Wells, the English novelist and historian, who once wrote: "The true strength of rulers and empires lies not in armies or emotions, but in the belief of men that they are inflexibly open and truthful and legal. As soon as a government departs from that standard, it ceases to be anything more than 'the gang in possession' and its days are numbered."

We copy that quotation with some sadness, because it fits the Vietnam era, but even more pertinently because it fits the present situation in Washington under the current administration and its "hostage for arms" exchange in Iran.

The publication of the Pentagon Papers was an event unique in American history. One day after their publication had begun in *The New York Times*, I received a call



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*The Pentagon Papers released by Daniel Ellsberg were cleverly selected to present an altered picture of how the Vietnam War began.*

from the British Broadcasting Corporation requesting that I travel to London to do a series of programs, live on prime time, with Daniel Ellsberg. I did travel to London and did a daily series of broadcasts on the subject, but due to the legal situation Ellsberg's lawyer advised him not to leave the country or to participate in the broadcasts.

In this long series of articles on the origins of the warfare in Indochina, I have used various editions of the Pentagon Papers as reference material. They are useful and they are quite accurate as far as individual documents go, but they are dangerous in the hands of those who do not have the experience or other sources required to balance their content. This is because of their true source and the clever selection of those that were chosen to tell the story of the Vietnam War. From the beginning, the Pentagon Papers were a compilation of documents designed to paint President John F. Kennedy as the villain of the story.

**"How did it happen  
that the subject of  
discussion in Hawaii was  
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would not come up until  
after Kennedy had  
been murdered?"**

Although this vast stack of papers has been labeled the Pentagon Papers, that is a misnomer. It is quite true that most of them were found in certain highly classified files in the Pentagon, but they were functionally limited files. For example, despite their volume — nearly 4,000 documents — there are remarkably few that actually bear the signature of military officers. In fact, many of those that carry the signature of a military officer, or that refer to military officers, make reference to such men as Edward G. Lansdale — who actually worked for the CIA while serving in a cover assignment with the military. When such papers are removed from the "military" or "Pentagon" categorization what remains is a non-military and non-Pentagon stack of papers. For the serious and honest historian, this is an important distinction.

In a letter to the then-secretary of defense, Clark Clifford, dated January 15, 1969, Leslie H. Gelb, director, Study Task Force<sup>4</sup> said: "In the beginning, Mr. McNamara gave the task force full access to OSD [Office of the Secretary of Defense] files, and the task force received access to CIA materials, and some use of State Department cables and memoranda. We had no access to the White House files."

Despite this disclaimer about "no access to the White House files" there are many White House files in the papers, and it was this group of White House files that was the source of the anti-Kennedy forgeries.

The files from which most of these papers were obtained were in that section of the Office of the Secretary of Defense called the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs. Although this office was in the Pentagon, it was lightly staffed with military officers and most of its activities concerned other government departments and agencies such as the CIA, the Department of State, and the White House. That is why its files were full of papers that originated outside the Pentagon, and gives the entire Pentagon Papers production an entirely non-military slant.

Another reason for interpreting the Pentagon Papers, as history, with caution is that, as Gelb said, "These outstanding people [those who worked on the task force] came from everywhere — the military services, State, OSD, and the

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<sup>4</sup> The Study Task Force assembled the Pentagon Papers.



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"think tanks." Some came for a month, for three months, for six months... in all, we had 36 professionals working on these studies, with an average of four months per man."

That says it all!

The former secretary of state, John Foster Dulles, declared that one of the most complicated periods in this nation's history began in Indochina on September 2, 1945. There is no way that this group averaging "four months per man" in its studies in 1967, 1968 and 1969 - was going to be qualified to present a true and accurate account of that war by the compilation of a scattering of papers that contained bits and pieces of the story.

This reveals one of the greatest misgivings concerning the concept and goals of those who compiled this study. There are altogether too many important papers that did *not* get included in this study; too many of those were absolutely crucial to an understanding of the origins and reasons for the events of this war from 1945 to 1975.

This has been a complaint of historians who have attempted to teach the facts of this war. They have found that the history books about this most controversial segment of our past have been written by writers who were not there, who had little or nothing to do with the war, or, conversely, they have been written by those who were there, but who were there for a one-year tour of duty, usually in the post-1965 period. None of these writers has had the comprehensive experience that is a prerequisite to understanding that type of recent history.

