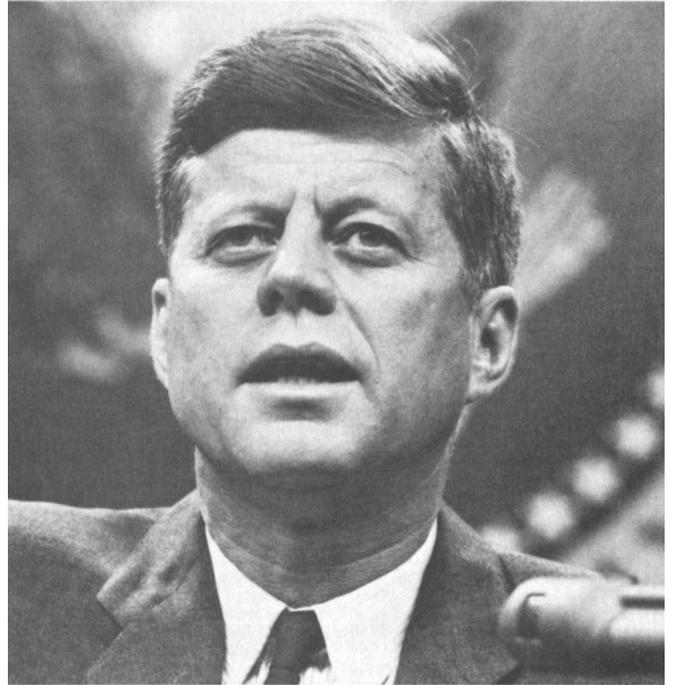


Editor's note: I wish to express my gratitude to Maria Fonzi for letting me borrow her November 1980 copy of Gaeton Fonzi's *Washingtonian* article—as well as the February 1981 issue with Robert Blakey's letter and Fonzi's response—in order to scan the originals and craft this hypertext edition. As Marie shared with me in a July 2017 e-mail, "Today I found Blakey's original letter threatening him with litigation, followed by finding Phillips' law suit for 35 million. Gaet's reaction was to expand the *Washingtonian* article into a book. I always told him that he was brave. But he was more than that; he was fearless!" Recently Marie explained how this "article was originally written for *Philadelphia Magazine*; Alan [Halpern] got fired; Alan made contacts and *The Washingtonian* bought the story. Gaet owned rights to the story and gave it to Bernie [McCormick] to publish in his magazines." The book this article was expanded into was aptly titled, *The Last Investigation*. See Also: [Original Manuscript of The Last Investigation](#).

WHO KILLED JFK?

BY GAETON FONZI

The Washingtonian
November 1980, pp. 157-192.



There Were Two Conspiracies in the Kennedy Assassination: The First Was to Murder the President. The Second Was to Pretend There Was a Full and Complete Investigation.

This Is the Story of Government Investigator Gaeton Fonzi and His Three-Year Search for the Truth, His Efforts to Track Down a Mysterious American Spymaster Seen in Dallas with Lee Harvey Oswald in September 1963, His Work for the House Assassinations Committee That Was Supposed to Tell the American People What Really Happened on November 22, 1963.

Fed Up with the Politicizing of This Last Investigation, He Breaks His Oath of Silence to Tell What the Insiders Know About the Assassination of President John F. Kennedy. It Is a Suspenseful Spy Story, It Is a Clear-Eyed Account of How Washington Handles Serious Issues, and It Is History.

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A very hot day in Dallas in the summer of 1978. I could see the city's 106-degree fever shimmering from the gray macadam. I waited on the south curb of Elm Street for a break in the traffic and then walked out into the center lane. The street is not as wide as it appears in photographs. *Right about ... here.* I looked over at the grassy knoll. There was only a stillness there now, a breezeless serenity. On my right was the familiar red brick building, flat, hard-

edged, its rows of sooty windows now dull. In my mind, I dropped into a well of time and fell against that instant of history.

A man was killed here.

Here, in an explosively horrible and bloody moment, a man's life ended. That realization—a man was killed here—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, and now all the scurrying about in a thousand directions in the mad rush to produce a final report—all of that seemed detached from the reality of a single fact: A man was killed here.

