

# Who is Gus Russo?

By Jim DiEuenio

In late 1991, when Oliver Stone released *JFK*, Mark Lane decided to write his third book about the Kennedy assassination. Anyone who has read *Plausible Denial*, knows the significance of Marita Lorenz to that book. When the book became a bestseller, the media was eager to attack it. So in *Newsweek*, a man was quoted deriding Lorenz in quite strong terms as telling wild and bizarre stories and being generally unreliable. The source was, at that time, a little known Kennedy researcher. He was so obscure that Lane replied to the reporter, "So who is Gus Russo? Has he ever written a book? Has he ever written an article?" At that time, to my knowledge, he had done neither. But now Russo has written a book. It is so dreadful in every aspect that Lane's question carries more weight now than then. In retrospect, it seems quite prescient.

I can speak about this rather bracing phenomenon from firsthand experience. To my everlasting embarrassment, Gus Russo is listed in the acknowledgments to my book, *Destiny Betrayed*. In my defense, I can only argue that my association with Russo at that time was from a distance. We had communicated over the phone a few times because I had heard he was interested in the New Orleans scene and had done some work on Perminex, the murky rightwing front group that Clay Shaw had worked for in Italy in the late fifties and early sixties. Later, after my book came out in the summer of 1992, he called me and asked me for some supporting documents that I had used in writing it. My first impressions of Russo were that he was amiable, interested, and that, since he lived in Baltimore, he was quite familiar with what was available for viewing at the National Archives and at the Assassination Archives and Research Center in Washington D. C.

## First Encounter

I encountered Russo in person a couple of times at the end of 1992 and the beginning of 1993. I attended the '92 ASK Conference in Dallas where I exchanged some materials with him and at which he did an ad hoc talk with John Newman. I did not actually attend that dual presentation but I heard that Russo's part centered on some aspects of military intelligence dealing with the assassination. Specifically it concerned Air Force Colonel Delk Simpson, an acquaintance of both LBJ mili-

tary aide Howard Burris and CIA officer David Atlee Phillips, about whom some significant questions had been raised. And since he was coupled with Newman, I assumed that Russo was investigating the possibility of some form of foreknowledge of the assassination in some high military circles. My other encounter with Russo in this time period was even more direct. Toward the end of 1992, I had reason to visit Washington to see a research associate and examine a new CIA database of documents that was probably the best index of assassination-related materials available at the time. We decided to call up Russo and we arranged to spend a Saturday night at his home.

When we got there, Russo was his usual amiable self and his surroundings revealed that he was indeed immersed in the Kennedy assassination. There were photos of a man who was a dead ringer for Oswald in combat fatigues in Florida, where Oswald was never supposed to have been. Russo had obtained letters showing that George de Mohrenschildt had been in contact with George Bush at a much earlier date than anyone had ever suspected. Russo had a library of books on the Kennedy assassination that was abundant and expansive. He had secured a letter written by Jim Garrison to Jonathan Blackmer of the House Select Committee on Assassinations that examined the significance of two seemingly obscure suspects in his investigation, Fred Lee Crisman and Thomas Beckham. Russo had a letter from Beckham to a major magazine that was extraordinarily interesting. It discussed the young man's relationship with Jack Martin, the CIA, the Bay of Pigs, a man who fit the description of Guy Banister, and a personal acquaintance of his, "this double agent, Lee Harvey Oswald." (Significantly, none of the above material appears in Russo's book.)

## Russo and the Anniversary

It was 1993 that proved an important year for Russo. It was the 30th anniversary of the murder and there were plenty of books, articles, and even television shows being prepared in anticipation of that event. Russo somehow had heard of a new author on the scene, a man named Gerald Posner. To some people he was actually praising the man and touting some of the new "revelations" to be unsheathed in his upcoming book. Russo had

just come off of working for Oliver Stone on *JFK: The Book of the Film*, which had turned out fairly well. Jane Rusconi, Stone's chief research assistant at the time, seemed to like him. Russo had also secured another plum assignment right after this: he was serving as one of the lead reporters on the PBS *Frontline* special "Who Was Lee Harvey Oswald?" In fact, early in 1993, Dennis Effle and myself had met with Russo in the penthouse bar of a Santa Monica hotel where he was staying as he investigated a reported sighting of Oswald in the Los Angeles area.

