

JFK Plot Leads May Have Been Neglected

By Michael Dorman
SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Long-secret testimony from the former chief of the Secret Service and one of his top aides reveals that several reported conspiracies to assassinate President John F. Kennedy may not have been fully investigated.

The 1978 testimony, just released by a federal agency, was offered to a congressional committee by James Rowley, Secret Service chief at the time of Kennedy's 1963 murder, and Thomas Kelley, who directed the service's investigation. They said the Secret Service began investigations into various reported assassination plots, but several days after the assassination President Lyndon B. Johnson ordered that the FBI conduct the criminal investigation. The Secret Service continued investigating — but only for the purpose of uncovering information needed to safeguard people under its protection — and turned its leads on purported conspiracies over to the FBI.

Both Rowley and Kelley said the Secret Service never learned whether the FBI pursued those leads to logical conclusions. Most involved Cubans of various political colorations — including Fidel Castro. Others involved right-wingers and the Ku Klux Klan. At least one surfaced before the assassination.

At one point in Rowley's testimony before the House Select Committee on Assassinations, committee counsel Leodis Matthews asked about a group of anti-Castro Chicago Cubans "who may have had a connection in the assassination of President Kennedy." Matthews noted that a Secret Service informant had reported to an agent that one of these Cubans had told him before the assassination: "We now have plenty of money, and as soon as we take care of Kennedy . . ." An interruption followed. Rowley said the investigation had been pursued until the Secret Service was told to turn its information over to the FBI.

"You do have a recollection of yourself being under the impression the Secret Service was to cease all investigations into the Kennedy assassination?" Matthews asked.

"My impression was that, yes," Rowley said. "I know definitely the order [to take over the investigation] was given by the president to the FBI."

Matthews, in testimony released by the U.S. Assassination Records Review Board, questioned Rowley about other Cuban activists — including a former delegate to the United Nations described as "a well-known terrorist." Rowley testified: "From all appearances, it would appear that there would be a conspiracy."

Rowley and Kelley, both now dead, testified that the Secret Service was never informed of the outcomes of the investigations referred to the FBI. But it is known that the FBI failed to complete one such investigation involving Hemario Echevarria, a member of the

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Other testimony involved a Miami Secret Service report on a right-wing activist named Joseph Milteer. Thirteen days before the Kennedy assassination, a Secret Service agent obtained a tape recording quoting Milteer as saying Kennedy would soon be assassinated by a rifleman from a high window in a downtown business district. Asked why the Secret Service did not put Milteer and his associates under 24-hour surveillance, Kelley replied that the service did not have enough manpower.

Officials of the Assassinations Review Board said it would not be practical at this point to determine what action, if any, the FBI took on each lead provided by the Secret Service. The FBI did not comment.



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