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# SEChronicle New Doubts On JFK's Death

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The key moment, Senator Richard Schweiker (Rep.-Pa.) later recalled, came sometime in early September. As a member of Senator Frank Church's Select Committee on Intelligence Activities, he was listening in executive session to a CIA witness who was discussing Cuban Prime Minister Fidel Castro's reaction to U.S. attempts on his life following the failure of the American-supported Bay of Pigs Invasion.

It all was fairly routine stuff — much of it had already been published — but then the witness added, "and Castro said, 'If they (the Kennedys) don't stop trying to get me, I'll get them.'"

That statement, one committee staff member said, had a great impact on Schweiker. "He almost jumped out of his chair," he said. "He put two and two together before anybody else; namely, what did Castro's threat have to do with President Kennedy's assassination, and more specifically, with Lee Harvey Oswald?"

A good question, and one which shortly thereafter led Schweiker and Senator Gary Hart (Dem.-Colo.) — a fellow member of the committee — to convince Church to form a two-man subcommittee of themselves to investigate the assassination, Oswald and his yet-unspecified links with the CIA and the FBI. It also led Schweiker to delve into all 26 volumes of the Warren Commission's report on the assassination. He was not satisfied with the results.

"It's a house of cards," he said in an interview. "recent disclosures have devastated its credibility . . . Up until a few months ago, I was one who

*"The evidence reviewed above identifies Lee Harvey Oswald as the assassin of President Kennedy and indicates that he acted alone in that event."*

—The Warren Commission Report  
1964

believed the Warren Commission's conclusion that Lee Harvey Oswald had acted alone. But all these new developments have caused me to question some of the commission assumptions. To me, it's like a big, public boil that's going to burst."

Schweiker is not alone in his doubts. Since the 1964 Warren Report was released, there has been a growing sense of disbelief among Americans that the assassination was the act of a deranged loner. A Gallup Poll this year concluded that nearly 60 per cent of Americans think Oswald did not act alone and that a conspiracy was involved.

The doubts, of course, are not new. In the late 1960s, there was a flurry of attacks on the Warren Commission's conclusions, including 22 books, several novels, national conferences, television specials and hundreds of magazine articles. Interest then declined, but it has undergone a strong revival recently.

The revival is due not only to Watergate-inspired disbelief about the word of government officials, but also to several significant revelations elicited during congressional investigations of intelligence activities, concerning the CIA and the FBI, which did all the investigative work for the Warren Commission. First there were the revelations about the CIA's secret war against Castro, which apparently included assassination attempts. Second, there were disclosures about the

curious relationship between Oswald and the FBI. Worse, the FBI now has admitted that it destroyed evidence on Oswald — a letter that he had written before the assassination, threatening to blow up the Dallas police station.

Neither this evidence nor the fact that the CIA had Oswald under surveillance in 1962 had been brought to the attention of the Warren Commission.

One interesting effect of this renewed interest is that several staff members who wrote the Warren Commission's final report, and were reluctant for years to discuss their work, now admit to having doubts that their job was complete enough — while they continue to defend the report's conclusions.

One key ex-staff member, attorney David W. Belin, said last week in congressional testimony that evidence of CIA plotting against Castro "should have been made available to the Warren Commission."

Belin also headed up a Rockefeller Commission study, which concluded that the Warren Commission's conclusions were correct. He still feels that the

conclusion about a single assassin holds.

Other former Warren Commission members agree. "I suspect," says John Hart Ely, another ex-staff member, "that the facts, even assuming they could all be learned, would disclose a suppression of nothing more sinister than evidence of inadequate vigilance."

Dr. John K. Latimer, a Columbia university pathologist who has done extensive autopsy studies on Kennedy, says, "basically, the Warren Commission was correct, although some facts were wrong." All the former staff members say they would have no objection to a new investigation, although they maintain that it would not reveal anything new.

Perhaps, but the legion of public critics of the commission's report remain unconvinced and want a new commission.

It is a very mixed group, and its members can roughly be divided into two types: those who simply criticize the Warren Commission's conclusions and those who go further by formulating various theories about what happened.

The latter include people such as comedian Dick Gregory who say the United States is run by a "cabal" that is blackmailing the Kennedy family and was responsi-



ble for killing President Kennedy. Gregory is among the best-known conspiratorialists because he makes about 300 lectures (at \$1000 per talk) on the subject on college campuses each year. Others include ex-CIA liaison officer Colonel L. Fletcher Prouty ("there is a grave conspiracy over the land") and former New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison, whose attempt.

to prove an assassination conspiracy collapsed in court.

Less well-known are the so-called "responsible" critics, who work up detailed analyses of errors in the commission report, but stop short of advancing any theories. This group, including ex-congressman Allard Lowenstein, rely on the work of dozens of assassination buffs, who literally have devoted their lives to analyzing every scrap of information about the shooting. Their unanimous verdict is that Oswald did not act alone.

The key film is the home-movie shot by a bystander, Abraham Zapruder. His film is invaluable because it is the only one that actually shows Kennedy being hit. Moreover, because Zapruder's camera was running at a determinable speed (18.3 frames per second) with a governor control, that means the frames of the film were about  $1\frac{1}{2}$ th of a second apart. More important, it means that Kennedy's movements during the critical seconds can be plotted with accuracy within  $1\frac{1}{2}$ th of a second, with a distance error of no more than 7.3 inches. Therefore, elapsed time between events can be pinpointed, especially between the firing of the first and last shots (6.8 seconds).

Given that sort of accuracy, why can't the Warren Commission case be proven conclusively? Because there still are ambiguities in the Zapruder film, the most important piece of evidence.

No film has ever been more thoroughly dissected, frame by frame, or subjected to so many different analyses — optics, motion, reversal — yet the film doesn't answer every question. In the key sequence showing Kennedy being hit, for example, Kennedy's head is seen suddenly jerking backwards. To computer expert Richard Sprague, a leading student of the assassination, this indicates that Kennedy was hit by another shot from the front. But to Dr. Latimer, this is a "neuromuscular spasm, consistent with a head wound from the rear."

However, the problem with the Warren Commission report for many Americans is less

technical. The fact is that the official account doesn't quite seem right intuitively. A loner with no record of ever threatening the President's life waits on the sixth floor of a building overlooking the President's motorcade route. As the presidential limousine passes, the assassin, using an ancient 1940 bolt-action Italian rifle, fires three shots in about six seconds. One shot misses, the other two hit the President, one of them exiting from Kennedy and striking Texas Governor John Connally, exiting again, striking Connally again. The bullet is recovered, virtually unmarked. Later, the suspect is arrested, denies the crime, and is shot to death by another man before he can go to trial.

Nonetheless it is the only version that is backed up by ballistic and circumstantial evidence. True, it is pockmarked by many unanswered questions and a host of curious circumstances, but no one yet has been able to refute it conclusively by making a solid case for another version. Many still are trying.