Later in 1993, three things happened that permanently altered my view of and relationship with Gus Russo. In order, they were his comments at the 1993 Midwest Symposium; the showing of his PBS special; and his helming of a panel at the 1993 ASK conference. In light of those three events, there seemed to be things I should have paid more attention to before that time. For instance, Russo argued against any change in the motorcade route on some weird grounds. First, he said that the HSCA had investigated that and found no basis for it. With what we know about Robert Blakey and the HSCA today, this is sort of like asking someone to trust the Warren Commission. Second, he commented that even if the motorcade route had gone down Main Street, a professional sniper could have still hit Kennedy. (At the time, I thought that Russo was at least arguing for a conspiracy, albeit a low-level one, although I am not so sure of that today.) Russo also seemed impressed with Jack Ruby's deathbed confession in which he seemed to dispel any notion of a conspiracy. I frowned on this because it had been made to longtime FBI asset and diehard Warren Commission advocate Larry Schiller. Also, Ruby's comments had been erratic while in jail: some of them clearly implied a larger conspiracy that seemed to go high up into the government. Related to this, the fact that a notorious CIA doctor had treated Ruby with drugs could explain the erratic behavior. Finally, there was another point that I should have considered more seriously. Before I talked to Russo at his home, he had related to me a rather intriguing fact. I had asked him if he had ever heard of the so-called "Fenton Report". This is the culmination of work—not really a report—done by the HSCA in both Miami and New Orleans. It is called the Fenton Report because HSCA Chief Investigator Cliff Fenton supervised the work. When I popped that question, Russo's response surprised me. He said, "I've heard it." He went on to explain that he had gotten access to the then classified taped interviews of the House Select Committee at the National Archives. This had been accomplished through some error by the staff there. The error had persisted for some time since Russo had heard many of the tapes.



## Russo in Chicago

At Chicago in 1993, Russo stunned Rusconi, myself and presumably some others who had known him previously. As he rose to the podium he ridiculed those who had the idea that Lee Harvey Oswald had some association with American intelligence. He asked, "How many of you think Oswald was some kind of James Bond?" I thought this was an oddly posed question. Nobody had ever reported Oswald owning an Aston-Martin, or leading an army of underwater scuba divers in a spear-gun fight, or employing all kinds of mechanical gadgetry to disarm his enemies. Far from it. The question was a pointless and unserious one, at least to anyone truly interested in Oswald. It was especially unbecoming from one who was then working on a documentary about the man's life. Russo went on to advise the research community as to what they should really be investigating. He said we "should be following our Mafia leads and Cuban exile leads". In the question and answer period that followed, someone asked him to explain his recent blurb for Robert Morrow's newly published book *First Hand Knowledge*. Russo had the quote read back to him and he seemed to stand by the endorsement, which is interesting since Morrow was proffering a low-level plot of CIA rogue operatives led by Clay Shaw allied with the Mob and some Cuban exiles. Later, he then attributed a quote to Robert Blakey endorsing a somewhat similar line. The reference to Blakey set off an alarm bell. Although I had not done an in-depth study of the HSCA at the time, I knew enough to realize that anyone who took Blakey seriously either wasn't serious himself or had not done his homework. I didn't realize at the time that Russo and his cohorts were making Blakey one of the prime talking heads on their November special.

There was one other thing I should have noted about Russo at that conference. During the proceedings, I saw him with a tall, thin, bespectacled man who I had not encountered before. I would later recognize him as Dale Myers, who I now know as an unrepentant "lone-nut" zealot. If I had known who Myers was in April in Chicago I would not have been so far behind the curve.

## The Frontline Special

Then came November of 1993. This was the coming out party for Russo and company. In Cambridge, Massachusetts I attended the fine Harvard Conference put together by Lenny Mather, Carl Oglesby and some of his friends. On the second night of that conference, Lenny somehow secured an advance rough cut of the upcoming *Frontline* special. Jerry Policoff, Roger Feinman, Bob

