

DOUBTS HAUNT J. F. K. PROBE

Over the World, Many
Believe There Was
a Conspiracy

STRANGE GAPS IN STORY

By Some, Warren Report
Is Considered Part of
a Cover-Up

By Raymond R. Coffey
(Service of the Chicago Daily News)

In the instant that John F. Kennedy died November 22, a series of unwanted and sometimes monstrous questions was born.

As the weeks passed, these offspring of tragedy proliferated and spread themselves across the world.

Some perished quickly when exposed to cold fact, but others survived, thrived and grew into genuine and even fundamental doubts.

To Be Issued Tonight

Tonight, more than 10 months after the assassination, the special commission appointed to investigate the slaying is to make its report to the world.

Presumably, if history is to be at all satisfied, the report will contain answers to the questions that have persisted.

To help find and focus on those answers, amid the staggering volume of more than a quarter-million words in the report, the Chicago Daily News has gathered and traced the parentage of some of the major doubts raised against the generally held view of the assassination.

What It Will Say

First of all, the report of the commission headed by Chief Justice Earl Warren will firmly and flatly endorse the generally held positions that:

- Lee Harvey Oswald, an unstable Marxist, acting alone and on his own, shot Kennedy from a window of the Texas Book Depository building as the presidential motorcade passed through downtown Dallas.

- Less than 48 hours later, Oswald was shot and killed in the basement of Dallas police headquarters by Jack Ruby, who also acted on his own, not as part of any conspiracy.

Only one member of the commission, Sen. Richard B. Russell (D-Ga.), has hinted there will be any surprises in the report.

Sources of Rumors

Secondly, it is important to recall the sources of some of the questions and the atmosphere in which they flourished.

The bizarre, almost incredible bungling by Dallas law enforcement officers contributed to confusion, contradiction and chaos.

The very fact that the assassination occurred in Dallas created an atmosphere of suspicion. The city is a citadel of right-wing radicalism. Only weeks before, Ambassador Adlai E. Stevenson had been spat upon. Kennedy himself had been warned there might be danger.

As the shots were fired, hundreds of reporters scrambling all through the city and working under intense pressures found and were fed scores of conflicting details that in later and calmer days could be ballooned up into seemingly significant contradictions.

To Fit Own Theories

Further, an event of such magnitude, as always, stirred amateur and professional sensationalists to imagine and fabricate and peddle wildly speculative and implausible theories. Extremists from all over the political compass twisted facts to fit their fears and alarms.

Anyone with a rumor could find an audience.

Especially in Europe, where the plot or conspiracy theory of politics is almost a way of life, there developed a kind of bull-headed determination to make facts match theory.

Indeed, right to this day, most Europeans appear to reject the semi-official version of the assassination that has been generally accepted in this country.

A principal purveyor of doubt abroad, though not the only one, is Thomas G. Buchanan, an expatriate former American newspaperman and former Communist who wrote a book, "Who Killed Kennedy?"

Blames Oil Man

Buchanan's book advances, among other notions, the theory that the assassination was arranged by a Texas oil millionaire who feared Kennedy would abolish the oil depletion allowance and President Johnson would preserve it.

In this country many of the questions raised about the assassination have been developed by Mark Lane, a New York lawyer of liberal persuasion who for a time represented Oswald's mother.

Lane's investigations, for example, led Bertrand Russell, British philosopher, to propound "16 questions" on the assassination and form a Who Killed Kennedy committee, filled with eminent personages.

Here are some of the major questions to which readers may look for answers in the extensive coverage of the Warren commission report:

- Even before the shots were fired, a man named Bernard Weisman had placed in the Dallas Morning News a vituperative advertisement attacking Kennedy.

In Ruby's Place

According to Lane, he has information that this same Weisman was seen before the assassination in the strip-tease night club of Jack Ruby in the company of a rich oilman and J. D. Tippit, a policeman allegedly slain by Oswald shortly after he killed the President.

Did such a gathering in fact, take place? Ruby has not answered the question directly in his testimony to the Warren commission and there has been no public indication that Weisman was ever called before the commission.

- Did the FBI and Dallas police fail in their responsibility by not having Oswald under surveillance on the day of the assassination?

According to Bertrand Russell, security forces had a list of 23 subversives in Dallas and Oswald's name headed the list. Yet, according to Russell, Oswald—the man who had a job on the route of the motorcade—was the only one on the list not under surveillance that day.

'Route Was Changed'

- Russell also alleges that the motorcade route was changed at the last minute to take it past the Texas Book Depository.

Why, he asks, was it changed, and how could Oswald—if he was acting on his own—have known that the change would be made?

Who was responsible for the final route plan and when did it become final?

- Most witnesses agree that they heard three shots in rapid succession. Yet there has been confusion about the number of bullets found—three, four or even five.

How many shots were there and, much more important, from what direction did they come, or did they come from more than one?

Several witnesses said they first believed the shots came from ahead of the motorcade—from a railroad overpass—instead of from the book building at the right rear.

Saw Bullet Hole

Some witnesses, including Richard Dudman, a reporter for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, have insisted they saw a small bullet hole in the windshield of the presidential limousine.

Dudman said it was impossible for him to tell whether the hole was made by a bullet fired from the front, or by a bullet fragment leaving the car.

- What about the medical evidence? The doctors at Parkland hospital who first examined the body said one of the bullets entered Mr. Kennedy's throat frontally, just above the knot in his necktie.

This would have been impossible if the shots were fired at the time and angle authorities say they were.

