

SENATOR SCHWEIKER REOPENS ASSASSINATION PROBE

The Finger Points to Fidel, But Should It?

BY DICK RUSSELL

The death of a president is once again at hand. With CIA comicbook plots on world leaders and Oswald notes in FBI wastebaskets, time stops at the edge of where it all began to go wrong.

In recent days, it's seemed like even the most diehard Warren Commission supporters have been endorsing the Senate's move to reopen the JFK assassination inquiry. First David Belin, the world's staunchest defender of the original conclusions as counsel for the Warren and later Rockefeller commissions, announced for reopening although anticipating the same results. Then the most famous ex-commission member—President Ford himself—told a press conference that "some responsible group or organization" should investigate "new developments."

But if those developments go beyond an FBI-CIA-White House cover-up and accusations of murder actually start flying, look for the main target to be Cuba. Not necessarily because Fidel Castro is guilty, but because he is convenient—and, in the wake of at least eight admitted CIA plots on his life from 1960 to 1965, even excusable.

For sure, Lee Harvey Oswald had some kind of relationship with several mysterious Cubans. That's never been any secret. Who they were working for, or who Oswald thought they were working for, is another question.

The recent CBS inquiry featured an interview with LBJ filmed in 1970, implying that Castro might well have conspired against Kennedy in retaliation. That same series had a startling clip of Robert McKeown, onetime gunrunner to Castro and his guerrillas in the Sierra Maestra mountains, claiming Oswald approached him with a Latin-looking man shortly before the assassination and offered \$4000 for four high-powered rifles. Another recent story, originating with Clare Booth Luce, has a Cuban friend approaching her after the assassination and describing tapes of a pro-Castro conspiracy.

Now, suddenly, Belin's call for reopening (motivated, he says, "toward a rebirth of confidence and trust in government") centers on the failure to tell the Warren Commission about CIA plots against Castro.

U.S. Senator Richard Schweiker, the Pennsylvania Republican whose subcommittee investigation is the impetus behind the Ford-Belin turnaround, is another who seems to lean toward Castro as the culprit. But Schweiker rules out no possibilities—except the one that Oswald acted alone. The story of his own turnaround—and the mirror image he uses to describe it—is the most hopeful sign that the truth, at long last, will be known.

"The Kennedy assassination is a mirror image proposition," Schweiker says. "What makes it so

'Like others, Schweiker leans toward Castro but he rules out no possibilities—except the one that Oswald acted alone.'

hard to know what happened is that you're struggling to find the real focus in the mirror. And you really need two reversible ones." How to read the mirrors? That's the puzzle that faces Schweiker's growing team of investigators as the likelihood mounts for a full congressional

Senate Select Committee on Intelligence granted Schweiker his mandate—a two-man subcommittee, with Colorado Senator Gary Hart, to explore the probability of an intelligence agency cover-up during the Warren Commission investigation. That made theirs the first government body since the

ing support many months earlier, things are more or less at a standstill. Congressman Tom Downing's House resolution to reopen the case does have over 80 sponsors, and a Henry Gonzalez proposal to examine all four shootings (the two Kennedys, King, and Wallace) has 53. But so far, Rules Committee



Cuban Premier Fidel Castro is an obvious target for investigation, but U.S. Senator Richard Schweiker (right) is asking questions and may hold first open hearings on the JFK murder.

examination of JFK's murder. Mirror number one is cloaked by the reversible dagger of the intelligence business. Who was Oswald? Agent or double agent? FBI, CIA, KGB? None of those? All of those? Did he even know? Or were there two of him? Mirror number two spins to memories of an undeclared war on an island off the Florida coast. Who were the Cubans that Oswald was associating with? Pro-Castro or anti-Castro? Or did he even know?

Someone knew. Or so Richard Schweiker believes. "The more witnesses we talk to, the more they raise the fact that the Warren Commission really is a house of cards. Now it's just prodding, pushing, shaking the tree enough to have it fall."

And could that mean—as the Bicentennial dawns—a TV spectacular to make Watergate pale? A daytime parade of soldiers-of-fortune, Cuban exiles, right-wing fanatics, mobsters, and spies?