I had been working as an investigator for the House Select Committee on Assassinations for more than a year and a half. Now I was one of the few investigators remaining on the staff. The rest had been fired after less than six months of a formal investigation. And now I was standing in Dealey Plaza, on the spot where President John F. Kennedy was killed on November 22, 1963, and wondering what the hell had gone wrong.

I stood in Dealey Plaza on that hot day in 1978 and could not help thinking that the powers that controlled the Assassinations Committee would have searched much harder for the truth if they had remembered that instant of time when a man's life ended here.

I

The Historical Imperatives

Years ago, in reviewing a book about the Warren Commission, author and critic Sylvia Meagher wrote: “There are no heroes in this piece, only men who collaborated actively or passively—willfully or self-deludedly—in dirty work that does violence to the elementary concept of justice and affronts normal intelligence.”

It didn't take long for most of those who examined the 1964 report of the Warren Commission and its volumes of published evidence to conclude that its investigation of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy was deficient. Considering the Commission's resources and the opportunity it had at the time to do a thorough investigation, its failure was, indeed, a “violence to the elementary concept of justice.” With its strained case for a lone-nut assassin, the Warren Commission report became hard for most Americans to swallow. By the early '70s, polls showed that only a small percentage of people still believed it. Its legacy was a nagging, burning scar on the psyche of America.

Finally, on September 17, 1976, the US House of Representatives passed House Resolution 222,

which established a Select Committee to “conduct a full and complete investigation and study of the circumstances surrounding the assassination and death of President John F. Kennedy....”

The politicians may have given it legal status, but the mandate came from deep within the conscience of a nation fed up with the deceptions and confusions and crazy theories spawned in the wake of the assassination of a President.

When the House Assassinations Committee expired more than two years later, it issued a report that appeared to have more substance and depth than the Warren Commission’s report.

But, like the Warren Commission, what the House Assassinations Committee did not do was “conduct a full and complete investigation.”

What the House Assassinations Committee did do about that murder of a young President in Dallas was play political games, Washington-style.



Before a horrified national television audience, Jack Ruby kills Lee Harvey Oswald and silences the man who could best have answered the still-unresolved questions about the Kennedy assassination.



Dealey Plaza in Dallas: The white arrow points to the Texas School Book Depository, where Oswald reputedly fired the fatal shots on November 22, 1963. Circled is the grassy knoll from which a second gunman may have fired the shot that blew Kennedy’s head off.

On Tuesday morning, July 17, 1979, the chairman of the House Select Committee on Assassinations, Ohio Democrat Louis Stokes, called a press conference to release the Committee’s final report.

The resulting front-page headline in the *Washington Post* was **MOBSTERS LINKED TO JFK DEATH**.

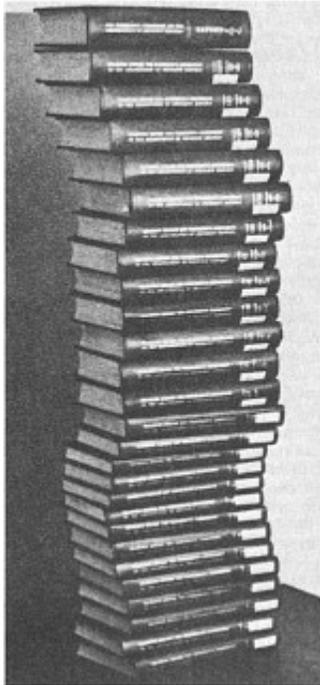
The Committee’s chief counsel and staff director, G. Robert Blakey, wanted to be certain that the reporters at the press conference would accurately interpret the report’s interlinear message. “I am now firmly of the opinion that the Mob did it,” he told them. “It is a historical truth.” Then—to use an expression popular among Committee staffers, “covering his ass”—he quickly added: “This Committee report does not say the Mob did it. *I* said it. I think the Mob did it.”

My area of investigation threatened to open more doors than the Committee cared to open. It dealt with a mysterious CIA spymaster linked to Lee Harvey Oswald.