Spiegelman, Lenny and myself sat around in Lenny's small living room to view this much anticipated special. We were stunned. First by the choice of talking heads. True, John Newman and Tony Summers were on, but they were overwhelmed, engulfed, obliterated by the clear imbalance from the other side. PBS, Russo, his fellow lead reporter Scott Malone and producer Mike Sullivan made no attempt to hide their bias in the show. People like Gerald Posner, Edward Epstein, Blakey, and even well known intelligence assets like Carlos Bringuier, Priscilla McMillan, and Ed Butler were given free rein to express the most outrageous bits of propaganda about Oswald and the assassination. For example, Epstein made a comment that Oswald joined the Marines because it was a way of getting a gun. As if civilians had no access to rifles or weapons. The cut we saw even used a photographic expert associated with Itek, exposed in the 1960's as having done a lot of work for the CIA, and shown long ago by veteran Ray Marcus to have an agenda on the Kennedy assassination. Second, although people like Newman had made some important discoveries while working on the project i.e. a CIA document apparently revealing that Oswald had been debriefed when he returned from Russia, this was also drowned out by the spin of the show's content which, without clearly saying so, pointed toward Oswald as the lone gunman. One of the last bits of narration in the program was words to the effect that the secrets behind the assassination were buried with Oswald. The show was so one-sided that even Summers, at that time beginning to move into his "agnostic" phase, asked that his name be removed from the credits and that his segments be cut. Feinman was so outraged by Russo and the show that he made a strong comment about not inviting Russo to the ASK conference that year.

## Russo, Zaid, Vaughn and Co.

But Russo was invited by the conference producers who were not really that cognizant of the Kennedy case or its dynamics. If anybody needed more evidence about where Russo stood at this time, it was available at this conference. Incredibly, Russo got to chair a panel in Dallas. There were two people on this panel that I had serious doubts about, but Russo was glad to have. They were John Davis and Lamar Waldron. In *Probe*, Bill Davy and myself have written at length about why Davis is not a trustworthy writer, and as I wrote in my article on Robert Blakey in the last issue, the Review Board's release of the Brilab tapes bears this out. (Russo was one of the other culprits spreading rumors about the strong evidence on these FBI surveillance tapes sup-

posedly implicating Carlos Marcello in the assassination. The "strong evidence" has turned out to be another dry well for the Mob-did-it advocates.) On his panel, Russo gave Waldron a solid hour, unheard of at the time, to present his "evidence" for the so-called "Project Freedom" theorem i.e. the idea that the Kennedys had already set an invasion of Cuba for late 1963, the Mob found out about it and miraculously managed to turn the whole project on its head so that RFK would now have to forever remain silent about what he really knew about his brother's murder. (Don't ask me to explain all the details. Waldron didn't seem to understand them either.) I walked out when Waldron tried to state that RFK was actually in charge of his brother's autopsy. The implication being that he ordered the unbelievable practices at Bethesda that night as part of a witting or unwitting cover-up. I later heard from reliable sources that Russo and Davis revealed in Waldron's thesis. Which, in light of Davis' book on the Kennedys, and Russo's current effort, makes a lot of sense. Russo also invited Ed Butler to that conference, and reportedly, Butler prefaced his remarks by thanking his friend Russo for inviting him. The man who was testifying before Senator Thomas Dodd's subcommittee on foreign subversion within about 24 hours after the assassination. The man who was collecting material on Oswald within hours of the murder for that appearance. The man who, in the eighties, when the Iran/Contra affair and the drugs for guns trade in Central America was heating up, came into the possession of some of Guy Banister's files. And Russo knew the latter because, as Ed Haslam relates, they discovered that fact together in the spring of 1993. (See Chapter 11 of Haslam's *Mary, Ferrie, and the Monkey Virus*.)

Then there was the Myers' parallel. In Dallas, Russo was chummy with people like Todd Vaughn and Mark Zaid. In Chicago, lawyer Zaid had said that Oswald would have been convicted at trial but would have later won an appeal. In Dallas, Zaid was advocating the positions of compromised scientist Luis Alvarez, who was long ago exposed as accepting money from a CIA front group. (His defense was he didn't know it was a CIA front.) On a panel discussing Oswald, Zaid argued, Russo-like, that there was no evidence that Oswald was an intelligence agent. Reportedly, when original witnesses appeared in Dealey Plaza, Zaid distributed literature making arguments against their credibility. Vaughn was in the position of Russo: an anti-critic within the critical community. Vaughn had expressed an interest to me in David Ferrie. But every time I talked to him afterwards, he seemed to get

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Kissinger, Richard Helms, and Colin Powell went to the top and got Ted Turner and CNN chief Tom Johnson to capitulate and retract their story—about nerve gas use in Vietnam—before Smith and Oliver could defend themselves. Another point of interest in this document is that it appears to show that the files the House Select Committee on Assassinations actually saw from CIA were not all that the Agency had. It appears that the CIA's Office of Security was monitoring what the HSCA staff saw and did not see. It also appears that this arrangement was established with the leaders of the HSCA i.e. Robert Blakey and Louis Stokes. If this is so, it further proves our point about the cozy relationship between the Agency and those two men, one which we already demonstrated in the second part of our two part series on the HSCA (Vol. 5 No. 6 & Vol. 6 No. 1). We wonder if the ARRB ever got to the bottom of this "green circular dot" marking system that the notorious Office of Security was using. If so, no one has mentioned it to us yet. ♦

## Gus Russo

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more and more close to an "Oswald did it" position. (Later on, Effle and I did a talk on the Kennedy assassination in Detroit. Vaughn and Myers both showed up and afterward tried to convince us that 1) The single-bullet theory was viable and 2) Oswald would have had no problem getting three shots off in six seconds.)