"Only if the worst fears of the critics are realized," Schweiker hedges. "But they could be."

It was only October, after six months of swampy allegations of CIA-Mafia deals and FBI black bag jobs, when Frank Church's

commission with power to review classified documents, subpoena witnesses, and grant immunity. Once the regular Senate intelligence hearings end on December 15, it may also become the first body ever to hold open hearings on who killed JFK.

Beyond CIA-FBI sins of omission about Oswald, it's not clear how far Schweiker's knowledge extends. Just who might be saying what is a closely guarded secret within the labyrinthine cubicles of the Senate auditorium, where outsiders are forbidden and four task forces are winding up 60 different projects on the warp-and-wool of the intelligence trade.

This much is certain: the JFK task force is gaining both momentum and manpower. Schweiker and Hart's full-time subcommittee staff is up from two to five members and, as other phases of the Church committee come to a close, more are likely to switch over.

"There are indications from Church," says Schweiker's personal aide Dave Marston, "that he will make available as much staff as the inquiry needs."

On the other side of Capitol Hill, where the JFK issue began gather-

ing support many months earlier, things are more or less at a standstill. Congressman Tom Downing's House resolution to reopen the case does have over 80 sponsors, and a Henry Gonzalez proposal to examine all four shootings (the two Kennedys, King, and Wallace) has 53. But so far, Rules Committee

chairman Ray Madden hasn't been too receptive, and even by combining the two resolutions, twice that many co-sponsors would be necessary to pass a vote on the House floor.

So the burden is really on the Senate, particularly Schweiker, whose staff has never seen him devote so much energy to any single issue. Marston, normally his legislative counsel, is now spending about 90 per cent of his time "running a brushfire operation" out of the senator's office. That means maintaining liaison with the subcommittee staff, tracking down new leads, and filtering potential witnesses through Schweiker's schedule. Another personal assistant devotes full time to receiving all kooks, spooks, and their possible truths in an outer office. A new assistant press secretary has been hired to devote half his day to the JFK inquiry, and a WATS line has been installed to handle cross-country calls.

In many ways, Schweiker seems an unlikely crusader. Not a dodger of issues—a liberal Republican who opposed Vietnam, Haynsworth, Carswell, and ultimately Richard Nixon—but a reserved and not-too-charismatic

49-year-old who barnstormed Pennsylvania in an old school bus last year, and whose wife is the original Miss Claire of TV's "Romper Room."

Now he's barnstorming the talk shows, telling of "the bankruptcy of American policy" in stooping to alliances with the Mafia. And with eight of the 11 Church committee senators consulting him "on a fairly regular basis," it's only a matter of time until he becomes the Sam Ervin of an old and painful psychic wound.

"I was one of the millions who believed the Warren report," he said in his Senate office, "until a CIA agent came before our committee and testified he'd made arrangements with the Mafia to make a hit on Castro. We know a lot more since then, but that was so repugnant and shocking to me that I did a backflip on any number of things."

"I've learned more about the inner workings of government in the past nine months than in my 15 previous years in Congress. Now I don't know who killed cock robin, but we don't know what happened and we do know Oswald had intelligence connections. Everywhere you look with him, there are the fingerprints of intelligence."

But as Schweiker found during the month's recess he spent studying the JFK literature last August, in this case the fingerprints are as likely to obscure the truth as reveal it. What J. Edgar Hoover and Allen Dulles pretended not to know has probably long since been given to the shredder. Recently declassified minutes of Warren Commission sessions do point directly to a cover-up, but Schweiker realizes "a lot of stuff is not in certain files—the 'Do Not File' procedure we've learned about. So when Hoover says his files show only three FBI contacts with Oswald, he could be narrowly telling the truth where in fact he's lying through his teeth."

Still, the most intriguing aspect of the Senate probe, initially anyway, is the chance for a peek at the 152 secret and top-secret documents still salted away in the National Archives. Included are the commission minutes and the reports submitted by various government agencies, many of which were assembled after the Warren Report and never even seen by the commission.

