

TODAY SHOW

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...the assassination of John Kennedy he has developed a new conspiracy theory. One of the people involved in his conspiracy will be here as well saying that "No, indeed, he did not take part in it." This is a former CIA agent who is a Latin-American station chief. Anyhow, that will be coming up during the first half hour or today and later we'll have a report on...

There's a new book out that you're going to be hearing a great deal about and it's written by this man over here, Anthony Summers. He's a British journalist, former BBC investigative reporter, who took some time off a few years ago to begin writing books. Says he has uncovered important new evidence now possibly linking CIA agents with a conspiracy to assassinate John F. Kennedy and a man who knows all about that, who shows up in the book in one form or another, is David Atlee Phillips, who was the CIA's Latin-American station chief during the Kennedy years. First, Mr. Summers we are going to begin with you.

BROKAW: What prompted you to write this book after all the attention that this investigation and assassination has received already?

SUMMERS: You know I think there's a great national weariness about the Kennedy assassination because of the years of rumor and counter-rumor. I was brought into the case reluctantly when Congress's Assassinations Committee was working two or three years ago. First I did a documentary which was shown on the BBC and over here, and when I went down the road and did the journalish, started wearing out the shoe leather, I

found that I was seeing relevant important witnesses, who had never been visited by the media before and in some cases had never been visited by -- even by law enforcement. That somewhat shocked me and I started working on what has ended up as the book.

BROKAW:

We can't go through this obviously paragraph by paragraph. But let me, if I can, summarize what you concluded about Lee Harvey Oswald based on your investigation.

That he was a kind of a double agent, that he posed as a very pro-communist sympathizer, pro-Castro, pro-Soviet Union, but, in fact, you conclude in a way that he was really a right-winger, he was a kind of a low level CIA operative and that he had connections with the CIA before the assassination of John Kennedy. Is that a fair...?

SUMMERS:

I think to say the CIA at any point in this whole story is wrong. American intelligence was and is an octopus with many legs, and I don't conclude as such that he was definitely anything at all. I think, however, it's too simplistic just to say that he was a lone left-wing zealot. What I would also like to add is that I think the starting point of this book, and any new consideration of the Kennedy assassination is the fact that last year Congress's Assassination Committee, which you all paid for, concluded that there was a conspiracy in the sense that there were two gunmen in Dealey Plaza. The directions that the Committee looked to for its conspiracy were the anti-Castro movement and organized crime. Lee

Harvey Oswald apparently, the Lee Oswald that we know from official reports in the past fitted neither of those frames.

BROKAW: Let's jump now to a man by the name of Antonio Veciana who was an anti-Castro leader. He was a member of "Alpha 66."

SUMMERS: He was the civilian leader of "Alpha 66" which was one of the most militant and best known anti-Castro guerrilla groups in 1963, yes.

BROKAW: He told you that he saw Lee Harvey Oswald in the company of who?

SUMMERS: Veciana says that his U.S. intelligence case officer who was code-named, according to him, Maurice Bishop, was during 1963 attempting to subvert American national policy by causing trouble in the wake of the missile crisis, a very dangerous time between the United States and the Soviet Union over Cuba. He says that about eight weeks before the assassination he saw Maurice Bishop, his case officer in the company of Lee Oswald, and he also says, which I think in a way is more disquieting that after the assassination this case officer asked him to fabricate, to help fabricate evidence linking Oswald with Castro-Cuban diplomats.

BROKAW: Now there has been some suggestion that this man Mr. Bishop is the same man who is our other guest here this morning, and he's here to deny that. We are going to show you the artist's rendering made by Mr. Veciana and this man who is, as you know, David Lee Phillips. He

was the Latin-American station chief at the time. There is a remarkable physical similarity. Would you agree with that, Mr. Phillips?

PHILLIPS: There is some similarity, yes.

BROKAW: But, you met Mr. Veciana, didn't you now?