I don’t know if the Mob did it, but I doubt it. From my experience as a Committee investigator, I do know this: The Committee’s investigation was not adequate enough or honest enough to produce any firm conclusions about the nature of the conspiracy to kill President Kennedy. To

give the impression that it was is a deception, a particularly Washington kind of deception.

Ten months after the 1963 assassination, the Warren Commission produced its report and 26 accompanying volumes of testimony and exhibits, much of which contradicted the Commission's conclusion that Oswald had acted alone.



There were areas of the Committee's investigation that, if pursued, could have negated "the Mob did it" implications of the Committee's final report. My area of investigation threatened to open more doors than the Committee cared to open. It dealt with a mysterious CIA spymaster linked to Lee Harvey Oswald.

When the Committee's report was released in the summer of 1979, it was long overdue. After spending more than \$5.4 million over a two-year period, the Committee had legally ceased to exist in December 1978. At that time, however, Chief Counsel Blakey wasn't satisfied with the report. He felt it had to be rewritten. So he had himself and a few staff members temporarily attached to the office of the Speaker of the House for administrative and pay purposes. It took them almost seven months to reconstruct a new final report.

That reconstruction was necessary because of evidence that emerged in the last days of the Committee's life. Acoustics experts, analyzing a tape recording of the sounds in Dealey Plaza when Kennedy was shot, concluded that more than one rifle had been fired.

The presence of more than one gunman meant there must have been a conspiracy; yet the Committee had not nailed down the character of that conspiracy. That wasn't good enough for Blakey. He had earlier determined he was going to produce an impressive document. "This, I can assure you, will be the absolutely *final* report on the Kennedy assassination," he had told the staff. "This will be the *last* investigation. After us, there ain't gonna be no more."

Thus, he felt he had to restructure and weight the report toward a conspiracy theory. The question then became: Who to blame?

In retrospect, the answer should have seemed obvious. G. Robert Blakey was a 41-year-old criminal-law professor and head of Cornell University's Organized Crime Institute when he was asked to take the reins of the Assassinations Committee. Blakey was one of the top organized-crime experts in the country, was regularly called to testify as an "expert witness" in that area, and was a fixture at the organized-crime seminars held by law-enforcement agencies.

As soon as he was appointed, Blakey drew upon his contacts in that organized-crime-fighting fraternity to select key senior counsels for the Committee. The lawyer he picked to head the Kennedy investigation task force was a Texan named Gary Cornwell. As chief of the Federal Strike Force in Kansas City, Cornwell had achieved notable trial victories against key Mafia figures in the Midwest. When Blakey was finished hiring, the House Assassinations Committee was stacked to find an organized-crime conspiracy in the John F. Kennedy assassination.

Chief Counsel Blakey also knew how Washington operates. He had worked not only at the Department of Justice but also with previous congressional committees. He knew what the priorities of his job were by Washington standards.

The first priority, he announced in his inaugural address to the staff, was to produce a report. The second priority was to produce a report that looked good, one that appeared to be definitive and substantial.

The final report—686 pages thick, with thirteen volumes of appendixes—appears to have substance. And yet it makes few definitive statements. Used in abundance are such terms as “on the basis of evidence available to it” and “the Committee believes” and “available evidence does not preclude the possibility” and such words as “probably,” “most likely,” “possibly,” and “may have been.”



PHOTOGRAPH BY WIDE WORLD PHOTOS

The Warren Commission was made up of the cream of the American establishment: from left: former CIA chief Allen Dulles, Representative Hale Boggs (Democrat from Louisiana), Senator John Sherman Cooper (Republican from Kentucky), Supreme Court Chief Justice Earl Warren, Senator Richard Russell (Georgian Democrat), New York lawyer John J. McCloy, and Representative Gerald Ford (Republican from Michigan).

The point is that the Committee report does not say that organized crime was involved in the conspiracy to kill President Kennedy. The report says this: “The Committee believes, on the basis of evidence available to it, that the national syndicate of Organized Crime, as a group, was not involved in the assassination of President Kennedy, but that the available evidence does not preclude the possibility that individual members may have been involved.”

The latter part of that conclusion referred to two key Mob bosses: Carlos Marcello of New Orleans and Santos Trafficante of Florida. (Lee Harvey Oswald’s uncle, the Committee discovered, was a numbers runner for the Marcello organization, and Jack Ruby may have had some contact with Trafficante in Cuba.)

However, after making that allegation in its “Summary of Findings and Recommendations,” the report in its body says “it is unlikely” that either Marcello or Trafficante was involved in the assassination of the President.

That is an example of the contradictions in the report. Another of the report's key conflicts came from Blakey's insistence that the Committee come to some conclusion about Oswald's motivation. But like the Warren Commission, the Committee never did define who Oswald really was, what he really believed, the nature of his relationships with an odd assortment of people, the reasons for some of the mysterious things he did, or why there are no traces of his actions over certain periods of time. The Committee, because of its limited investigative plan, did very little original work in this area.

After an inadequate investigation, Blakey swept aside the objections of his staff and insisted that the Committee conclude that Oswald killed Kennedy because of left-wing motivations.

Then, when a conspiracy explanation was needed, Blakey contended that Oswald had been a tool of organized crime. Thus the largest number of pages in the Committee's final report was devoted to building a conspiracy case against the Mob.

But in order to create the impression that organized crime was involved, the Committee had to contradict its own staff's findings concerning the Central Intelligence Agency.

I spent a large part of three years delving into that area of evidence. For history's sake, the questions raised by the evidence deserve to be fully defined and honestly explained.

I can still hear the sound of Vincent Salandria's voice, with its low, velvet intensity. He was leaning back in his chair, his hands clasped behind his head, speaking slowly. We were in the paneled basement office of his home in Philadelphia. It was late in 1964, and what Vincent Salandria was telling me was that the Warren Commission report was not the truth.

I thought he was crazy. You have to remember what a discordant thing it was in 1964 to hear that an official government report might be wrong—especially a weighty one issued by a panel of men of public stature. People then believed what government leaders said. If a guy like Salandria came along and suggested that this kind of government report wasn't truthful ... well, Salandria was crazy.

After the Warren Commission report was released in September 1964, Salandria [had written a critique of it](#) for the *Legal Intelligencer*, Philadelphia's legal newspaper. Salandria was then a 38-year-old Penn Law graduate and ACLU consultant. His critique was a detailed analysis of the Warren report's findings on the trajectories and ballistics of the bullets that killed President Kennedy. The first time I read Salandria's article, I didn't understand it. It was complex and technical. But I did grasp Salandria's contention that the Warren Commission report might be wrong.

I wrote an article for Philadelphia magazine about this oddball young attorney who was saying these crazy things about our government. Salandria said his interest in the Warren Commission had begun long before its report was issued. "If this had happened in Smolensk or Minsk or Moscow," he said, "no American would have believed the story that was evolving about a single assassin, with all its built-in contradictions. But because it happened in Dallas, too many

Americans were accepting it.”

Salandria began a watch of 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 accompanying 26 volumes of evidence as soon as they were issued and [plunged into a page-by-page study](#).

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

Salandria said the details did not fit. There were, he contended, contradictions between the Commission’s conclusions and the details of the evidence in the 26 volumes. Salandria gave me a copy of the Warren report and the 26 volumes and suggested I take the time to study them carefully. I did, and was surprised to discover he was right.

Salandria became one of the pioneers in the burgeoning number of Warren Commission critics. He was one of the few who never commercialized his research. And, over the years, as he continued analyzing new evidence, he went beyond criticism and began to reach theoretical conclusions about the nature of the assassination itself. He was the first to suggest that details of the evidence [indicated not only a conspiracy but also the pattern of an intelligence operation](#). That’s when a young columnist named Joe McGinniss wrote about Salandria in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. McGinniss thought Salandria was crazy.

I left Philadelphia in 1972 to live in Florida and, by late 1975, when I began working as a government investigator on the Kennedy assassination, I had not spoken with Vince Salandria for years. He had faded into the background among Warren Commission critics.

“All the critics were misled very early. We spent too much time analyzing the details of the assassination when all the time it was obvious that it was a conspiracy.”