### Russo vs. Wecht

I found all this quite puzzling. Why would people who apparently believed the conclusions of the Warren Commission attend a conference designed for its critics? On the last night of the conference, I decided to say something about this mini-lone-nut faction within our midst. Earlier in the year, I had written a letter to Zaid about what our coming strategy should be to try to reopen the case. (Zaid had seemed interested in this aspect and had actually met with a New York lawyer about the possibility.) He had written me back and in the response he had alerted me to the rather surprising fact that he had shown my letter to Gerald Posner, with whom both he and Russo were friendly. I mentioned that fact to the audience and then revealed some aspects of his letter to me in which he stated that we did not have enough evidence or reliable witnesses at the time to even attempt a reopening of the case. I also made some comments about Russo. Naively, I called him my friend, but I then read off the list of talking heads he had featured on his PBS show and questioned the objectivity of the show's producers. (In a conversation with me, Russo had said that he did not have editorial control of the program and I mentioned this to the audience. The implication to me was that it would have been at least a bit different if he had.)

Cyril Wecht followed me as a speaker, and at the end of his comments made a ringing declaration against inviting "fence-sitters" to any more of these seminars. He specifically mentioned Vaughn who, on the medical panel, had argued for the single-bullet theory.

That last night's panel was one of the most emotional I had ever seen at a JFK convention. John Judge, Wecht, and myself were all interrupted several times by sustained applause and Wecht's powerful peroration against equivocators brought the house down. Outside the hall, this emotional display carried over into two outbursts. Dr. Wecht had passed Russo on the escalator—Wecht was going up and Russo down—and scolded him about not including certain critical arguments against the lone-nut thesis of the PBS show. Russo came up to me

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## Gus Russo

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afterward and expressed his anger at me for singling him out in my speech. I then walked upstairs to the bar at the Hyatt Hotel. As I was proceeding, a middle-aged man who I had never seen before, but will never forget, accosted me in an undeniably emotional state. He explained to me that he knew I did not know him, but what he was going to tell me was important and borne out by experience. He told me that he had been in the leftist students association SDS in the sixties. He added that SDS did not fall from without. It fell from the inside. Its leaders later learned that some of its higher-ups had actually been FBI informants. Relating that experience to this one, he looked me in the eye and said slowly and deliberately, "Mark Zaid and Gus Russo are infiltrators." He commented on Zaid by asking me how many young lawyers I knew who left a relatively small town to join an international law firm in Washington D.C.? (Which Zaid had just done.) About Russo, he added that he had worked for a time in the television business. Programs like *Frontline* are not designed as they go. They have a slant and a content about them from the beginning that Russo had to know about going in. Since he didn't know me, he said it was difficult to bare such heavy and unkind comments but he felt he had to do it. He then expressed reservations about whether or not I believed him, or if I thought he was demented. I said no, I didn't think he was. Before he walked away, he told me that time would prove that he was right.

I had one last communication with Russo after that fateful convention. I wrote him a letter expressing how absurd it was for him to be outraged at me for mentioning him in my speech when he had put Dennis Effle's name in the credits for his program. I told him that we had gotten several calls and comments about the curious fact of a member of CTKA being credited in such a one-sided program. I also could have added that at least my comments in front of 600 people were accurate; Effle's research was nowhere to be seen in a show watched by hundreds of thousands. Russo got in contact with Effle afterwards to try to straighten out the misunderstanding. Thus ended my direct and indirect contact with Russo.