What persuaded the Dallas doctors to change their minds after an autopsy was performed at Bethesda (Md.) Naval hospital and after they talked with two Secret Service agents? Now, the story was, the wound in the throat was made by an exiting bullet.

- Can the conflicts in the chronology of events be resolved?

A Dallas policeman and the manager of the book building say they dashed inside and up to the second floor almost immediately after the shots were fired. Did Oswald have time to hide his rifle, descend four floors, extract a Coca-Cola from a vending machine and stand-sipping the drink placidly by the time the officer and manager arrived?

How then did Oswald get out of the building and away from the police swarming over the area? And if he got out, is there any certainty that he fled alone?

In Only 45 Minutes

Did Oswald have time to make the complicated trip of more than four miles—by foot, bus and cab—to his room, change clothes and dash out again to encounter Officer Tippit some 45 minutes after the assassination?

- Will the report resolve the discrepancies in the various times given for the Tippit killing—1:06 p. m., 1:15 p. m., 1:18 p. m.?

- Why did Tippit stop Oswald in the first place? Had they known each other? Did Tippit know Ruby?

- Why did District Attorney Henry Wade first give a false name for the cab driver who allegedly had given Oswald a ride away from the assassination scene?

A Skilled Marksman?

- There has been almost overwhelming confusion and evasion about the alleged assassination weapon and Oswald's skill as a marksman.

Wade, a former FBI man presumably possessing some knowledge of firearms, first said it was a 7.65-mm. Mauser. Then he decided it was an Italian 6.5-mm. Mannlicher-Carcano.

First, Dallas authorities said Oswald's fingerprints had been found on the weapon, then they said it was a palmprint, something not nearly so positive as a fingerprint. Was there a print at all?

Police Chief Jesse Curry was quoted as saying a paraffin test showed Oswald had recently fired a gun and "proves he is the assassin."

Doubts About Test

Later there were doubts about what such a test might prove, or even whether such a test had been made.

Authorities said all three shots had been fired in the space of about 5½ seconds. Some leading rifle experts expressed doubt that Oswald could have squeezed off three accurate shots at a moving target in that time.

At one point Oswald was described as an expert marksman. Later Marine associates disputed this.

Finally, did ballistics tests establish that the bullets that killed Kennedy came from the weapon linked to Oswald?

● What about the legal propriety of quizzing Oswald for hours and failing to provide an attorney for him? Why was he brought before a multitude of reporters and identified absolutely as the assassin in the face of what was then at least incomplete evidence?

About Transcripts

● And what did he say during all those hours of questioning? Were transcripts made and will they be unwrapped by the commission?

● What will the commission say about Oswald's stay in Russia and his marriage to a Russian girl? Was he an agent of the Central Intelligence agency, or was he a Russian agent on his return?

● Was there anything unusual in his getting a job at the book depository despite his background?

● What about some of the subsidiary characters in the drama — an area of deep and real mystery?

● Bertrand Russell, for example, revives a newspaper report that a man named Warren Reynolds, who heard the shots fired at Officer Tippit and saw the killer run off, was later himself shot in the head by a rifleman.

A man was arrested for shooting Reynolds, according to the report, but was released when his girl friend said he was with her at the time of the attack.

A Former Stripper

The girl friend—allegedly a former stripper in Jack Ruby's club—was arrested two days later and reports circulated that she hanged herself in her jail cell.

Still another story has it that the son of the only witness to the Tippit slaying was arrested after being seen in conversation with private investigators and likewise died, in a plunge from a jail window.

Is there anything at all to these reports of violence hounding the minor players in the cast?

● Is there any significance in the fact that Ruby's apartment, Oswald's rented room and the scene of the Tippit slaying are all in the same section of Dallas?

Found No Witnesses

● Why were the hordes of reporters working on the story unable to find any witnesses to Oswald's capture inside the movie theater?

● With Oswald in custody, how did Ruby manage to slip into the heavily guarded police headquarters, arriving just at the right time to get a clear shot at Oswald?

● Was there any tampering with or manufacturing of evidence against Oswald? For instance, it was reported that on Friday, hours after the assassination, police had found a map of Dallas in Oswald's room but little was made of it.

But on Saturday the map had suddenly become a "startling" discovery and by Monday, District Attorney Wade was announcing that the map had crosses marking intersections the Kennedy motorcade would pass and, even more sensational, the area in front of the book building was marked with lines showing the trajectory of the bullets that killed the President.

Doesn't Fit Oswald

● Is there any explanation for the fact that the only known witness of the actual shooting of Officer Tippit described the killer as a short, bushy-haired man wearing a plaid jacket—a description that did not fit Oswald?

All these questions relate to the evidence in the slayings of Kennedy and Oswald themselves.

But the sensationalists and the doubters, on the right and the left, have also raised a grave question that goes beyond the evidence.

They have suggested that the Warren commission itself is part of a conspiracy to keep the truth from the world.

Revalo P. Oliver, a University of Illinois professor who is a member of the John Birch society, described the commission's work as a "whitewash" ordered by the Communists.

Bertrand Russell and others have cast doubt on the commission's dependability because it relied on evidence gathered by the FBI, Dallas police and Secret Service—all deeply involved in whatever security failures may have occurred.

There also have been complaints that all the commission members are associated or have been associated with the

government—that none represents the American public.

The question then is, will the commission answer these complaints, attempt to resolve the questions about itself?

Or will it ignore them, refuse to dignify them with an answer, and simply state its own version of the tragedy, letting the world weigh this version against all the doubts and all the sinister speculations?