

Third Decade speech/fonzi

In 1976, more than a decade after the assassination of President John F. Kennedy -- and long after a majority of Americans had decided they didn't believe the Warren Commission Report -- the United States Congress announced it was going to "conduct a full and complete investigation."

Congress lied.

Congress said that its new investigation would be more impartial than the Warren Commission's, would examine with unbiased finality every piece of evidence, and would explore the possible involvement of every individual or group with the means and motivation to kill the President.

Congress lied.

Congress said that its probe would debunk all the wild theories and crazy speculations that had sprouted over the years and that it would confront all the unanswered questions surrounding the mystery of the assassination.

Congress lied.

And the leaders of Congress's new investigation said that it would definitely be the last investigation.

That, finally, was the truth. I believe there will never be another official government investigation of President Kennedy's assassination.

In my heart, that's a very difficult conclusion for me to accept -- and I will undoubtedly continue to support efforts to re-open the Kennedy case if those efforts could lead to a truly complete and honest investigation.

Considering the political realities, I don't see that happening. But I base my belief that there won't be another government investigation on my personal experiences during the last investigation.

In retrospect, it seems so obvious now that the government never wanted that investigation and it certainly does not want another one. By the government I mean, in this case, both the institutions within the government and our elected representatives. Certainly, the institutions within government are, by their very nature, opposed to any scrutiny that threatens their protected comforts or questions the basic foundations of their existence.

And our elected representatives view a Kennedy assassination investigation as an act that holds no positive political compensation for them individually. That self-centered perspective is the basic nature of every political animal in Congress.

With a few exceptions, most of the members of the Committee paid very little attention to the details of the staff's activities. (Offhand, I think of Connecticut's Christopher Dodd and North Carolina's Richardson Preyer as among the few who did.) Its Chief Counsel, Bob Blakey, structured the Committee's views of what it was doing and where it was going. Most of its members didn't really care.

I was reminded of that just recently, when I was speaking with one of my former fellow staffers, who asked not to be identified because he still works in Washington.

This was a very important person in the compilation of the Final Report, one of a small clique of Bob Blakey loyalists who, after the Committee officially ended, remained in Washington to help Blakey structure the final report to give it media "sex appeal" as he called it, and to make it appear as if we had conducted a real investigation. As segments of this final report were completed, they were run by the Congressional Committee members for approval. My fellow former Committee staffer was telling me about those last days:

"I remember at the very end I had to go see a bunch of them for some reason and, well, it was almost embarrassing. I had to explain who I was and what I was doing working for them, like some guy off the street. They didn't really care about the subject, they just put in their time.

"I think they were all sorry they had somehow got involved in the Kennedy assassination. I got the feeling they kind of resented that they were on the damn committee. And eventually my feeling came to be, why are we doing all this and working so hard when these Congressmen don't give a damn?"

As most of you may know, the House Select Committee on Assassinations was formed reluctantly by the house leadership only after tremendous pressure by the Black Caucus to re-open the Martin Luther King case. That was the wedge that opened the door to those pushing for a Kennedy investigation, and so the two investigations were piggy-backed, each with its own separate staff.

But as soon as that Committee was formed, the politicians decided they really didn't want it and made every attempt to kill it. They did succeed in getting rid of the first chief counsel, Richard Sprague, a former prosecutor who was threatening to conduct a real investigation. And when they forced Sprague to resign, they replaced him with someone who gave them what they wanted. Chief Counsel G. Robert Blakey produced a final report that made it appear as if a real investigation had been conducted -- it had all the lights and whistles, the weighty volumes of hearing transcripts and sophisticated scientific test results -- but it was as much a cover up as the Warren Commission Report had been because it did not accurately reflect how shallow and incomplete the actual investigation was. Like the Warren Commission investigation, it was another slap in the face of the American people.

Now let me ask you this: When are we going to get sick and tired of being slapped in the face and pretending it didn't happen?

Over and over the government has slapped the American people in the face by simply denying that the blatant truth is the blatant truth. It has slapped the American people in the face by lying repeatedly and insistently in the most fraudulent and outrageous manner.

I'll never forget how shocked I was when I discovered that the Warren Commission Report wasn't the truth. It had been out for several months. Not only were the American people and their elected representatives accepting it, almost all of the American media was praising it. The first stirrings of criticism came from small and obscure corners of the press.

I was working in Philadelphia then for a publication called, oddly enough, Philadelphia Magazine.

I was supposed to be the chief investigative writer, but that was too hard and I was always looking for nice easy stories to do. So one day, in late 1964, while searching for such a story, I happened to read a piece in Philadelphia's local legal daily, the Legal Intelligencer. The paper then ran mostly listings of court cases and suits filed, and had some legal news on its front page. But one day it's front page had an article written by a local attorney who worked for the School Board. His name was Vincent Salandria. His article was about the Warren Commission Report. I didn't know it at the time, but Salandria was one of the pioneering critics of the Warren Report.