### Russo's Fateful Meeting

The next time I heard of him was in the late summer of 1994. Rumors were circulating, later verified, that Russo had lunch with two CIA heavies: former Director Bill Colby and former Miami station chief Ted Shackley. Apparently the subject under discussion was the upcom-

ing conference of the fledgling Coalition on Political Assassinations (COPA). Some very interesting things had already begun flowing out from the Review Board. Already, the understanding was that a prime goal was getting everything out about Oswald's mysterious trip to Mexico City in September of 1963. If this was done, it would greatly illuminate the role of David Phillips since the HSCA had discovered that he played a prime role in delivering the tapes to CIA HQ and making comments about what was on them to the press. When John Newman found out about this meeting, he called Colby and asked him what the problem was. Colby admitted that they were worried about what COPA had in mind for Phillips, who they felt had gotten a bum rap from the HSCA. Newman told Colby that, if that is what they were worried about, they should come after him and not COPA.

In retrospect, the timing of this meeting, and the attendees, are quite interesting. Later, Russo's pal, Bob Artwohl also admitted to being there. Artwohl, for a brief time, was Russo's authority on the medical evidence. From Artwohl, CTKA learned that a fifth person at the meeting was writer Joe Goulden, partner with Reed Irvine in that extreme rightwing, unabashedly pro-CIA journalist group *Accuracy in Media* (AIM). One of the reasons for Goulden's presence was to discuss whether or not the CIA should use one of its friendly media assets to attack COPA. (An attack did come, but not until the next year in Washington's *City Paper*.) This meeting is endlessly fascinating and literally dozens of questions could be posed about it. For instance: How did it originate and who proposed it? Why on earth did Shackley, notorious for his low profile, decide to talk to Russo? Another important point to press is: Why was Russo there at all? The PBS special was completed. After the 1993 ASK debacle, Russo knew he would not be a prime force at any conventions. He writes in the opening of his book that he never contemplated writing a volume on the case. (We will later see that this is probably disingenuous, but for sake of argument, let it stand.) In other words, Russo was at a crossroads. He was now firmly in the Warren Commission camp, having cut his ties to the critics. He had at least collected a salary for the *Frontline* show. And now he shows up at a meeting with Colby and Shackley at a time when one of the things they are contemplating is a possible discrediting of COPA.

### Russo Joins Hersh

At around the time of this meeting, Seymour Hersh was beginning his hit-piece on John F. Kennedy, *The Dark Side of Camelot*. We know from Robert Sam Anson's article in *Vanity Fair* that Hersh had wanted to do a television segment in 1993, but for some reason it never came

to fruition. At approximately that point, Hersh began on his book, for which he got a million-dollar advance. With that kind of money, he could afford to hire researchers. On the last page of his book, the following sentence appears: "Gus Russo did an outstanding job as a researcher, especially on organized crime issues." (p. 476) One of the organized crime issues that Russo apparently worked on was the Judith Exner aspect of Hersh's hatchet job. In the first installment of my two-part piece on the negative Kennedy genre I discussed Exner at length (*Probe* Vol. 4 No. 6). I explained all the many problems with Exner's credibility, how her story had mutated and evolved with every retelling. I demonstrated in detail so many aspects of it were simply not credible on their face, or even on their own terms as related by Exner and her cohorts: Kitty Kelley, Scott Meredith and Ovid DeMaris, and Liz Smith. Well, for Hersh, Exner added yet another appendage to her never-ending tale: this time she said that she had served as a courier for funds between Kennedy and Giancana (Hersh pp. 303-305). This new episode concerned a transfer of funds, a quarter of a million in hundred dollar bills, in a satchel with Exner delivering the bills via train. Kennedy told Exner that "someone will be looking out for you on the train." Exner was met in Chicago by Giancana who took the bag without saying a word. Hersh knew that this story was incredible on its face. That Giancana would himself meet a messenger and himself be seen taking a bag from her; that JFK would put himself in such an easy position to be blackmailed; and that Exner's story had now grown even beyond its already fantastic 1988 Kitty Kelley version for *People*.

### Underwood and the ARRB

Apparently Hersh, and Russo, knew this would be a tough one to swallow. So they had to come up with a corroborating witness. It turned out to be a man Exner never referred to before, but who that master of intrigue, JFK, had referred to in his above quoted cryptic quote about providing a lookout on the train. The man who Hersh says "bolstered" Exner's new claim was Martin Underwood, a former employee of Chicago mayor Richard Daley who Daley had loaned to Kennedy as an advance man for the 1960 campaign. According to Hersh, Underwood was told to watch over Exner by Kennedy's trusted aide Ken O'Donnell. Significantly, Underwood refused to appear on the ABC special that producer Mark Obenhaus made out of Hersh's book. Yet, the host of that special, Peter Jennings, did not explain why.