PHILLIPS: Yes, I have. Indeed I have.

BROKAW: Had you met him before the Senate investigators brought him to be interviewed?

PHILLIPS: I met him in 1976 when the investigation first began. Mr. Brokaw, I do want to say that I have mixed emotions about being on this program. I don't want to promote the sales of this book, but I do appreciate the opportunity to defend myself, since the author did not. Welcome to America, Mr. Summers. I accuse you of assassination. The dictionary tells us there are two definitions of that: one is killing people and the other is viciously denigrating the person, as in to assassinate a man's character. You've written a book which encourages the reader, indeed, cajoles the reader to believe that I was somehow involved in the Kennedy assassination. You've done that by writing a book which supports your contentions putting in the things and then throwing in a barrel of question marks. Well, in the short time that we have, I think you owe me the answer to three questions:

1. You say you interviewed all the relative [sic] witnesses? Mr. Summers, why didn't you interview me?
2. I'm going to ask you in this section on Veciana and Bishop, did you write this alone or did someone else

work with you? Did you have a collaborator, specifically a man named Gaeton Fonzi? I ask you that, and

3. I ask you to explain what you don't say in this book. What was Mr. Veciana doing during 1974 and 1975?

SUMMERS: I'd like first of all to answer you on your first point which is you say that I, effectively, that I assassinate your character in the book. What I actually do is to report what the Assassinations Committee itself said in its report and in Volume X of its Appendices. Which is precisely what we were talking about just now which is that the Assassinations Committee considered the possibility that you might have been the said Maurice Bishop. I have made no suggestion in the book, indeed, I specifically disclaim the notion that Maurice Bishop, let alone David Phillips, was involved in the assassination. I merely indicated that there may have been a connection between Lee Oswald and Maurice Bishop.

BROKAW: We have a moment or so here -- we are going to continue with this in the next half-hour but let's get through the three questions. Why didn't you interview him?

SUMMERS: I didn't interview him because I... his name did not surface publicly at all until after the Assassinations Committee came out and I have been....

PHILLIPS: My name did not surface publicly? This is my third appearance on the Today Show.

SUMMERS: Not so far...

PHILLIPS: I have been... BBC in London twice, French National

television, Canadian television.

SUMMERS: No, not so far as this matter of Bishop is concerned.

PHILLIPS: I beg your pardon. It surfaced in...

BROKAW: Did you write it in connection, did you write it with someone else, this section of the book?

SUMMERS: Absolutely not. I wrote the book entirely on my own, but I have had access to Committee sources, which is the normal -- part of the normal work of an investigative reporter.

BROKAW: And the third part of the question?

SUMMERS: What was the third part of your question?

PHILLIPS: What was Mr. Veciana doing during 1974 and 1975?

SUMMERS: In 1974 and 1975, as I have not mentioned in my book...

PHILLIPS: You have certainly...

SUMMERS: ...and I have not mentioned it because it is not mentioned in the final report of the Assassinations Committee. Mr. Veciana was serving time in a Federal prison in connection with narcotic offences. I have no problem with that. There is a long and complicated background to that issue. The point is that in 1963, Mr. Veciana was, as the readers of Time Magazine and Life magazine would know, the leader of one of the top anti-Castro guerilla groups in this country.

BROKAW: All right. Mr. Summers, Mr. Phillips, we're going to come back to more of this, but first we have to go away for a little while...

BROKAW: ...who has done a major new book on the assassination of

John Kennedy. We've had a confrontation here on Today with a man whose name appears frequently in that book, a former CIA station chief for South America. His name is David Phillips and he had a series of questions that he made and asked of Mr. Summers. We're going to pick that up again because....