I returned to Philadelphia because I wanted to draw upon Salandria’s knowledge of the evidence and get his opinion on fruitful areas of investigation. Salandria was cordial, said he would be glad to help, and we spent a long winter Sunday talking. Yet in his attitude I sensed a feeling of disappointment in what I was about to begin. Eventually, he explained it and why he was no longer pursuing an investigation of the assassination.

“I’m afraid we were misled,” Salandria said. “All the critics, myself included, were misled very early. I see that now. We spent too much time and effort analyzing the details of the assassination when all the time it was obvious, it was blatantly obvious, that it was a conspiracy.

“The tyranny of power is here. We are controlled by multinational forces. I suggest to you, my friend, that the interests of those who killed Kennedy now transcend national boundaries and

national priorities.

“We must 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 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 since the time I first interviewed Salandria. Flying back home to Miami that evening, I sat in the dark plane and brooded. As when I first spoke with him, I didn’t quite grasp what he was talking about, but had the uneasy feeling he was [advancing some awesomely frightening theories](#). It crossed my mind that this time for sure Salandria was crazy.

That was late November of 1975. A few weeks earlier, I had received a call at my home in Miami from Senator Richard S. Schweiker of Pennsylvania. I had never met Schweiker, but I had spoken with his administrative assistant, Dave Newhall, a few times. Newhall, a former newspaper reporter, was familiar with my early interest in the Kennedy assassination and thought I might help Schweiker check out some leads in Miami’s Cuban exile community.

At the time, Schweiker was a member of the Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, headed by Idaho Senator Frank Church. The Church Committee, as it became known, had been making headlines since early 1975 by revealing how the FBI abused its power by harassing dissident political groups and conducting illegal investigations; how the CIA, Army Intelligence, and the National Security Agency were involved in domestic snooping; and how the intelligence agencies had planned assassination attempts on foreign leaders. For Schweiker, despite his long service in both houses of Congress, these were revelations. “I’ve learned more about the inner workings of government in the past nine months than in my fifteen previous years in Congress,” [he said](#).

Schweiker had never been moved to take a special interest in the details of the Kennedy assassination. He had assumed, as did most Americans, that the Warren Commission report reflected a comprehensive, objective investigation. He had never been inclined to question the report because that inclination would have had to include the assumption that government officials and agencies could have been involved in—at the very least—a cover-up. Schweiker did not want to believe that. However, when the Church Committee discovered that United States government officials—specifically CIA agents—had made alliances with the Mafia and other members of organized crime in planning assassinations, Schweiker was shaken. “That was so repugnant and shocking to me that I did a backflip on any number of things,” he recalled.

One of the backflips included his old assumption about the validity of the Warren Commission report. It was particularly upsetting to Schweiker when he discovered that CIA Director Allen Dulles had been aware of CIA assassination plots against Cuban Premier Fidel Castro and yet had withheld that information from his fellow members on the Warren Commission.

While the Senate and the Church Committee took their summer vacations, Schweiker spent most of his time sifting through the volumes of evidence and the available agency documents relating to the murder of John F. Kennedy. Then, in September, he [issued a public statement](#) calling for a

reopening of the Kennedy assassination investigation.

Schweiker felt the Church Committee could, in keeping within its mandate, focus initially on the role of US intelligence agencies in investigating the assassination. “We don’t know what happened,” Schweiker concluded from his study of the case, “but we do know Oswald had intelligence connections. Everywhere you look with him, there are the fingerprints of intelligence.”

“We don’t know what happened,” Schweiker concluded from his study of the Kennedy case, “but we do know that Oswald had intelligence connections. Everywhere you look with him there are the fingerprints of intelligence.”

[The Church Committee](#) was one of the larger select committees formed by the Senate. It employed more than 100 full-time staffers, mostly attorneys. Its mandate, however, was broad. It was to investigate all illegal domestic intelligence and counterintelligence activities on the part of the CIA, the FBI, and the military intelligence agencies.

The Church Committee had been formed in January 1975, and its report was scheduled for release by that September. That meant that the report had to be, considering the Committee’s broad mandate, a predetermined exercise in superficiality. To Chairman Frank Church, it was important that the Committee finish its work quickly. He had already told intimates that he was going to run for the presidency but said he would announce it only after the Committee finished its final report.