With the issuance of the ARRB's *Final Report*, we now know why. We also have a better idea why Jennings didn't explain it and why ABC has not commented on it since. Under



questioning by a legally constituted agency with subpoena and deposition power, the Hersh/Russo "bolstering" of Exner collapsed. Underwood "denied that he followed Judith Campbell Exner on a train and that he had no knowledge about her alleged role as a courier." (p. 136) And with the implosion of this story, Exner is now exposed as at least partly a creation of CIA friendly journalists in the media. This is the same Exner who in the January 1997 *Vanity Fair*, actually talked about the Review Board uncovering documents and tapes that would strengthen her story. There are a couple of questions still left about this new revelation of another Hersh deception. Did Underwood ever actually tell Hersh or Russo the tall-tale that is in the book? Did Underwood also actually deny the story to Jennings or Obenhaus? And if he did, and if this is the reason for Underwood's refusal to appear, did ABC keep this a secret in order to further protect Hersh and their investment? (As I noted in my discussion of ABC's exposure of the previous Monroe hoax, Jennings did a carefully constructed limited hangout to minimize the damage to Hersh in that scandal. See *Probe* Vol. 5 No. 1.)

But the Review Board's *Final Report* goes even further in its detailing of the Russo-Underwood association. (The report does not actually name Russo but it labels their source as a researcher working for Hersh, and the 12/7 issue of *The Nation* wrote that it was Russo who led Hersh and ABC to Underwood.) It appears that Russo went to the Board with a story that Underwood had gone to Mexico City in 1966 or 1967. He was on a mission for LBJ to find out what he could learn about the Kennedy assassination from station chief Win Scott. Russo presented the Board with handwritten notes detailing what Scott told Underwood while on his mission for Johnson. The ARRB writes this summary of the notes:

The notes state that Scott told Underwood that the CIA "blew it" in Dallas in November 1963. On the morning of November 22, the agency knew that a plane had arrived in Mexico City from Havana, and that one passenger got off the plane and boarded another one headed for Dallas. Underwood's notes state that Scott said that CIA identified the passenger as Fabian Escalante. (p. 135)

What an extraordinary story. Escalante was a former officer in Castro's internal security police who was responsible for protecting him against assassination plots. So if the Underwood story is true, it would neatly fit into the pattern of Russo's book i.e. that Castro killed Kennedy as retaliation for the CIA plots against himself.

The ARRB interviewed Underwood about his trip to Mexico. He said he took the trip but it was in his function as an advance man for Johnson, not to look into the Kennedy murder.

When the Board asked him about any notes he had taken on the trip, he initially claimed to have no memory of any notes. When the Board showed him the copies of notes that Russo had given them, Underwood replied that he had written those notes especially for the use of Hersh in his book. In other words, they were written in this decade. They were composed on White House stationery because he had a lot of it still laying around from his White House days. But Underwood insisted that Scott had told him what Russo had said about Escalante. The problem was that Underwood could not even recall if he had contemporaneous notes from his talks with Scott. But later, he did forward a set of typewritten notes from his trip to Mexico. They only briefly mentioned his meeting with Win Scott. And there is no mention of the Kennedy assassination in them. Ultimately, the Board asked Underwood to testify about the Scott anecdote under oath. He begged off due to health problems.

### Russo Savages the Critics

Between his work for Hersh and on the ABC special, Russo has presumably been preparing his book, *Live By the Sword*. For me, the two most important parts of this book are the introduction and the first appendix. In the former, Russo takes up the mantle of the young Kennedy fan who has now been educated to understand that many of the early books critical of the Warren Commission were "ideologically-driven" and that:

Ideologues are dangerous enough, but the books and authors of this time inspired a clique of followers, all with a pathological hatred of the U. S. government. These "conspirators" would make any leap of logic necessary in order to say that Lee Oswald had been an unwitting pawn of the evil government conspirators.

And this is just the beginning of Russo venting his spleen against the critical community. Research seminars are called the "conspiracy convention circuit" (p. 469). The dust jacket places the two words—Kennedy researchers—in quotation marks. The "assassination buffs" have misled Marina Oswald (p. 569). The research community is labeled a "cottage industry" (p. 575).

