

Charles Bartlett

The Schweiker disclosures

The fresh disclosures on President Kennedy's assassination by Sen. Richard Schweiker, R-Pa., raise intriguing questions but they do not, as he suggests, vitiate the findings of the Warren Commission.

Schweiker's claim that his probings leave the nation with no further cause to have faith in the Warren Commission is an exaggeration. The senator has, it is true, found a gap in the commission's inquiry and he has somewhat laboriously woven a tapestry of assorted facts that point to Fidel Castro as the man behind Lee Harvey Oswald.

Kennedy assassination buffs will be stimulated to new frenzies by Schweiker's discovery that the commission did not prod the CIA or the FBI into extensive inquiries on the Cuban angle. There was more concern with Oswald's links to Russia than with his friendliness toward Castro. One member, former Sen. John Sherman Cooper, is quoted as saying that he doesn't recall any deep discussions of the Castro angle.

It is clearer now than it was then, even to members of the commission, that Castro had some cause to consider retaliatory measures against the American President. Richard Helms, then CIA director of operations, could have made the situation clearer by informing the commission that the agency had taken serious

steps, with presidential backing, to bump off Castro. But as Helms testified later, no one asked him about it and the agency had lots of license in those days to keep its secrets to itself.

But President Kennedy had not hidden his anxiety to see Castro out of the way. In his Miami speech four days before his death, he talked of Castro's small band of conspirators as the only obstacle to good Cuban-American relations. "Once this barrier is removed," he declared, "we will be ready and anxious to work with the Cuban people." These words could have prompted the commission to consider Castro's reaction.

However, Schweiker seems to be stretching his case when he links the assassination to the CIA negotiations with AMLASH, a high Cuban official who was entreating U.S. support for a coup d'etat. Agency officials refused to give AMLASH the weapons he wanted or to have any part of his assassination plans until almost the same hour the President was shot. This sad irony makes it hard to believe that Dallas was a retaliation for the AMLASH dealings.

Similarly, Schweiker's case gains interest but little added weight from his fascinating description of J. Edgar Hoover's dog-in-the-manger dealings with the Warren Commission. Hoover's

inclination to put the FBI's reputation ahead of its duty to work closely with the commission does not seem as surprising now as it might have in 1964. The country has learned a lot about the kinds of games Hoover played.

But the FBI and CIA spared no efforts to establish the range of Oswald's contacts, and nothing in the Schweiker findings ties him any closer to Cuban intelligence. He brawled on the street and talked on the radio in behalf of Castro in New Orleans. He did not hide from his wife his frustrated attempt to reach Havana. This is not the behavior pattern of a man tapped for a secret mission.

Schweiker has turned up some question marks. It would be interesting to learn more about the two men who slipped into Mexico and flew to Cuba soon after the assassination. Perhaps more scrutiny should be given to Castro's unusual interview with an American reporter three months before the assassination. He warned then that American leaders would be in danger if they assisted any attempt to do away with Cuban leaders.

But the grim episode should not be stirred into another formal investigation unless there is new information which flatly refutes the conclusions by the Warren Commission. The Schweiker disclosures do not justify another inquiry.