Regarding the Pentagon Papers themselves, Senator Gravel wrote, "The Papers do not support our good intentions. The Papers prove that, from the beginning, the war has been an American war, serving to perpetuate American military power in Asia. Peace has never been on the American agenda for Southeast Asia. Neither we nor the South Vietnamese have been masters of our Southeast Asian policy; we have been its victims, as the leaders of America sought to preserve their reputation for toughness and determination."

Senator Gravel added: "The elaborate secrecy precautions, the carefully contrived subterfuges, the precisely orchestrated press leaks, were intended not to



AP WIDE WORLD PHOTOS

Leslie H. Gelb, director of the Study Task Force that assembled the Pentagon Papers.

deceive 'the other side,' but to keep the American public in the dark. . . . For too long they have been forced to subsist on a diet of half-truths or deliberate deceit by executives who consider the people of the Congress as adversaries."<sup>5</sup>

In concluding this brief section on the Pentagon Papers, it is important to identify and understand the subtle anti-Kennedy slant of this work. Nothing reveals this bias more than the following extract taken from the section, "The Overthrow of Ngo Dinh Diem, May-November 1963."

At the end of a crucial summary of the most climactic 90-day period in modern American history, from August 22 to November 22, 1963, this is what the authors of the Pentagon Papers had to say:

<sup>5</sup> Senator Gravel wrote these words in August 1971 for the introduction to *The Pentagon Papers*, published by Beacon Press Books of the Unitarian Universalist Association. They were timely and applicable then. The reader cannot help but note that they are equally timely and applicable to the recent Iranian "hostages for arms" controversy.

**"The plotters made their plans in detail as they moved to take over the government. All other public officials became pawns on that master chess board."**

"After having delayed an appropriate period, the U.S. recognized the new government on November 8. As the euphoria wore off, however, the real gravity of the economic situation and the lack of expertise in the new government became apparent to both Vietnamese and American officials. The deterioration of the military situation and the Strategic Hamlet program also came more and more clearly into perspective.

"These topics dominated the discussions at the Honolulu conference on November 20 when [Henry Cabot] Lodge and the country team [from Vietnam] met with [Dean] Rusk, [Robert] McNamara, [Maxwell] Taylor, [George] Ball, and [McGeorge] Bundy. But the meeting ended inconclusively. After Lodge had conferred with the president a few days later in Washington, the White House tried to pull together some conclusions and offer some guidance for our continuing and now deeper involvement in Vietnam. The instructions contained in NSAM 273,<sup>6</sup> however, did not reflect the truly dire situation as it was to come to light in succeeding weeks. The reappraisals forced by the new information would swiftly make it irrelevant as it was 'overtaken by events.'"

Recall what had been going on during that month of November 1963. President Ngo Dinh Diem and his brother had been murdered and the administration of South Vietnam had been placed in the hands of General "Big" Minh.

Then, in one of the strangest scenarios of recent history, most of the members of the Kennedy Cabinet had flown to Honolulu, together, for that November 20 series of conferences. The full Cabinet meeting - even the secretary of agriculture was there - in Hawaii was followed by a flight to Tokyo on November 22. Again, almost all of the Kennedy Cabinet members were on that flight to Tokyo. That is where they were when they learned that President Kennedy had been shot dead in Dallas.

Upon receipt of that stunning news they ordered the plane to return directly to Hawaii and, almost immediately, on to Washington.

But what strange and impersonal words for this "official history," the Pentagon Papers, to use to describe those events:

1. "The deterioration of the military

<sup>6</sup> A National Security Action Memorandum (NSAM) is a top-level directive, often signed by the president.



situation." Just four days after Kennedy's death and less than 60 days since Kennedy had published NSAM 263, which visualized the Vietnamization of the war and the return of all U.S. military personnel, Lyndon Johnson and most of the same JFK Cabinet saw things in an entirely different light. They saw the military situation deteriorating.

2. "The deterioration of . . . the Strategic Hamlet program." All of a sudden, these same people saw this program as a failure.

3. "These topics dominated the discussions at the Honolulu Conference on November 20. . . ." This is a remarkable statement. On that date, John Kennedy was still alive and was president. Yet this report says that his Cabinet was assembled in Honolulu to discuss "these topics" which were the very topics of NSAM 273, dated November 26, and a total reversal of Kennedy's own policy as stated in the Taylor-McNamara report and of NSAM 263, dated October 2, 1963.