We have here with us an investigative reporter from Great Britain by the name of Anthony Summers who has written a book called Conspiracy about the assassination of John Kennedy. We also have with us a former CIA Agent, Latin-American Station Chief of the CIA, his name is David Lee Phillips. They are here together because Mr. Phillips' name comes up frequently in a book written by Mr. Summers about the possibility of a conspiracy involving some CIA operatives and members of the intelligence apparatus and the assassination of John Kennedy. Mr. Phillips asked a series of questions of Mr. Sumner a few moments ago -- most of those, I gather, were at least answered, maybe not to your satisfaction.

PHILLIPS: Partially.

BROKAW: Partially answered. Well, let's get back to this business of Antonio Veciana, who is a key figure in all of this. He says that he worked for a CIA man by the name of Bishop who was seen in the company of Lee Harvey Oswald before the assassination of John Kennedy, and there is the suggestion in this book and also in the Senate investigation that you might be one and the same man as Mr. Bishop. But, in all fairness, you accuse Mr. Summers

of saying that you have been identified as that man in his book. He makes it plain that the Assassination Committee considering whether former Mexico CIA officer David Phillips was Bishop was not satisfied by his denials nor by Veciana's, so the search for Bishop continues. Are you satisfied that he is not Mr. Bishop, Mr. Summers?

SUMMERS: No, I have merely reported what Congress's Assassinations Committee said. I think it is significant certainly that the Committee, not me, no coup of mine, that the Committee found a former CIA case officer who worked in Miami at the same time that Mr. Phillips was involved in anti-Castro operations, and he did say that he was almost positive that David Phillips did use the code name or the common name Maurice Bishop.

PHILLIPS: I certainly would like to have an opportunity to talk to that gentleman. His name is not given in the book. It's a pseudonym, and that sort of thing. A cover name. Throughout this book it says that the Committee doubted me, they didn't believe what I was saying. I deny that, and I suggest that you, Mr. Brokaw, might contact Congressman Richardson Preyer who is the head of that Committee on Assassinations and ask him if that charge is true. Now, when the program closed a few minutes ago you said [something to the effect that Veciana's imprisonment was not in the HSCA Report] ... I beg your pardon, it certainly was in the report.

SUMMERS: It was not in the final report.

PHILLIPS: ...It was in the Appendix of the Report and the incredible

part about it, which could change this whole entire story of Mr. Veciana, is the circumstances. Now, the fact that Mr. Veciana....

BROKAW: He was put in a federal penitentiary on drug charges.

PHILLIPS: Yes, and the fact that he is an ex-convict doesn't mean that his story is not necessarily true except in the context...

SUMMERS: ...the record of Antonio Veciana is one of a courageous exile leader, whatever one thinks of exile politics. His associates don't think he is... say that he is a man of absolute integrity, and he has absolutely no crime record whatsoever...

PHILLIPS: It says in the report that he came out of the prison and immediately told Congressional investigators that he thought he was in there because of the CIA. He told another witness that he thought the CIA had framed him. This gives a whole new light.

SUMMERS: No, it did not arise like that. He did not volunteer information. And he was visited in the prison because of his role -- it was not in the prison, he was out of prison by that time. He was visited while on parole because of his past, as an anti-Castro leader.

PHILLIPS: Mr. Summers, I read the same material you used for your book. He said he thought he was framed by the CIA. That's a motivation.

SUMMERS: Excuse me. You said just now, and I want to catch you on your points because you're coming out with them one after the other. You said that you felt that the Committee was wholly satisfied with your responses in general.

Now what the Report actually says in a long footnote is that...

PHILLIPS: A footnote.

SUMMERS: Yes.

PHILLIPS: Written by a Mr. Fonzi. Mr. Fonzi, the man that you said is in the final report of the Committee and had nothing to do with the book.

SUMMERS: It's in the Final Committee Report -- a Congressional Report. Now, it says that the Committee suspected that Veciana, the witness, was lying when he denied that the retired CIA officer, that's Mr. Phillips -- was Bishop, to protect the officer from exposure. For his part, David Phillips, the retired officer, aroused the Committee's suspicion when he told the Committee...