After his opening blast against the critics, Russo then details the episode that convinced him that Oswald did it himself. He says the HSCA convinced him of this. (Russo writes that the HSCA "geared up" in 1978. It actually started in September of 1976.) About the HSCA, he writes, "It was their meticulous photographic, forensic, and ballistic work that convinced me that Oswald alone shot President Kennedy." This is a revealing comment. For as detailed above, when I first encountered Russo in the early nineties, he appeared to be in the

high-level conspiracy camp. Revealing also was the fact that he now says that he advised Stone against doing a film based on the Garrison probe. Neither Russo, Rusconi nor anyone connected with the film ever told me this had happened. In the introduction, and throughout the book, he relentlessly pillories Garrison from every angle. Yet, at the 1993 meeting Dennis Effle and I had with him in Santa Monica, Russo actually said words to the effect that Garrison had been very close to solving the case. (Significantly, in his introductory attack on Stone and Garrison, Russo leaves out the fact that he worked for Stone on the accompanying volume to *JFK*, entitled *JFK: The Book of the Film*.)

There is something else that surprised me while reading this brief but (for some of us) pithy introduction. It now appears that the whole PBS *Frontline* documentary was Russo's idea in the first place! It seems that Russo had pitched the idea to PBS in the eighties. Then when Stone's film was in production, he pitched the idea to them again. This time, with the 30th anniversary approaching and Stone's film sure to create a sensation, they bit.

Russo also presents another quite paradoxical point in his introduction when he writes: "I never intended to write a book on this case." He explains this further by adding: "I never thought anyone could write a book on this subject because all the secrets were well beyond the grasp of anyone without subpoena power." He says that the main thing that changed his mind was the year he spent going through the release of new JFK files made possible by the Board. The Board did not start any serious release of files until 1995. And the files that Russo is interested in, the Cuba policy files, were not released until two years after that. Yet, when I visited his home in Baltimore at the end of 1992, Russo told me about the six figure contract he had already signed with a major publishing house with the help of New York agent Stirling Lord. He was then teamed with another writer and Russo actually explained some of the details of the contract to me. When Russo's partner dropped out of the project, that contract was apparently canceled. But he was certainly doing a book at that earlier time.

### Russo, Vaughn, and Myers vs. Oswald

Where Russo loses all credibility is with his Appendix A entitled "Oswald's Shooting of the President". (Here, Russo writes another confusing sentence to the effect that from 1963 to the early eighties, he doubted Oswald's lone guilt in the shooting. Yet, as I noted earlier, in his introduction, he wrote that the HSCA studies convinced him otherwise. The HSCA report came out in 1979.) This is the section

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## Gus Russo

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where Russo tries, in 1998, to again cinch the case against Oswald. He has to go through this tired litany because if he doesn't there is no book. And since he knows 80% of the public disbelieves him anyway, he has to make the attempt to show that he just might believe it himself. As most observers of the Review Board will agree, one of its finest achievements was the extensive, detailed review of the medical evidence conducted over many months by Chief Counsel Jeremy Gunn. This package of materials was available early in 1998, so Russo could have included it in the book. It consisted of 3,000 pages of compelling evidence, much of it new, that greatly alter the entire dynamic of this case. Most objective observers would say that it shows that something consciously sinister went on during and after Kennedy's autopsy in Bethesda, Maryland. It is the kind of evidence one could present in a court of law. So how much time does Review Board watcher Russo devote to this absolutely crucial part of the case? All of four pages. How much of those four pages deal with Gunn's new and powerful evidence? Not one word. To show just how serious Russo is in this section, toward the end he trots out his buddies Vaughn and Myers. Russo uses Vaughn to show that, actually, everyone was all wrong about how difficult it would be to fire three shots in six seconds with Oswald's alleged Mannlicher-Carcano rifle. What the Warren Commission accused Oswald of doing was really not difficult at all. Yet from what I could see, Vaughn never actually accomplished this. His fastest time was 6.3 seconds and on that firing round, he did not use the scope on the rifle. Recall that the time allotted to Oswald by the Warren Commission was 5.6 seconds (Warren Report p. 115). Further undermining his own argument, Russo never describes what Vaughn's rounds were fired at, or where he was firing from, or at what distance, or if the target was moving or not.

In spite of all this, Russo moves on and clinches the case against Oswald with Dale Myers' computer recreation of the assassination. This rather embarrassing computer model of the events in Dealey Plaza was published in the magazine *Video Toaster* in late 1994. As we have mentioned before, Dr. David Mantik ripped this pseudo-scientific demonstration to bits in *Probe* (Vol. 2 No. 3). Myers actually wrote that, by removing the Stemmons Freeway sign from his computer screen, he could see both Kennedy and Gov. John Connally jump in reaction to the Warren Commission's single bullet piercing them

both at frame Z-223. As Mantik wrote, this "is both astonishing and perplexing.... If it does not appear in the original Z film (that would appear to be impossible since both men were hidden behind the sign), then where did Myers find it? This startling assertion is not addressed in his paper." Mantik exposed the rest of Myers' methodology and candor to be equally faulty as his "two men jumping in unison" scenario. I would be shocked if Russo is not aware of this skewering inflicted on his friend Myers. Why? Because Myers sent CTKA a check for that particular issue once he heard Mantik had left him without a leg to stand on.