This fantastic situation cannot be treated lightly. How did it happen that the Kennedy Cabinet had traveled to Hawaii at precisely the same time Kennedy was touring in Texas? How did it happen that the subject of discussion in Hawaii was a strange agenda that would not come up until after Kennedy had been murdered?

Is there any possibility that the powers-that-be who planned and executed the Kennedy assassination had also been able to get the Kennedy Cabinet out of the country, and to have them conferring in Hawaii on an agenda that would be put before President Lyndon Johnson just four days after Kennedy's death?

President Kennedy would not have sent his Cabinet to Hawaii to discuss that agenda. He had issued his own agenda for Vietnam on October 2, 1963, and he had no reason to change it. More than that, he had no reason at all to send his Cabinet to Hawaii for such a conference. It is never good practice for a president to have key members of his Cabinet out of town while he is on an extended trip. Why was the Cabinet in Hawaii? Who ordered the Cabinet members there?

If JFK had no reason to send them to Hawaii, who did and why?

As soon as the Honolulu conference broke up, these same Cabinet members got back on their VIP aircraft and departed from Hawaii on an unprecedented trip to Japan. No one has explained why the Kennedy Cabinet had been ordered to Japan at that time.



Almost the entire Kennedy Cabinet flew to Hawaii for a series of conferences on November 20, 1963. Shown here as they returned to Washington after the assassination on November 22 are (left to right) Agriculture Secretary Orville Freeman, Treasury Secretary C. Douglas Dillon, Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Interior Secretary Stewart Udall, Commerce Secretary Luther Hodges, Economic Adviser Walter Heller and Labor Secretary Willard Wirtz. Among the officials not shown here who also attended the Hawaii conference were Defense Secretary Robert McNamara and Presidential Press Secretary Pierre Salinger.

This trip to Japan was not some casual event. Someone had arranged it with care. A reading of newspapers of that period in late November 1963 reveals that extracts of the speeches given by some of these same Cabinet officers, in Japan, were made available and were printed in these newspapers.

We all know now that these Cabinet officers did not reach Japan and that their VIP aircraft returned to Hawaii. Why would newspapers in the United States print extracts of their speeches as though they actually had gone to Japan and delivered those speeches? Who had set this trip up so meticulously that even such details as the press releases appeared to validate the presence of the Cabinet members in Japan when in fact they never went there?

4. "After Lodge had conferred with the president a few days later in Washington. . . ." Here is the most astounding statement of them all. From November 20 to "a few days later" covers the date of the assassination of JFK on the 22nd, yet there is absolutely no mention of the Kennedy murder. The Pentagon Papers say simply, "conferred with the president," as though it was just any president. What a way to toss off Kennedy! This entire section of the Pentagon Papers simply skips all mention of the death of the president of the United States and tells the story of the death of Diem as though it had occurred in a vacuum.

These are the things of which assassinations and coups d'etat are made. The

plotters made their plans in detail as they moved to take over the government. All other public officials became pawns on that master chess board.

5. Only four days after Kennedy's murder, LBJ came up with new guidance, as follows: ". . . the White House tried to pull together some conclusions and offer some guidance for our continuing and now deeper involvement in Vietnam."

With JFK out of the way, the agenda from that November 20 meeting in Hawaii was trotted out in the White House and the first steps were taken to reverse the Kennedy course in Vietnam and to make ready for the enormous build-up that followed — all \$220 billion of it.

How many of us realize that more than 10 million people were airlifted to Vietnam during the war by military-chartered commercial airlift? That was only one windfall of the war. (That huge number does not include the many millions transported to Vietnam by military airlift.)

6. "The instructions contained in NSAM 273, however, did not reflect the truly dire situation as it was to come to light in succeeding weeks. The reappraisals forced by the new information would swiftly make it irrelevant as it was 'overtaken by events.'"

This is fascinating. The presidential document, NSAM 273, November 26, 1963, initiated the reversal of the Kennedy plans for Vietnam and laid the groundwork for NSAM 288, published in March 1964. Whereas Kennedy had seen hope

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## SETTING THE STAGE — FOR — THE DEATH OF JFK

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for Vietnamization of the conflict and the early return of all Americans, only four days after JFK's death the new administration — consisting of most of the same people — viewed a "truly dire situation."

