

SIX-B

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FOLLOWS DEVIIOUS PATH

'Letter' by Novel Adds to Mystery

A letter written by fugitive witness Gordon Novel added a new cloak-and-dagger twist today to the Kennedy assassination probe.

Attorney Steven Plotkin said Novel actually wrote the communication. Further, he said his client was working for the Central Intelligence Agency here in 1961.

But Novel called the letter a "trap" set for Dist. Atty. Jim Garrison, who is attempting to bring Novel back to New Orleans for questioning.

WHATEVER THE authenticity of the document, the circumstances of its discovery read like a chapter in a who-done-it.

The letter came into the hands of States-Item reporter Hoke May. This is how it happened:

The letter turned up when two girls were doing their spring housecleaning. It was well hidden in the fugitive witness's French Quarter apartment.

SO WELL HIDDEN, in fact, that a team of Federal Bureau of Investigation Agents and officers from Garrison's investigative squad missed it when they searched the rooms after Novel left town in March.

The girls, who rented the Novel apartment after his departure, found it during a thorough housecleaning and refurbishing session.

One of them turned it over to her boy friend. He, in turn, showed it to his professor at a New Orleans university.

The professor is a friend of May's.

THE LETTER was addressed to a Mr. Weiss and probably was written in late January or early February of this year, judging by the time sequence it describes.

When a copy was sent to him, Plotkin reviewed its contents, spoke to his client and told the States-Item Novel had drafted the letter.

He said, "Everything in the letter as far as Novel is concerned is actually the truth."

The contents of the missive are compounded of cryptic references, code names and a plea for Weiss to get Novel "out of this mess" by an unspecified date in March of 1967.

THE LETTER appears to be a draft which later might be recopied or typed. There is no indication it was ever mailed, however, and Plotkin said he does not know whether the draft was sent "to the addressee."

Presumably, Weiss is connected with the CIA.

Novel departed New Orleans about mid-March after receiving a subpoena to testify in Garrison's Kennedy death plot investigation. He went to McLean, Va., the headquarters of the CIA.

HE WAS MET there by a former official of the Justice Department who now works for one of the radio-television networks.

The 29-year-old former bar owner took a lie detector test at McLean and ducked under cover for another few days, a time when he was reported to be in Montreal.

His next appearance was at Gahanna, Ohio, a Columbus suburb where he was arrested April 1 on a warrant from Garrison who charged him with conspiracy to burglarize a munitions dump at Houma in 1961.

AN INDEPENDENT handwriting expert says the letter is in Novel's handwriting. The expert, Gilbert Fortier of New Orleans, compared the penciled letter with other samples of Novel's writing and printing.

"It is my conclusion that the same person who wrote the handwriting specimens also wrote the draft to Mr. Weiss," Fortier asserted.

He said he checked especially for the possibility the letter might be a forgery but concluded it was not probable.

"It was written too easily and too freely to have been forged," Fortier said.

THE LETTER to Weiss begins:

"This letter is to inform you that District (Attorney) Jim Garrison has subpoenaed myself and an associate to testify before his Grand Jury on matters which may be classified TOP SECRET. Actions of individuals connected with DOUBLE-CHEK CORPORATION in Miami in first quarter of 1961."

(The authoritative book, "The Invisible Government," identified Double-Chek Corp.

of Miami as a CIA front organization which recruited pilots and other Cuban personnel for the Bay of Pigs Invasion in 1961.)

"WE HAVE NO current contact available to inform of this situation," the letter continues. "So I took the liberty of writing you direct and apprising you of current situation . . . expecting you to forward this through appropriate channels.

"Our connection and activity of that period involved individuals presently . . . about to be indicted as conspirators in Mr. Garrison's investigation.

"We have temporarily avoided one subpoena not to reveal Double-Chek activities or associate them with this mess. We want out of this thing before Thursday 3/1/67. Our attorneys have been told to expect another subpoena to appear and testify on this matter. The Fifth Amendment and/or immunity (and) legal tactics will not suffice.

"MR. GARRISON is in possession of unsworn portions of this testimony. He is unaware of Double-Chek's involvement in this matter but has strong suspicions. I have been questioned extensively by local FBI recently as to whether or not I was involved with Double-Chek's parent holding corporation during the time. My reply on five queries was negative.

"Bureau unaware of Double-Chek association in this matter. Our attorneys and others are in possession of complete sealed files containing all information concerning matter.

"In event of our sudden departure, either accidental or otherwise, they are instructed to simultaneously release same for public scrutiny in different areas . . .

"APPROPRIATE counter action relative to Garrison's inquisition concerning us may best be handled through military channels vis (a) vis D.I.A. man. Garrison is presently colonel in Louisiana Army National Guard and has ready reserve status. Contact may be had through our attorneys of record, Plotkin, Alvarez, Sapir."

Plotkin confirmed that he has tapes and records held in escrow for Novel to be released in case of his death.

One final footnote of interest relates to D.I.A., which apparently refers to the super-secret Defense Intelligence Agency. It was created by President Kennedy after the Bay of Pigs invasion to shepherd all U.S. intelligence and espionage operations. The man appointed to head it was Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy.