



By James K. W. Atherton—The Washington Post

Assassination-probe leaders Henry Gonzalez (left) and Thomas Downing confer with counsel Richard Sprague.

# Assassination Probers to Buy 2 Costly Secret Transmitters

By George Lardner Jr.  
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The chief counsel of the House assassination inquiry said yesterday the committee plans to buy two tiny \$2,200 transmitters that can be secretly worn by investigators.

The lawyer, Richard A. Sprague, maintained that the devices are needed for "certain surveillance activities" that he is contemplating. He denied that they would be used to make secret recordings of the conversations of unsuspecting witnesses.

"It is our intention in making recordings that we will advise each individual that we are recording the interview," Sprague said.

Asked why walkie-talkies wouldn't suffice for surveillance, Sprague insisted that there would be situations when investigators would need to communicate with one another without tipping anyone off.

"A guy might be getting ready to step out of a tap room, for example, and you might want to communicate that fact," Sprague said. He said he en-

visioned "many situations" in the forthcoming House investigation into the assassinations of President Kennedy and Martin Luther King where "you cannot just call out a window (or) ... pull out a walkie talkie."

Pressed to elaborate at a press conference following a meeting of the House committee yesterday afternoon, the former Philadelphia prosecutor said he had in mind some individuals who "are in a situation where we want to be observing what they are doing after they've been interrogated."

The proposed purchases of the "mini-phone recording devices" had raised questions about the committee's investigating techniques.

Sprague made his comments after Rep. Don Edwards (D-Calif.), chairman of the House Judiciary subcommittee on constitutional rights, had written a letter of protest about the possible bugging of witnesses to the inquiry committee's chairman, Thomas Downing (D-Va.), and to Vice Chairman Henry B. Gonzalez (D-Tex.).

The committee held its last meeting under Downing yesterday afternoon, beginning in public session, but wind-

ing up amid strict secrecy at Sprague's behest. The official stenographers and most of the committee staff, as well as the press and public, were ordered outside for the final portion of the meeting.

Downing, who is retiring from the House, refused later to comment on the discussion beyond stating that it was devoted to "a very sensitive matter" currently under investigation.

Earlier, after voting 6 to 2 to go into closed session, the committee tentatively adopted a 10-page final report to the current Congress, outlining proposed avenues of inquiry for the projected two-year investigation. Downing said there are "hundreds of unresolved questions" in each assassination, some 600 by the staff's count in the King murder and 380 in the case of President Kennedy.

Del. Walter E. Fauntroy (D-D.C.) made the motion for a secret session to discuss the report although it is said to contain "no bombshells." Reps. Christopher Dodd (D-Conn.) and Charles Thone (R-Neb.) opposed the closed hearing. The report is expected to be made public, after some final revisions, on Jan. 2.