But I'm not sure that small, legal newspaper in Philadelphia would have printed Salandria's article if another Philadelphia lawyer named Arlen Specter hadn't been involved with the Warren Commission. But it did print Salandria's article and, in reading it, I discovered that it was a highly detailed analysis of the report's conclusions, focusing on the trajectories and ballistics of the bullets. The first time I read the article, I didn't understand it. It was complex and technical. But I did grasp the sensational implication of Salandria's contentions: There was a possibility that the Warren Commission report was wrong.

I thought he was crazy. If you do not recall that time, you cannot comprehend what a discordant thing it was then to claim that an official government report might be wrong -- especially one which had been issued by a panel of men with such lofty public reputations.

I know it's hard for the post-Watergate generation to understand, but then almost everyone still believed what government officials said. If someone like Salandria came along and suggested that an official government report wasn't truthful...well, Salandria had to be nuts.

Normally, I wouldn't have a reason to get involved in a national story like the Kennedy assassination. But I decided I would write something about this oddball young attorney saying crazy things about our government. So I made an appointment to interview Vince Salandria.

Salandria told me his interest in the Warren Commission had begun long before its report was issued and largely because he did not like the fact that it was holding secret hearings.

Salandria began to watch the Warren Commission's activities. He spent his vacations in Dallas to familiarize himself with the murder scene. He ordered the Commission's Report and its 26 volumes of evidence as soon as they were issued and plunged into a page-by-page study.

"My initial feeling," Salandria told me, "was that if this were a simple assassination, as the Commission claimed, the facts would come together very neatly. If there were more than one assassin, the details would not fit."

Salandria told me the details did not fit. There were, he claimed, *blatant* contradictions between the Commission's conclusions and the evidence in the 26 volumes.

I found that hard to believe. But Salandria gave me a copy of the Report as well as the 26 volumes of evidence and suggested I take the time to study them carefully. I did and I, too, discovered that the details did

not fit. There were blatant contradictions between the Report's conclusions and the evidence in the 26 volumes.

But still I did not believe what was slapping me in the face. I knew Arlen Specter and was friendly with him.

Before he joined the Warren Commission, when he was an assistant district attorney, he had helped me with a couple of articles I worked on, including one about his rather courageous prosecution of the local Teamster boss. I knew Arlen was very smart and very articulate. He had been head of the Yale Law debating team. I was sure that once I talked with Arlen Specter he would explain and clear up all these apparent contradictions in the Warren Report.

I still have what I believe are historic tape recordings -- old reel-to-reel tapes -- of my two long interviews with Arlen Specter. When the Warren Report was issued and, later, when Salandria's article in *The Legal Intelligencer* was first published, Specter, responding to reporters' questions, was vigorous in his defense of the Commission's conclusions. But then, no reporter had thoroughly read the Report or its volumes of evidence.

As it turned out, I was the first one to ask Specter specific questions about the Report's inconsistencies. I couldn't believe the hemmings and hawings, the hesitations and evasions I got from the normally cool, collected and verbally masterful Specter. I had caught him off guard. As time went on, when other journalists became acquainted with the Report's incongruities and began hitting Specter with tougher questions, he was ready. But, by then, my encounter with Specter had already convinced me that President Kennedy was murdered as the result of a conspiracy.

Let me give you an example:

The Warren Report said the entrance wound caused by the bullet which came out Kennedy's throat was "approximately five-and-a-half inches" below the back of the right ear.

But the photographs, ~~it printed~~ <sup>Later released by the FBI,</sup> of Kennedy's jacket clearly indicates that the hole in the back of the jacket is almost five-and-a-half inches below the top of the collar, and one-and-three-quarter inches to the right of the center back seam of the coat.

And the photograph ~~the Warren Report printed~~ of the shirt worn by the President shows a hole in the back consistent with the one in the jacket, about five-and-three-quarter inches below the top of the collar and one-and-one-eighth inches to the right of the middle.

The locations of both these holes are inconsistent with the wound below the back of the right ear described in the Commission's autopsy report.

I'll never forget asking Specter about that as I sat in his City Hall office in Philadelphia. (It was about a year after he had returned from his Warren Commission job and had recently been elected District Attorney.)

"Well," he said -- and now I'm going to be quoting Arlen Specter exactly from the transcript of those tape recordings, "that difference is accounted for because the President was waving his arm." He got up from his desk and attempted to demonstrate his explanation on me, pulling my arm up high over my head. "Wave your arm a

few times," he said, "wave at the crowd." He was standing behind me now, jabbing a finger into the base of my neck. "Well, see, if the bullet goes in here, the jacket gets hunched up. If you take this point right here and then you strip the coat down, it comes out at a lower point."