Citing reasons of national security, in 1964 Lyndon Johnson issued an order to keep these particular documents hidden for 75 years, until 2038. Since then, about 50 of the original 200-plus have been released or recently pried loose by Freedom of Information suits. Two of those are the commission sessions where Dulles admits that Hoover might lie about the bureau's links with Oswald and where members agree the FBI refused to investigate conspiracy evidence because of a precon-

ceived conclusion about Oswald—both instrumental in Schweiker's original call to reopen the case.

Of the 152 still-sealed documents, 107 are FBI and 23 are CIA reports. That includes 15 relating to Oswald's sojourn in the Soviet Union, 23 more about his trips to Mexico. Some of the titles are unbelievably tantalizing. There is a CIA document called "Oswald's Access to Information About the U2 (the high-flying spy plane)." Another is titled "Reports of Travel Activities, Lee Harvey Oswald as Marine." Plus two memos from then-CIA Director Richard Helms, an "Allegation That Lee Harvey Oswald Was Interviewed by the CIA in the USSR," and a "Reproduction of CIA Official Dossier on Lee Harvey Oswald."

The secret FBI reports contain information about Oswald from Louisville, St. Louis, Albany, Tampa, Norfolk, Cincinnati, Oklahoma, Cleveland, Chicago, and Washington. Not to mention 15 of the 23 Mexican files.

Then there is Jack Ruby. "Why did the FBI withhold for 12 years that he'd informed for them on nine occasions?" Schweiker asks. "This wasn't national security information, so why were they so sensitive? Also I'm certain there were extenuating circumstances in his activities running guns to Cuba. We were really running a secret war against Cuba, and we know the CIA was heavily involved. Ruby had to have been at least working for someone who was working for CIA."

Tucked away in those classified archives is material on Ruby's tax returns, social security records, long-distance phone calls—and a mysterious CIA report titled "Information on Jack Ruby and Associates."

All this, supposedly, is being made available to the Senate subcommittee—with a few ground rules.

"The agencies involved have not released the documents, they've given us access," Schweiker says. "You can't take documents away or photocopy them. The FBI originally had a rule we couldn't even copy them by hand. If you have a good photographic mind, you're all right. But until we have a case to make on it, why fuss about it?"

The CIA, say Senate staffers, has

been more cooperative than the FBI, though Schweiker says both agencies have given "most of what we've asked for. Until we digest it and question witnesses, we won't know if there are any gaps. We've had to get specific and narrow with our requests, and we may be missing the target unknowingly."

How good are the chances of finding a bombshell to blow the case wide open? Schweiker offers a dubious "who-knows" shrug.

"Whether any single document would reverse it is a very questionable assumption," he says. "But until you remove the documents from the premises and go over them with a fine tooth comb . . . well, my personal opinion is that there have got to be leads and relationships there. It should all be put in a computer and integrated. A lot of the material is overclassified in my judgment. In 1964, they'd classify your tie if it walked through a secret security net. And with the Warren Commission proceedings, a lot of the documents were simply not put together in any meaningful way."

The most glaring problem was mislabeling of documents. Con-

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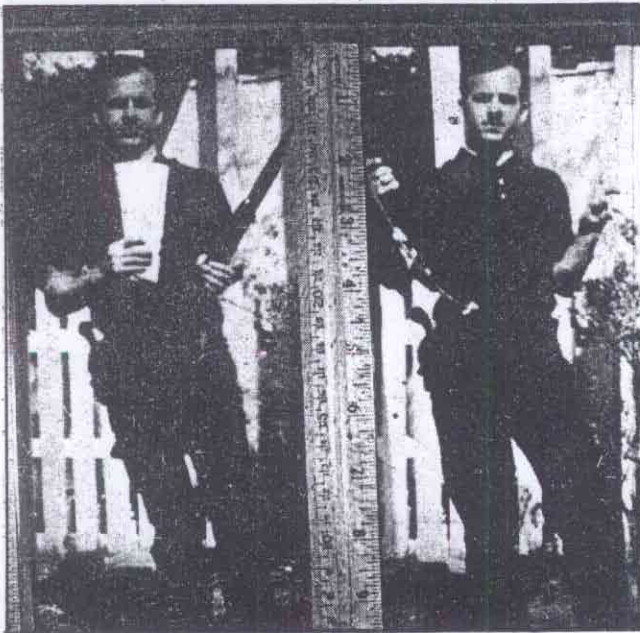
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sciously preplanned mislabeling, Schweiker believes, in the case of a 1960 Hoover FBI memorandum already raising the possibility of an Oswald imposter in USSR. That vital document was listed under "A Message to State Department on Data Oswald."