With such a weak performance, one would think that Russo would at least qualify his judgment in this section. He doesn't. In one of the most appalling statements in an appalling book, the judicious Russo can write:

When first proposed by the Warren Commission, it was known as "The Single Bullet Theory." With its verification by current, high-powered computer reconstructions, it should be called "The Single Bullet Fact." (p. 477)

This ludicrous statement and the foundation of quicksand on which it is supported expose the book as the propaganda tract it is.

### Russo's Real Agenda

What is the purpose of the tract? If one is knowledgeable of the significance of this case, and is aware of the dynamic guiding it today, one realizes the not-too-subtle message behind the book. And when one does, one can see what is at stake in the JFK case, and how Stone's movie drove the establishment up the wall. For the book is really the negative template to JFK. The main tenets of Stone's film were: 1) Oswald did not kill Kennedy; 2) Kennedy was actually killed by an upper-level domestic conspiracy; 3) he was a good, if flawed president, who had sympathetic goals in mind for the nation; 4) the country was altered by Kennedy's death; and 5) the cover-up that ensued was, of necessity, wide and deep to hide the nature of the plot. If we can agree on that set, then compare them with Russo's themes. The main tenets of this book are in every way the inverse: 1) Oswald killed Kennedy; 2) Oswald was guided and manipulated by agents of Castro; 3) Kennedy's own Cuba policies were the reasons behind the murder; 4) we didn't understand Oswald at the time because Bobby Kennedy and the CIA were forced into a cover-up of JFK's covert actions against Cuba; and 5) whatever cynicism about government exists today was caused by the RFK—CIA benignly motivated cover-up. In other words, all the ruckus stirred up by Stone was unfounded. That Crazy Commie Oswald did it, and JFK had it

coming. And it wasn't the Warren Commission, or LBJ, or the intelligence agencies that covered things up, it was his brother Bobby. So let's close up shop and go home. All this anguish over Kennedy and Oswald isn't worth it.

When one indulges in this kind of total psychological warfare, the reader knows that something monumental is at stake. And I mean total. For the singularity of Russo's book is that it does not just attack the critical community, or just JFK, or just Bobby Kennedy, or only Oswald. It does all this and at the same time it attempts to make fascist zealots like David Ferrie and Guy Banister into warm, cuddly persons. Extremists, but understandably so. Kennedy would have actually liked them. (I won't go into how he does this; but it is as torturous and dishonest as the stunts he pulls with the single bullet theory.) It has often been said that the solution to the Kennedy murder, if the conspiracy is ever really exposed, will unlock the doors to the national security state. The flights of fantasy that this book reaches for in order to whitewash that state and to turn the crime inward on Oswald and the Kennedys, is a prime exhibit for the efficacy of that argument.

What is one to make of Russo's journey from Delk Simpson to Robert Morrow to the single-bullet *fact* (Russo's italics)? Could he really have believed the likes of Blakey and the HSCA, which I have taken the last two issues to expose in depth and at length? That is, is he really just not that bright? If so, in his forays into the critical community, was he at least partly dissembling to hide what he really believed? Or does he know better and is dissembling now to curry favor with the establishment? Or did he just never have any real convictions and decided to go with the flow? Consequently, when Stone was at high tide, he pursued a military intelligence lead. When the reaction against Stone set in, he adjusted to the lone-nut scenario. How, in just one year, does someone go from following a grand conspiracy lead (Simpson), to a low-level plot (Morrow), to a straight Oswald did it thesis, which is the road Russo traveled from 1992 to 1993. I don't pretend to know the answer. To echo the closing words on Russo's PBS special about Oswald: only one man knows the truth about that mystery. But I will relate the newest riddle circulating around the research community in the wake of Russo's phony pastiche. It goes as follows: What happens when you throw Gerald Posner, ice cream, Priscilla McMillan, nuts, Sy Hersh, strawberries, and Thomas Powers in a Waring blender? You get the Gus Russo Special i.e. *Live By the Sword*. ♣