A lower point? I said.

"Well, not too much lower on your example, but the jacket rides up."

If the jacket were 'hunched up,' I asked, wouldn't there have been two holes as a result of the doubling over of the cloth?

"No, not necessarily," Specter admitted. "It...it wouldn't be doubled over. When you sit in the car it could be doubled over at most any point, but the probabilities are that...aaah...that it gets...that...aaah...this...this is about the way a jacket rides up. You sit back...sit back now...all right now...if...usually, as your jacket lies there, the doubling is right up here, but if...but if you have a bullet hit you right about here, which is where I had it, where your jacket sits...it's not...it's not...it ordinarily doesn't crease that far back."

What about the shirt?

"Same thing."

Was Specter saying there is no inconsistency between the Commission's location of the wound and the holes in the clothing?

"No, not at all," Specter said, which I thought was an important admission. "That gave us a lot of concern. First time we lined up the shirt...after all, we lined up the shirt...and the hole in the shirt is right about, right about the knot of the tie, came right about here in a slit in the front..."

But where did it go in the back?

"Well, the back hole, when the shirt is laid down, comes...aah...well, I forget exactly where it came, but it certainly wasn't higher, enough higher to...aaah...understand the...aah...the angle of decline which..."

Was it lower? Was it lower than the slit in the front?

"Well, I think that...that if you took the shirt without allowing for its being pulled up, that it would either have been in line or somewhat lower."

Somewhat lower?

"Perhaps. I...I don't want to say because I don't really remember. I got to take a look at that shirt."

I found it difficult to believe that Arlen Specter didn't take a very close look at that shirt -- and that jacket -- at the time of the investigation and that these factors didn't indelibly stick in his mind: Kennedy was one of the best-tailored Presidents ever to occupy the White House, and if it is possible -- but not probable -- that he was wearing a suit jacket baggy enough to ride up five or six inches in the back when he waved

his arm, it is inconceivable that a tightly buttoned shirt could have done the same thing.

And the Zapruder film shows Kennedy was not waving his hand higher than the level of his forehead before he was shot.

After those interviews with Arlen Specter, my belief in my government was never the same. I felt that in advancing the single bullet theory as the truth, the government had slapped the American people in the face.

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Many years later, after I had moved to Miami, I received a call from Senator Richard Schweiker's assistant, Dave Newhall. Schweiker was on the Church Committee on Intelligence and had pushed Church into letting him have a subcommittee looking into how the intelligence agencies responded to the Kennedy assassination. That was the limit of its mandate.

Newhall, who knew of my work at Philadelphia Magazine and my early interest in the assassination, told me that the staff of Schweiker's subcommittee was leaning heavily on CIA documents that indicated that there was a Castro involvement in Kennedy's murder. Schweiker decided that the opposite road -- the possible involvement of anti-Castro Cubans -- should also be looked into. He had a few leads he wanted me to check out. Fine, I said, how long did he think it would take? A couple of weeks, he said. But as a result of what developed, I wound up working for Schweiker for a year and, then later, was asked to join the House Committee shortly after it was formed.

But by the time I had joined Schweiker's staff in 1975, Vince Salandria had become something of a legend among the growing circle of Warren Commission critics.

Almost everyone who planned to write a book about the Kennedy assassination first journeyed to Philadelphia to probe Salandria for insights and perspective. Salandria himself, however, never went commercial, never wrote a book, never capitalized on his knowledge. In fact, he spent a good deal of his time and his modest resources helping others and working to "advance the case." By that he meant trying to get the American people to understand what really happened when Kennedy was assassinated -- a job most of the national media had fallen woefully short on. But then, for some reason, Salandria became less involved in pursuing the investigation and he faded into the background.

But before starting my new job, I decided to return to Philadelphia to draw upon Salandria's vast knowledge of the evidence and get his opinion about the most fruitful areas of investigation. Salandria was most cordial, and we spent a long winter Sunday talking. Yet I sensed a certain balking in his attitude, a feeling of disappointment in what I was about to begin. Eventually, he explained why he was no longer actively involved in pursuing the Kennedy assassination. It gave me a surprising insight into how far Salandria's thinking had evolved.

"I'm afraid we were misled," Salandria told me. "All the critics, myself included, were misled very early. I see that now. We spent too much time and effort micro-analyzing the details of the assassination when all the time it was obvious, it was blatantly obvious, that it was a conspiracy.

Don't you think that the men who killed Kennedy had the means to do it in the most sophisticated and subtle way?

They chose not to. Instead, they picked the shooting gallery that was Dealey Plaza and did it in the most barbarous and openly arrogant manner. The cover story was transparent and designed not to hold, to fall apart at the slightest scrutiny. The forces that killed Kennedy wanted the message clear: 'We are in control and no one -- not the President, nor Congress, nor any elected official -- no one can do anything about it.' It was a message to the people that their government was powerless. And the people eventually got the message."