"They completely buried it," Schweiker says angrily. "A statement of an Oswald imposter by Hoover ought to have waved red flags around every circuit, but nowhere is it listed like this in the index. So it doesn't surprise me when the Warren Commission says they never saw some material.

Another strangely classified

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Oswald and Oswald imposter? The Schweiker Committee finds mislabeled documents and overclassified material.

series is seven FBI files on Mark Lane, the first and most vocal of

the Warren Commission critics. Though Schweiker won't cite specifics, he does admit his discovery of "an ongoing effort by the White House to discredit the critics."

The first piece of evidence is a White House memorandum from LBJ aide Marvin Watson to the FBI, ordering the bureau to compile secret dossiers on seven prominent commission detractors.

"The FBI did turn those dossiers over, and in one instance there was derogatory sexual activity with photographs," Schweiker says. "The part we've uncovered happened in 1966 and 1967. What we don't know yet is how ongoing it was. There is some indication that this is the tip of the iceberg."

If the federal government would go to such lengths to vilify its opponents, what could it possibly have been hiding? Merely the fact that Oswald and Ruby had intelligence connections that would prove embarrassing? Or something far more terrifying?

The idea that Castro engineered the whole thing is indeed the *least* of all possible evils. And Schweiker, with apparent good intentions, is inclined to buy it.

"As soon as he heard about the

attempts to assassinate Castro, he said we ought to look into the Warren Commission," Marston recalls. "I said why? He said 'If we're shooting at Castro, why isn't he shooting back?'"

Schweiker considers what Dulles didn't tell his fellow commission members about this "a cover-up of sensational proportions." And while insisting he doesn't subscribe to any particular theory, he does point to an Associated Press story of September 9, 1963 that has Castro threatening "to answer in kind" if the U.S. tried to "eliminate Cuban leaders."

"Nobody paid any attention then because nobody knew we were trying to kill Castro," Schweiker says. "But that statement had to

have meaning, particularly to Allen Dulles. Nobody has ever investigated that."

That's all well and good, as far as it goes. But strangely, some kind words about Castro of late come from E. Howard Hunt, who admitted to the Providence Journal that while working for the Nixon White House, he interviewed a Miami woman who was in Castro's house when news of Kennedy's death came. Hunt's report, a copy of which went to the CIA, called Castro "morose" because the two leaders had reached "an understanding" about eventually renewing diplomatic ties.

Despite all the fingers to Fidel, Hunt's statement seems far more believable. At least according to revelations in the Church committee's 347-page interim report, "Alleged Assassination Plots Involving Foreign Leaders."

According to this, in the fall of 1963, America's number two man at the U.N.—William Atwood—"held a series of talks with the Cuban ambassador to the United Nations to discuss opening negotiations on an accommodation between Castro and the United States." The progress was reported regularly to the White House, where McGeorge Bundy says JFK

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was in favor of "pushing towards an opening with Cuba . . . perhaps wiping out the Bay of Pigs and maybe getting back to normal."

In November, a French journalist named Jean Daniel went off to see Castro as a quasi-official spokesman for JFK. The administration's dirty tricks—the death plots and sabotage plans—had apparently, as far as Kennedy was concerned, come to a close. The journalist was with Castro on November 22, 1963. That same day, according to the CIA's 1967 inspector general's report, "it is likely that at the very moment President Kennedy was shot, a CIA officer was meeting with a Cuban agent and giving him an assassination device for use against Castro."