PHILLIPS: I deny that I aroused the Committee's suspicion.

SUMMERS: That's what it says in the Congressional Report.

PHILLIPS: No, that's what is written in a footnote.

SUMMERS: But, I'm reading from the Report.

PHILLIPS: Listen, I find myself in the position of having to prove a negative. I'm a writer, too. I've written three books. Now, let's say that I have a theory and the theory is that Willard Scott's job here is really just a cover. Willard Scott is Santa Claus. So, if I write a dishonest book, I can convince a lot of people that every December Willard Scott... and goes down chimneys.

SUMMERS: I think that your audience should also know that when Mr. Phillips said that he had mixed feelings about appearing on this program, I wish to point out that he is on this program not because this program sought him

out, or, indeed, because I would have wanted him to be on this program, but because he volunteered. He wrote to NBC.

PHILLIPS: To defend myself.

SUMMERS: Just in case the program might be doing an item on my book. Thus, has...

PHILLIPS: Mr. Summers, you have not accused me of taking dimes from parking meters. You have accused me of being involved in the Kennedy assassination.

SUMMERS: I have done nothing of the sort.

PHILLIPS: It's false. The promotional material sent out by your publisher to this media -- to the media for book reviewers -- says "the most serious accusations in the book concern specific senior American intelligence officers."

SUMMERS: No, it does not say that.

PHILLIPS: I beg your pardon.

SUMMERS: It does not say that. It says that the most specific serious allegation is the allegation that there was a link between a man called Maurice Bishop and Lee Oswald, and nowhere in the book do I suggest that I know who Maurice Bishop is.

PHILLIPS: It's right there.

SUMMERS: I do report the Congressional... It is not. I report the Congressional Committee considering the possibility...

PHILLIPS: May I have one last word?

BROKAW: You may have one last word, and Mr. Summers may have one last word. Then, we have to move on to other...

SUMMERS: I report that merely the Congressional Committee

considered in its final report and elsewhere the possibility that you were Maurice Bishop. You are the only name they mention as a possibility, that I have drawn no conclusion so I certainly wouldn't now.

BROKAW: Your final word, Mr. Phillips.

PHILLIPS: All right, Mr. Summers is trying to sell his book. I've read only one review. It was in the Times of London. It noted that he has a previous book, a conspiracy book, and they called that a book of "immense silliness." And, finally, that review ended with his theory, and it stated flatly...

SUMMERS: I have to come back on that one...

PHILLIPS: And, it won't wash...

SUMMERS: This is the same tactic as you used in a BBC interview against the Congressional Investigator Gaeton Fonzi. In fact, in general, in all the other serious newspapers in England and so far in this country my book has been reviewed well. You called the Congressional investigator a man who had written about his paranoia about the Kennedy assassination.

PHILLIPS: That's true.

SUMMERS: The fact is I know the article very well. I got it in my pile here. It's a tongue in cheek article by a serious journalist entitled...

PHILLIPS: "Me and my Paranoia."

SUMMERS: And, it's a tongue in cheek article, written in the beginning of the 70's. Mr. Fonzi is a man with a string of American investigative reporting awards from Bar Associations and elsewhere.

BROKAW: Let's move on, if we can here, to your final conclusion about which you generally conclude. This personality and other names besides, is that Lee Harvey Oswald... Lee Harvey Oswald was, as I say, a kind of double agent, a man who was in his heart a hard conservative right-winger who was anti-Castro.

SUMMERS: I say that we cannot exclude that possibility.

BROKAW: But that's the general conclusion that one will have from reading the book. I mean almost everything that you develop leads in that direction.

SUMMERS: I say we can't ignore the evidence that points in that direction.

BROKAW: And, that there ought to be another investigation.

SUMMERS: I... yes. The Chief Counsel of Congress's Assassinations Committee, Professor Blakey, has said that there should be a Justice Department investigation...