And then Salandria said: "I suggest to you, my friend, that the interests of those who killed Kennedy now transcend national boundaries and national priorities.

We must face that fact -- and not waste any more time micro-analyzing the evidence. That's exactly what they want us to do. They have kept us busy for so long. And I will bet, buddy, that is what will happen to you. They'll keep you very, very busy and, eventually, they'll wear you down."

It had been almost ten years from the time I first interviewed Salandria, yet, flying back home to Miami that evening, I sat in the dark plane and had an eerie sense of *deja vu*. As when I had first spoken with him ten years earlier, I didn't quite grasp exactly what he was talking about, but I had the uneasy feeling he was advancing some awesomely frightening theories. Then it crossed my mind that, perhaps this time for sure, Salandria was crazy.

"They" are going to keep me busy? Who the hell are "they"? And, after all these years, are "they" still around? And why would "they" take any interest in what one lone investigator in Miami would be doing?

It seemed to me that a bit of paranoia had slipped into Vince Salandria's thinking.

And then, in no time at all, I had two very enlightening experiences.

For instance, one of the first leads Schweiker asked me to check came from a source he considered impeccable: Clare Boothe Luce. One of the wealthiest women in the world, widow of the founder of the Time, Inc. publishing empire, former member of the U.S. House of Representatives, former Ambassador to Italy, Clare Boothe Luce was the last person in the world Schweiker would have suspected of leading him on a wild goose chase.

Yet the chase began almost immediately. Right after Schweiker announced the formation of his Kennedy assassination Subcommittee, he was told that Clare Boothe Luce wanted to give him some information relating to the Kennedy assassination.

Luce told Schweiker that some time after the Bay of Pigs she received a call from her "great friend" William Pawley, who lived in Miami. Pawley was a man of immense wealth. He had made his first millions in oil and then, during World War II, he had gained fame setting up the Flying Tigers with General Claire Chennault. Pawley had also owned major sugar interests in Cuba, as well as Havana's bus, trolley and gas systems. And Pawley was one of the dispossessed American investors in Cuba who early tried to convince Eisenhower that Castro was a Communist and urged him to arm the exiles in Miami.

Clare Boothe Luce told Schweiker that Pawley had gotten the idea of putting together a fleet of

speedboats -- sea-going "Flying Tigers" as it were -- which would be used by the exiles to dart in and out of Cuba on "intelligence gathering" missions. He asked her to sponsor one of these boats and she agreed. As a result of her sponsorship, Luce got to know the three-man crew of the boat "fairly well," as she said. She called them "my boys." Well, then came the Cuban Missile Crisis and, as Luce said rather bitterly, "the President made his deal with Khrushchev and I never saw my young Cubans again," she said. The boat operations were stopped, she said, when Pawley was notified by the Kennedy administration that it was invoking the Neutrality Act and would prevent any further exile missions into Cuba.

Luce said she hadn't thought about her boat crew until the day that President Kennedy was killed. That evening she received a telephone call from one of the crew members. She told Schweiker his name was "something like" Julio Fernandez, and he said he was calling her from New Orleans. Julio Fernandez told her that he and the other crew members had been forced out of Miami after the Cuban missile crisis and that they had started a "Free Cuba" cell in New Orleans. Luce said that Fernandez told her that Oswald had approached his group and offered his services as a potential Castro assassin. He said his group didn't believe Oswald, suspected he was really a Communist and decided to keep tabs on him. Fernandez said they found that Oswald was, indeed, a Communist, and they eventually penetrated his "cell" and tape-recorded his talks, including his bragging that he was "the greatest shot in the world."

Fernandez said that Oswald then suddenly came into money and went to Mexico City and then Dallas. According to Luce, Fernandez also told her that his group had photographs of Oswald and copies of handbills Oswald had been distributing on the streets of New Orleans. Fernandez asked Luce what he should do with this information and material.

"I said what you do is call the FBI at once," Luce said she told Fernandez. "Don't waste a minute. Go right in and call up the FBI."

Luce said she did not think about the story again until Jim Garrison's investigation hit the headlines in 1967. She said she called the New Orleans district attorney and told him of the incident but, after talking to him for ten minutes, she decided he was a "phony" and not serious. Through Pawley, however, she did locate and call her "young Cuban" and she reminded him of his conversation with her the evening Kennedy was killed.

By then, Luce recalled, Julio Fernandez no longer wanted to get involved: "He said, 'Mrs. Luce, we did just what you said. We got it all to the FBI. They came, took our tape recordings, took our photographs and told us to keep our mouths shut.' He said, 'Mrs. Luce, I am married, I have two children, I I don't want any part of the Kennedy assassination now. You couldn't torture it out of me.'"