The device was a poison-pen, a ballpoint rigged with a hypodermic needle so fine that the victim wouldn't notice its insertion. The would-be assassin was a "highly-placed Cuban official" code-named "AM/LASH" who original-

ly had wanted from the CIA "a high powered rifle with telescopic sights that could be used to kill Castro from a distance." Desmond Fitzgerald, head of CIA covert Cuban operations, has assured AM/LASH his mission had the sanction of the highest officials in the land. Because Richard Helms, according to the CIA's own report, decided "it was not necessary to seek approval from Robert Kennedy for Fitzgerald to speak in his name."

The CIA's own files claim "the situation changed when the case officer and Fitzgerald left the meeting to discover that President Kennedy had been assassinated . . . it was decided that we could have no part in the assassination of a government leader (including Castro) and would not aid AM/LASH in this attempt."

However, the Senate report says assassination efforts involving AM/LASH did in fact continue into 1965. And with Johnson's assuming the presidency, William Atwood's diplomatic talks with the Cubans became less frequent and eventually ceased early in 1964.

Why should U.S. Intelligence, which desperately wanted Castro gone anyway, be so scrupulous about covering up a Castro retaliation against Kennedy? Was Castro—or his tie with Russia—so strong that this government then feared him? Nonsense. The Castro's-revenge motive is too easy. The devil plays subtler games.

Who then? In Schweiker's files, there is also a large sheaf on a right-wing extremist group called the National States Rights party. It contains government documents, some pages still withheld from the public, on a wealthy southerner named J. A. Milteer. On November 9, 1963, in Miami, a police informant "who has furnished reliable information in the past" has Milteer—an organizer for the party—telling him that a plan to kill Kennedy was in the works. Two weeks prior to the assassination, the informant passed that information to the Secret Service. Information about an assassination plan "from a window with a high-powered rifle."

Milteer, according to researchers in Texas, died several years ago. But dozens of others, some never called or even men-

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tioned by the Warren Commission, are very much alive—and perhaps willing to talk.

"Some I was told would never talk at all, and I can't get them off the phone," says Dave Marston. "But you can do only the most preliminary things by phone. I've seen a large number of people here, and we hope to put more people in the field."

So far, the Senate staff hasn't talked to Oswald's wife Marina. Marston has spoken to his mother Marguerite by phone from Fort Worth: "She gave me the suggestion she's under surveillance continually, and that her son had some intelligence community connection she can prove—but that solution is always somewhere around the corner."

Progress is slow, but steady. As Marston says, "The Warren Commission was so compartmentalized, protected from the outside world. It's like the old story of how somebody wanted to confess but they had nobody handling confessions. The committee is more systematized, long-range."

And, to believe Schweiker, more open. Even the discredited case of New Orleans ex-District Attorney Jim Garrison isn't taken lightly. "We have some leads that obviously go to New Orleans and we're pursuing them," Schweiker says. "Whether it's Garrison's story or a contradictory one, I think we'll know in a couple months."

A couple months. That is Schweiker's timetable to find that single, sensational piece of news that will convince the most skeptical of his colleagues to rush ahead. Then will come the technical analysis ("If we had 100 staffers to turn loose, this would be a very important segment"), the feeding of all relevant material into a computer ("Ultimately it has to be done"), the appointment of a special prosecutor, and subpoenaing of witnesses.

The final irony, in an election

year, will be the fateful effect on the lives of two public figures—Gerald Ford and Edward Kennedy.

Does Schweiker believe Ford's chances for reelection might hinge on the findings of his subcommittee? "It strictly depends on what we find out. I believe there was a cover-up, so where was it and by whom? I don't really know. The LBJ White House? CIA-FBI? Or into the Warren Commission? If he was involved in some cover-up, it will certainly hurt him.

"But I don't think this will become party politics. I hope it won't, because it could set us back another two years. It can cut both ways. If a cover-up went to the Warren Commission, it also went to the Johnson White House."

As for Ted Kennedy, Schweiker glances down at his desk, then up, and says evenly: "Senator Kennedy and I are good friends. He is chairman of the Health Committee and I'm the ranking Republican. Before I held my initial press conference, I wrote a personal note to him explaining why I was doing it and that I hoped he would read my statement. I knew in my own mind he would not want to see the case reopened, from his family's point of view. I didn't expect an answer. I phrased it in a way it didn't need one, unless he wanted to. He has not told me to cease and desist."