

CIA inquiry revives JFK - Oswald mystery

ANALYSIS

By Jim Squires
Chicago Tribune

WASHINGTON — A prominent Midwestern governor, respected for his intelligence and rational judgment privately expressed concern recently that investigations of the Central Intelligence Agency might uncover, among other things, agency links to the assassinations of the Kennedys, Martin Luther King, and the shooting of George Wallace.

"Do you really believe that?" reporters asked incredulously.

"No," the governor replied, "but I no longer consider it beyond the realm of possibility."

While governors are not

necessarily more stable than anyone else, they generally should have more faith in the system and be less suspicious of grand conspiracies.

But it may be that the mind-shattering experience of Watergate has propelled all Americans to a new threshold of insecurity about their government.

We now read daily what we only suspected in the past: that Presidents lie, that J. Edgar Hoover was not a saint; that the Central Intelligence Agency won't even deny it was involved in political assassinations abroad.

In such an atmosphere it is only natural that old questions about the nation's most infamous crimes — political

murders at home — are again being raised.

Conspiracy theories surrounding the deaths of John and Robert Kennedy, King, and the attempted assassination of Wallace never died, even though in more recent years the debate has been limited to conspiracy freaks and amateur sleuths.

Haunting, unanswered questions still linger around all four cases. But the most fertile ground for conspiracy breeding is the first — the murder of the President in Dallas in 1963.

Within the month, another new book on a worn topic has appeared, alleging that voice-stress evaluation tests prove that Lee Harvey Oswald was not Kennedy's assassin.

A skeptic of some stature, former Democratic Sen. Ralph Yarborough of Texas has called for the reopening of the Warren Commission

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investigation. And, almost casually, the Rockefeller Commission investigating the CIA has confirmed that it is indeed examining possible links between the agency and Oswald.

Because Oswald once defected to the Soviet Union and then returned to the United States, it was quickly and widely assumed that such a relationship existed. But on May 18, 1964, CIA Director John McCone swore before the Warren Commission that the agency had never communicated directly or indirectly with Oswald; that he was not an agent, employe, or informant and the agency was never connected with him "in any way whatsoever . . ."

In 1964, a sworn declaration by such a high-ranking government official was enough. In 1975, it is not. And now amateur sleuths, professional sleuths, and journalists are plowing through a lot of dusty information in search of new clues that might link Oswald to the nation's intelligence apparatus.

Oswald's potential for contact with the CIA is great. But the actual connections, if any at all, appear restricted to rather tenuous relationships with three individuals during his lifetime, all of whom are suspected of having had ties to the CIA.

The first is Clay Shaw, the late New Orleans businessman who was a target of District Attorney Jim Garrison's discredited assassination investigation. Garrison, for all his efforts, never proved a single link between Shaw and Oswald.

The best anyone can do in that regard is that Oswald once passed out pro-Castro leaflets in a building owned by Shaw. And that the well-traveled Shaw, in his role as international trader, most likely passed information to the CIA at one time

or another.

The second relationship is hardly more fruitful. Oswald considered as his best friend a man named George de Mohrenschildt, a Russian-born petroleum engineer who came to the United States in 1938.

The Warren Commission concluded that de Mohrenschildt had no connection with the assassination. But it did not make the same claim about his relationship with the CIA.

It seems that de Mohrenschildt and his wife took an

eight-month hiking tour from the U.S.-Mexican border to Panama in 1960 and were in Guatemala when the CIA launched part of its ill-fated Bay of Pigs invasion from there. The Warren report said de Mohrenschildt later turned over films and a full account of his travels "to the U.S. government."

This fact alone has led many conspiracy buffs to conclude that de Mohrenschildt was at least an informer for the CIA and undoubtedly had told the agency of his friend Oswald.

Researchers who suspect de Mohrenschildt of CIA contact are far more certain of a third man who was in a position to cross paths with Oswald — Guy W. Banister of New Orleans. The question is whether he ever did.

In August, 1963, Oswald was arrested in New Orleans following a fracas with anti-Castro Cubans upset by his distribution of pro-Castro leaflets. Oswald's leaflets bore the address of 544 Camp St., an office he apparently never occupied.

The office at 544 Camp St. had been used, however, as the headquarters for an anti-Castro organization known as the Cuban Democratic Revolutionary Front, which was widely rumored to be a CIA-funded opera-

tion.

It was adjacent to a second office (fronting at 531 Lafayette St. around the corner) occupied by Banister, a former Chicago FBI agent, and an ex-deputy New Orleans police commissioner who doubled as a private detective and government contact with the community of Cuban revolutionaries in New Orleans.

More than one witness remembers seeing boxes of rifles, ammunition, and grenades in Banister's office. Although their credibility is not unchallenged, they all profess a common belief: Banister was a CIA or military intelligence contact with a contingent of Cubans being trained for the Bay of Pigs invasion.

The mysterious David Ferrie, a key figure in the Garrison investigation, often boasted of his own involvement in the Bay of Pigs and of burning Cuban cane fields for the U.S. government. He was a frequent visitor to Banister's office.

The files of Garrison's old investigation and the personal inquiries of journalists and conspiracy buffs are full of the names of former Ban-

ister associates who add more intrigue to the brew.

One is a former Banister aide, Jerry Brooks, an ex-Minute Man who connects Banister with Maurice Brooks Gatlin Sr., who represented some mysterious organization known as the Anti-Communist League of the Caribbean.

The league, it is often said, was intimately involved in the coup in Guatemala in 1954, something for which the CIA is now given credit.

In addition, Gatlin, who fell to his death from the sixth floor of a Panama hotel in 1964, once remarked that he could get \$100,000 in

CIA money for a French right-wing clique that planned to assassinate President de Gaulle in 1962.

Now, the circle is complete. The Banister connection has brought us to the current topic of the CIA investigation — alleged assassinations of foreign leaders.