Her impression, Luce told Schweiker, based on what she was told by Fernandez, was that Oswald was hired by Castro to assassinate Kennedy in retaliation for the assassination attempts against him.

Luce also said she did not remember the names of the other crew members, nor did she know how to get in touch with Julio Fernandez now. But, she said, Bill Pawley would know all about it.

Schweiker called Pawley and Pawley said he didn't remember a thing. But Schweiker took it as an indication that Pawley just didn't want to get involved, and he still thought that Luce's story, if confirmed, could lead to a significant break. It had to have some foundation; after all, it had come from Clare Boothe Luce. Schweiker asked me to try to find the Julio Fernandez who had called her.

I discovered that there are a lot of Cubans named Julio Fernandez in Miami. And in New Orleans. I spent weeks talking with scores of Cubans named Julio Fernandez.

I even found one in upstate New York whose name had appeared in an FBI report, but, when I checked him out, I concluded he wasn't the Julio Fernandez who had called Clare Boothe Luce.

What is interesting in retrospect about the Luce story is that it had characteristics common to many of the disinformation stories that emerged immediately after the assassination. And now, here it was so many years later, these same characteristics also began to pop up in so many of the other leads which were fed to the Schweiker Subcommittee and, later, to the House Assassinations Committee. The key characteristic was this: They were difficult, time consuming and, ultimately, impossible to confirm but could not be dismissed outright because they always contained at least one small kernel of truth mixed in.

For instance, in the case of Luce's lead, it was known that Oswald did approach an anti-Castro group in New Orleans and say he was interested in helping their cause. And you all know the story of how later Carlos Bringuier, who was the chief New Orleans delegate of the Student Revolutionary Directorate, encountered Oswald handing out pro-Castro leaflets. But you also probably know how staged that whole encounter was. You may not know, however, that the Committee discovered that the Student Directorate was one of the anti-Castro Cuban groups under the direct control of the CIA's JM/WAVE station in Miami.

At any rate, I spent a huge amount of time pursuing the lead that Clare Boothe Luce had provided Schweiker. I was kept very very busy. In the end, I was absolutely sure that Luce's story had no foundation, but I couldn't figure out how or why in the world she had brought it to Senator Schweiker.

Speaking of getting slapped in the face.....

Many times in the course of my experiences investigating the Kennedy assassination, I found it strangely difficult to accept the obvious. It's like sitting and talking amiably at a table with a friend who suddenly reaches out and slaps you across the face and then, just as suddenly, acts as if it never happened. And although you feel the sting, the way your friend goes on talking and smiling, you yourself wonder if it ever happened. *Did I just get slapped in the face?* It was a question I asked myself often.

Could the famous, sophisticated, respected Clare Boothe Luce have deliberately told Senator Schweiker such an embroidered tale of poppycock simply to mislead him and waste his time and resources?

It was a couple of years after her story to Schweiker, and after I had checked her leads as far as they would go, that I tried setting up a meeting with Luce. By then I was working on the House Assassinations Committee. I had a tough time setting up an appointment. By the time she consented to an interview, the

Committee was winding down and I couldn't convince my bosses that we needed to take her testimony under oath. It was too late to do that, I was told, we had to get a report out.

I finally met Clare Boothe Luce at her Watergate apartment, amid her splendid collection of museum-quality Chinese art and artifacts. Mrs. Luce was most pleasant and cooperative. She graciously repeated for me the entire story she had told Senator Schweiker, virtually unchanged.

However, she also confirmed something that our researchers on the Committee had only recently discovered. They learned that while Luce was in touch with Senator Schweiker, she was also calling CIA Director William Colby and telling him what was happening with Schweiker's Kennedy investigation. According to Colby's own notes, she admitted to him that she had concocted the name of Julio Fernandez. When I asked Luce why she had done that, she simply smiled sweetly.

When I walked out of the Watergate late that afternoon, I knew only one thing for sure: An awful lot of time had been spent checking out Luce's story and, in the end, it led nowhere at all.

Shortly afterwards, for reasons having to do with another part of this story, I was able to get into a luncheon meeting of the Association of Former Intelligence Officers at a country club in Arlington. I discovered that the guest speaker happened to be Clare Boothe Luce. Her speech was a vigorous defense of the intelligence establishment. I also discovered that Clare Boothe Luce was not only just a guest speaker, she was actually on the Board of Directors of the Association of Former Intelligence Officers.

Suddenly it was as obvious as a slap across my face.

Time and again, as I probed the tangle of detail that the Kennedy assassination had become, a thread indicating an association with an intelligence activity would appear; sometimes distinct, often only thin and tenuous. Was there *really* any meaning to it? Could 'they' still be out there?

