

THE HOUSE SELECT COMMITTEE ON ASSASSINATIONS

Doubt over the Warren Commission's conclusion blaming a "lone gunman," combined with burgeoning conspiracy theories and the assassinations of the Rev. Martin Luther King and Sen. Robert F. Kennedy, resulted finally in Congressional examination into the deaths of President Kennedy and King in 1976.

Specifically, in September of that year, the United States Congress passed special legislation, termed House Resolution 1540, creating "The House Select Committee on Assassinations." Resolution 1540 directed the Congress by means of the select committee to conduct a full and complete investigation surrounding the deaths of President John F. Kennedy and Dr. Martin Luther King.

In December 1978, after two controversial years of work and the expenditure of \$5.8 million, Committee members were poised to concur with the Warren Commission's bottom-line belief that Lee Harvey Oswald, acting alone, had assassinated President Kennedy, wounded Governor Connally and killed Officer Tippit, and that there was no conspiracy.

However, less than three weeks later, a major reversal occurred. The 600-plus page report was rejected, and on December 29, 1978, a majority of the Committee approved a seven-page "Summary of Findings and Recommendations." While still implicating Oswald, the Summary stated that President

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John F. Kennedy "was probably assassinated as a result of a conspiracy."

As with the Warren Commission, major focus was given to the "lone gunman" scenario. The Committee based its newly formed conclusions on the testimony of acoustical experts Mark Weiss and Ernest Aschkenasy. The two had analyzed the Dicta-belt recording of sounds picked up by a microphone on a Dallas police motorcycle.

That recording was compared with others made of shooting tests. The two experts determined there was a high probability (95%) that there was gunfire from two spots along the route of the Kennedy motorcade -- one from the Texas School Book Depository, and the other from what has become known as "the grassy knoll" in Dealey Plaza, to the right front of the passing Presidential limousine.

CONSPIRACY CONCLUSIONS:

The Committee's activities and subsequent findings did little, however, to explore conspiracy theories or conclude what other individual or individuals acted with Oswald. The Committee Report stated that "based on the evidence available to it, the Soviet Union, Cuba, organized crime or anti-Castro groups were not responsible for the Kennedy assassination." But the panel did conclude it was possible that individual members of organized crime or anti-Castro groups might have been involved.

Also, while not implicated in the assassination, the FBI, CIA, and the Justice Department were highly criticized in

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the Summary for their failings following the assassination.

THE JFK SUBCOMMITTEE PRINCIPALS:

The Select Committee was comprised of 12 members, divided into two subcommittees, one directing the investigation of the President's death and the other that of Martin Luther King.

Congressman Louis Stokes (D-Ohio) - Stokes, who remains in the Congress today, chaired the full Committee. He had little prior experience dealing with intelligence investigations and intelligence agencies.

Congressman Richardson Preyer (D-NC) - The Chairman of the JFK Subcommittee, Preyer expressed doubt about the Warren findings.

Congressman Christopher Dodd (D-CT) - Dodd, now a U.S. senator, wrote a strong dissenting opinion on the final Report, and was very strong in his belief Oswald did not act alone. He highly criticized both the FBI and the CIA, stating at the time that "the attitude of being in some way above the law still lingers in these agencies."

Congressman Samuel L. Devine (R-OH) - Devine co-authored a dissenting opinion which argued the determination of a "high probability of conspiracy" must be rejected.

Congresswoman Yvonne Brathwaite Burke (D-CA) - Burke was often absent from the hearings and did not take a strong stance in Committee meetings.

Congressman Charles Thone (R-NE) - Thone was a latecomer

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to the Committee and played little role in its activities and determinations.

Congressman Harold B. Sawyer (R-MI) - Sawyer also joined the Committee later and played a minor role.

OTHER IMPORTANT FIGURES:

Henry B. Gonzales (D-TX) - The original chairman of the Select Committee, he strongly supports its findings.

Richard E. Schweiker (R-PA, Senator) - Now a lawyer in private practice, Schweiker headed the Schweiker-Hart Subcommittee of the Church Committee (which investigated the abuses of the intelligence agencies.) Repulsed by the Church Committee revelations of CIA assassination plots, Schweiker, then a supporter of the Warren Commission findings, did an about-face and formed his own subcommittee (with Sen. Gary Hart) which accomplished more in its short life span -- many believe -- than did either the Warren Commission or the HSCA, actually treating the CIA with something other than kid gloves. Schweiker's staff developed some important leads and investigated them. Many concerned Oswald's ties to the CIA and anti-Castro Cubans. Schweiker abandoned his post to become Ronald Reagan's running mate in his unsuccessful '76 presidential campaign.

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11/25/91