Then, as if reluctant to say the words, "President Kennedy had been murdered," the writers of this Pentagon Papers scenario say simply that the situation was "overtaken by events."

In concluding this article on the origins of the warfare in Vietnam it may be well to add a few words of my own. I was on Okinawa in 1945 and observed the shipments of arms being loaded on U.S. Navy transport vessels for shipment to Haiphong Harbor in Indochina where they were given to Ho Chi Minh under the auspices of the OSS.

I was in Vietnam many times during 1952, 1953 and 1954. I saw that serenely beautiful country moved from a placid recreation area for American soldiers fighting in Korea to a hotbed of turmoil after the defeat of the French forces at Dien Bien Phu, the division of the country into two parts, the forced movement of more than one million "Catholic" northern Tonkinese to the South, and the establishment of the Diem administration. During this period I had frequent contact with the members of the CIA's Saigon Military Mission.

Then, from 1955 through 1963, I was in the Pentagon. I served as chief of Special Operations for the U.S. Air Force for five years, providing the Air Force support of the clandestine operations of the CIA. I was moved to the Office of Special Operations in the office of the Secretary of Defense for the next two years, and then I was asked to create the Special Operations office for the Joint Chiefs of Staff in order to bring that special work for all military services under the guidance of a single "Focal Point" office. I headed that office until 1964, when I retired after the death of President Kennedy.

By the fall of 1963, I knew, perhaps as much as anyone, the inner workings of this world of Special Operations. I had written the formal directives on the subject that were used officially by the U.S. Air Force and by the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Therefore, it seemed strange when I was approached after I had come back



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from a week spent reading intelligence papers in Admiral Felt's headquarters in Hawaii, during September 1963, and informed that I had been selected to be the military escort officer for the VIP group of civilian guests that had been invited to visit the naval station in Antarctica and the South Pole facility. This group was scheduled to leave about November 10, 1963, and to return by the end of the month.

Although this trip had absolutely nothing to do with my previous nine years' work, except that I had supported a CIA activity in Antarctica over the years, I appreciated the invitation and looked forward to the trip as a "paid vacation."

**"With JFK out of the way, the agenda from that November 20 meeting in Hawaii was trotted out in the White House and the first steps were taken to reverse the Kennedy course in Vietnam and to make ready for the enormous build-up that followed — all \$220 billion of it."**

After I had been to the South Pole and returned to Christchurch, New Zealand, another member of the VIP party, a congressman, asked me if I would like to go with him on a two-day side trip to the beautiful New Zealand Alps and to the Hermitage Chalet at the foot of Mount Cook, the highest mountain in the country.

On the first morning of our visit I had gone down to breakfast in a dining room of enormous beauty with a dazzling view of Mount Cook and the nearby range. I secured a table for the two of us and had ordered coffee when the public address announcer, who had been reading off the list of passengers to be taken to the top of Mount Cook by small aircraft for the ski ride back down, interrupted his announcements to say:

"Ladies and gentlemen, the BBC has announced that President Kennedy has been shot . . . dead . . . in Dallas."

That is how I learned of the murder of the president and of the start of the strange events surrounding that murder and the takeover of our government as a result of that brazen act.

I have always wondered, deep in my own heart, whether that strange invitation that removed me so far from Washington and from the center of all things clandestine might have had something to do with the events that followed. Were there things that I knew, or would have discovered, that made it wise to have me far from Washington, along with others, such as the Kennedy Cabinet, who were in mid-air over the Pacific Ocean en route to Japan, far from the scene?

I do not know the answer to that question, although many of the things that I have observed and learned from that time have led me to surmise that such a question might be well-founded. After all, I knew that type of work very well. I had worked on presidential "protection" and knew the great extents to which one goes to protect the chief executive; established procedures were discarded on the president's trip to Dallas.

It seems that those who planned the murder of the president knew the inner workings of the government very well. These facts became evident, not so much in the skill with which the murder of the president was undertaken as in the masterful cover-up program that has continued since November 22, 1963, and that terrible hour in Dallas' Dealey Plaza when the warfare in Indochina moved from a low-intensity conflict to a major operation. ▲