There was another incident which I won't go into a lot of detail on, but it involved a man from Key West who called Schweiker's office and said he remembered seeing Lee Harvey Oswald and Jack Ruby at the Key West Airport with a group of young people who were heading for Cuba to help cut sugar cane. He said he learned that the group was part of an organization called the Fair Play for Cuba Committee.

Now this sounded like a wild story I would normally find hard to believe, but the man was one of the most respected citizens of Key West, a successful businessman who had once been the Director of the airport. And when I spoke with him he was exceptionally believable. I spent almost a week in Key West checking out his story. He was very credible. He was so detailed in his memory of where Oswald and Ruby were standing at the airport, I thought I could see them myself. He provided news clips about flights and groups which did fly out of Key West to help cut sugar cane in Cuba. Some of what he said did check out. But I talked to dozens of people, crawled through piles of records and passenger manifests in a musty warehouse and, in the end, could not confirm that either Oswald or Ruby was there. But during the course of the week I became very friendly with this very respected and very credible Key West businessman. One night, he and his wife even invited me to dinner.

We had talked of many things besides the Kennedy assassination and were beginning to get to know each other a little. He was a soft-spoken, intelligent man and I liked him.

One day we were chatting in his office. Over the course of a long conversation he mentioned that he was a Navy veteran and an experienced pilot, had an avid interest in electronics and considered himself an expert photographer. He then mentioned he had a photo lab behind his machine shop. I told him about my own interest in photography and asked to see it. I assumed was an amateur photographer who might have a nice array of advanced amateur equipment. But I was amazed at the collection of sophisticated electronic and photographic gear stocked in this man's shop.

I guessed there was well over a few hundred thousand dollars worth of top-notch equipment. I then noticed sitting on the floor in a corner what appeared to be the housing of an aerial reconnaissance camera.

*Hey, what's going on here? I thought.*

So I gently began probing the man about his use of such equipment. Well, he said, he had made a number of trips into Cuba after Castro took over in order to find out a few things. He told a story about once being suspected of spying by Castro's police and how he was retained and beaten. He spoke of how he hated Castro and how he thought Batista, whom he had known personally, was "one of the best friends the United States ever had."

When I asked him specifically about the reconnaissance camera, he said he had flown a number of aerial photographic missions. He proudly went into a detailed explanation of how he had designed a special device enabling him to trigger the camera, hidden in the belly of his small plane, from the cockpit. He said he had taken shots of the Russian missiles in Cuba long before Kennedy announced they existed.

For whom, I tried to ask casually, was he working? "I was told," he said smiling, "I was working for the United States Information Agency." I asked if he thought it possible that he was really working for the CIA. "Yes," he said, "I would think so." Just think so. I decided to press him a bit. I asked him who paid for all the sophisticated photo and electronic equipment he had. He looked at me as if I were playing a game with him and didn't answer directly.

Finally he gave me a wide grin. "No comment," he said.

It's a beautiful ride from Key West to Miami over a long stretch of the Overseas Highway. But I couldn't appreciate the scenery because my mind was a jumble of confusion about what had just happened. I wanted to believe this man because he was intelligent and credible and I liked him. Besides, why would he be lying? Why would he tell such a story and go out of his way to bring it to Schweiker's attention? I remember the questions racing through my mind as I drove back. I also remember feeling as if I had just been slapped across the face.

I also couldn't help remembering what Vince Salandria had told me: "'They will keep you very, very busy."

From my personal experiences investigating the Kennedy assassination, both on my own and as a government investigator, I feel I can make two hard statements to you tonight:

Statement Number One: The facts of a conspiracy are beyond question. The facts reveal that there is absolutely no doubt now -- and there was no doubt long before the acoustics evidence came in -- that there was a conspiracy.

Statement Number Two: Lee Harvey Oswald had an association with an American intelligence agency, perhaps with more than one, but absolutely no doubt with the CIA.

Let's talk about both those assertions. First, the conspiracy:

I -- and likely many of my fellow researchers here tonight -- could spend many hours detailing the overwhelming amount of evidence that points to a conspiracy, some of it unassailable, some of it questionable, but all of it part of the *majority* of the evidence that indicates a conspiracy. In my work with the House Assassinations Committee, I feel I was able to contribute to developing at least two areas of evidence of lasting significance. One of them concerned what is called the "Odio incident." Most of you are familiar with it but I'll summarize it for those who are not. Silvia Odio was a young Cuban exile living in Dallas. Her German husband had deserted her and she was living alone in a small garden-type apartment with her four small children. Her father was a wealthy Cuban businessman who Castro put in prison.

Silvia Odio said that one the evening in the last ~~weekend~~ days of September, 1963, three men came to her door seeking her help in raising funds for anti-Castro activity. She spoke to them for about 20 minutes, but she was suspicious of them and finally put them off. But, she said, she remembered that one of the men was introduced to her as "Leon Oswald." A couple of days later, the man who had been the spokesman for the group, who had said his name was Leopoldo, called Odio on the telephone and, in the course of the conversation, said that Oswald had been a Marine who was an excellent marksman who believed that "we Cubans...should have assassinated Kennedy after the Bay of Pigs."

Silvia Odio, by the way, did not come forward with her story after the assassination because she was afraid. The FBI only learned about it in a very round-about and coincidental way.

But the Odio story gave the Warren Commission tremendous problems. First of all, it had already concluded that Oswald didn't have any fellow conspirators and, secondly, it had also concluded that Oswald was in Mexico City at the time Silvia Odio said she saw him in Dallas. So the Warren Commission first had the FBI attempt to discredit Odio herself and, in its final report, concocted what it knew to be a false explanation for her story.

But during the House Committee's investigation, I, along with my fellow Miami investigator Al Gonzales and a staff attorney named Jim McDonald, developed evidence that proved without a doubt that Silvia Odio was telling the truth and that she was a very credible witness. But my bosses on the House Committee didn't want to hear that because, before they got the acoustic test results, they were ready to conclude, like the Warren Commission, that there was no conspiracy.

Silvia Odio's scheduled appearance at our public hearings was cancelled. But by the time it came time to write the final report, we had provided such a hard foundation of solid evidence that Bob Blakey and the Committee was

forced to conclude that Odio was a credible witness. And that's what they finally report did. And then, incredibly enough, totally ignored the tremendous significance of that conclusion.

We had proven without a doubt that Silvia Odio had told the story to at least two unrelated, outside individuals *before* Kennedy's assassination, and that her younger sister, Annie, who was present when the men visited, confirmed that she, too, had identified Oswald when she saw him on television on the day of the assassination. Whether or not it was the real Oswald or a double is irrelevant. The point is this: There was a deliberate act that linked Oswald to the assassination *before* the assassination. Beyond all the other evidence indicating conspiracy, all the acoustic tests, the autopsy evidence, the bullet trajectory theories and what have you, even beyond all the other evidence of Oswald's associations, the Odio incident cries conspiracy *absolutely*. I now have no hesitation in declaring the Kennedy assassination was a conspiracy based strictly on Silvia Odio's consistently credible story and our investigation's proof of its validity.

My second assertion -- that Oswald was connected to an intelligence agency -- and it's my personal belief that the CIA has infiltrated all other American intelligence agencies -- again, there's a preponderance of evidence indicating that association. Phil Melanson had enough material to document an entire book, an excellent book called Spy Saga, detailing Oswald's connections. Researcher A.J. Weberman recently uncovered CIA documents which reveal that when the CIA opened Oswald's "201 file," it got some of its records from one of its own obscure departments called CI/SIG -- Counterintelligence/Special Investigations Group. This was a small, elite, supersecret unit run by James Angleton running major case counterintelligence activities in Russia. And the records are dated at the time Oswald was in Russia.

However, I believe the most solid foundation for my assertion of Oswald having a CIA connection comes from my experiences in investigating what is called the Maurice Bishop-David Atlee Phillips area.

As some of you may know, I developed a witness in Miami named Antonio Veciana who was the founder and leader of Alpha 66, the largest, most militant anti-Castro group during the CIA's massive secret war against Castro in the period between the Bay of Pigs and the Cuban Missile Crisis. It was Alpha 66 that attempted to sink Russian ships in Havana harbor during the most dangerous and delicate time of Kennedy's negotiations with Khrushchev. At the time, it seemed to be the act of a crazy, renegade group of anti-Castro Cubans who thought a war against Communism and Castro was a marvelous idea and that, in even dealing with Khrushchev Kennedy was a traitor.

But Veciana told me that those Havana harbor raids were instigated by a CIA operative named Maurice Bishop, who had been his strategic advisor for more than twelve years, had instigated the very founding of Alpha 66, and had also directed him to organize two assassination attempts against Castro. And it was Maurice Bishop that Veciana saw with Lee Harvey Oswald in early September in Dallas in 1963.

Maurice Bishop was David Atlee Phillips, who retired from the CIA as Chief of the Western Hemisphere Division. I state that unequivocally, although Veciana cannot officially identify him publicly as such.

In addition to the preponderance of evidence indicating that David Phillips was Maurice Bishop, believe me, I know that he was. And Bob Blakey and the House Assassinations Committee knew that he was, although its report did not admit that.

But if there is one area of the investigation which showed without a doubt that the Assassinations Committee did not want to confront the CIA or open doors that would force it to face facts it didn't want to face, it is this area. David Atlee Phillips committed perjury before the Committee. It could have been proven, he would have been convicted. Chief Counsel Blakey refused to pursue that option. That would have negated the Committee's final report that the CIA wasn't involved in the Kennedy assassination.

So, again, the American people got slapped in the face. We have been slapped in the face over and over again and we still deny it is happening to us. Why?

There is a small group of individuals who maintain a sort of round-robin correspondence among themselves, exchanging thoughts and opinions on various issues, the Kennedy assassination being the major one. One of these individuals is Dr. Marty Schotz, a psychiatrist in Brookline, Mass. In one of his recent letters, I thought Marty made a particularly incisive observation, relevant to what we're talking about tonight.

Here's what he wrote:

"It is so important to understand that one of the primary means of immobilizing the American people politically today is to hold them in a state of confusion in which anything can be believed but nothing can be known, nothing of significance that is.

And the American people are more than willing to be held in this state because to KNOW the truth -- as opposed to only BELIEVE the truth -- is to face an awful terror and to be no longer able to evade responsibility. It is precisely in moving from belief to knowledge that the citizen moves from irresponsibility to responsibility, from helplessness and hopelessness to action with the ultimate aim of being empowered and confident in one's rational powers."

So Marty Schotz is absolutely right. Today most Americans BELIEVE there was a conspiracy to kill President Kennedy, but they don't KNOW it. They don't want to KNOW it -- and our government doesn't want to KNOW it and our elected representatives don't want to KNOW it because KNOWING it would mean having to do something about it. That's an awesome thought.

But perhaps we all might find it easier to come to KNOW it if we remembered one little bit of historic reality: On November 22nd, 1963, a man died in Dallas.

I think one of the most powerful experiences I had with the Assassinations Committee was toward the end when I finally got a chance to go to Dallas, officially.

I had, of course, been to Dallas a few times before I joined the Committee, but this time it was official and I had a lot of last minute work to do. But, one day, I decided, for some reason I can't explain, I would take the time to go the very spot where President Kennedy was killed, right there on the street.

I described that experience in the book I just finished and I'd like to read it to you. I'm hoping it helps put into perspective why you and I are here and what this is really all about. But first I'd like to read a prologue to it that put that incident into an even larger perspective because, after all, what we're talking about here is death:

*At some point in each of our lives, we encounter the reality of death and are struck by its absolute finality. For some it comes traumatically, on the field of battle, in an automobile accident or just being at the bedside of a dying loved one, watching in anguish that terrible, hollow last breath of life drift softly from a body. For others it could arrive with the shock of a friend's unexpected demise. I'm speaking now of the feeling that comes immediately after that shock, when our very soul instantly falls into a dark, bottomless hole. The experience involves a sudden realization that someone who was a part of our moving, talking, touching, living world will simply not be any more. He or she will not be here tomorrow. Or all the days after tomorrow. It is a realization that leaves in its wake a dreadful emptiness, a sense of loss so deep and sad there remains forever an abyss in our own lives.*

\*

I remember now a very hot day in Dallas in the summer of 1978. The temperature had climbed to 106 degrees. I could see the city's fever shimmering from the dark macadam, feel its heavy heat on my skin. I waited on the south side of Elm Street for a break in the traffic and then moved out, into the middle of the center lane.

I stopped on the spot. *Right about...here....* I had studied it in the films and the still photos. *Right...here!*

Above me rose the dark shadows of the trees and the heavy foliage of the grassy knoll. There was a stillness there now, a breezeless serenity. On my right loomed the familiar red brick building -- flat, hard-edged, its rows of sooted windows now innocuous and dull. My mind dropped back into that micro-instant of history....

*Right here...is where a man died, in an explosively horrible and bloody moment. That simple and overpowering truth had been oddly removed from the whirlwind of activity in which I had been involved. A man was killed here, and what had been going on in Washington -- all the officious meetings and the political posturing, all the time and attention devoted to administrative procedures and organizational processes and forms and reports for the record, all the chaotic concern for distorted priorities and all the scurrying about in a thousand directions in the mad rush to produce a final report -- all that seemed so detached from the hard reality of a single fact: A man was killed here. Wasn't that supposed to have some relationship to what we were doing?*

And now here I was standing in Dealey Plaza, on the spot where President John F. Kennedy was killed on November 22nd, 1963, and wondering what the hell had gone wrong. What had smothered my initial optimism, my hope that, after all these years, we might finally find out the truth. Why had I become so bitter and cynical, so depressed

and frustrated about the end result of all our time and effort?

Standing in Dealey Plaza on that very hot day in Dallas, I could not help thinking that perhaps -- just perhaps -- the powers that controlled the last investigation would not have gone so far astray had they remembered that instant of time when a man's life ended here. *A man's life ended...*

I think that is why we are here and why we must get the American people to KNOW -- not just to believe -- but to KNOW what happened. Again and again we must remind them, as we ourselves must never forget:

A man died in Dallas.

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