Despite the pressure from Church to finish in September, the Committee staff got its deadline extended to March 5, 1976. Then Schweiker came up with his proposal to throw the Kennedy assassination into the investigative pot. That upset Church. He knew that looking into the Kennedy assassination, even from the focus of its relationship to the intelligence agencies, could extend the Committee’s work for months and months. Church, however, did not want to oppose the suggestion publicly, so he came up with a compromise. He said he would permit Schweiker and a Democratic counterpart, Colorado Senator Gary Hart, to set up a two-man Kennedy assassination subcommittee, provided that it, too, would wrap up its work when the Committee finished in March.

Schweiker wasn’t happy with the limitations but decided to take what he could get. He figured that if he could develop enough solid information or stumble upon a new revelation, the Committee as a whole could then be pressured into tackling the Kennedy assassination, regardless of deadlines. Schweiker jumped in with both feet. Because Church said he could spare only two members of the Committee staff for Schweiker’s subcommittee—he would get more later as the Committee wound up its individual projects—Schweiker geared up his own personal staff for a Kennedy inquiry.

Schweiker had his operation going for about a month before he called me. Although he himself never detailed all of them, I later learned there were several reasons that he felt he needed an

outside staff investigator who would report directly to him and not to the Committee. He wanted someone who knew something about the Kennedy case, and he wanted to do some original probing, not just work with the FBI and CIA.

Although Kennedy was murdered in Dallas, a rash of leads and tips relating to Miami popped up within hours of the assassination.

Another reason Schweiker decided to hire his own investigator was this: Although he was struck by the newly discovered evidence that Kennedy's murder might have been an act of retaliation by Castro for the CIA assassination plots against him, Schweiker wasn't ready to rule out other possibilities. The subcommittee staff was obviously concentrating on the retaliation theory because, from the pragmatic viewpoint of its paper investigation, it was the easiest one to structure into a report within the time limitations. Yet Schweiker was struck by what he termed "the fingerprints of intelligence" on Oswald's activities, as well as Oswald's associations with anti-Castro Cubans. So while his subcommittee staff was heading down one road, Schweiker wanted the opposite one also checked out.

Finally, there was this factor: Although Kennedy was murdered in Dallas, a vast amount of information about the case relates to a city 1,300 miles away. Within hours of the assassination, a rash of leads and tips related to Miami popped up. Schweiker decided that if there was a relationship between the Kennedy assassination and Castro elements—either pro-Castro or anti-Castro—or if one of the intelligence agencies was involved, Miami was the place to look for clues. He decided he could use a man on the street in Miami's Little Havana.

I was in the right place.

Knowing something about Miami is important in attempting to understand John F. Kennedy's murder.

Miami Beach is an unrelated island strip of high-rise condominiums, kitschly elegant hotels, expensive restaurants, and peacock tourists. But Miami—just across Biscayne Bay—is something else.

Like other big cities during the '50s, Miami felt the effects of urban sprawl as the white middle-class took off for the suburbs. And although area population was booming, Miami itself was relatively old and few newcomers to south Florida wanted to move back into an urban environment—despite the fact that Miami really had a small-town feeling about it. Never blighted with high-rise tenements, Miami was a city of streets lined with modest old homes of white clapboard, cinderblock, or coral rock, rear "Florida rooms," and front porches. With the middle-class exodus and the deterioration of its traditional neighborhoods, the city of Miami began more and more looking like a neglected waif. Its downtown began going downhill and its poor black sections like Overtown and Liberty City began oozing their blight through the rest of the city. Despite the tropical clime, Miami's future wasn't sunny.

Until the Cubans came.

The first small flock came in the early '50s, the *anti-Batistianos*, those who opposed the military dictatorship of General Fulgencio Batista. A young lawyer named Fidel Castro was among them. He stayed briefly and gave fiery speeches at an old movie theater on Flagler Street. Another was the wealthy former president, Carlos Prio, who ensconced himself in an elegant home on Miami Beach and dispensed millions in setting up arms and supply lines to the rebels while staying close to the American racketeers who were running the Havana gambling casinos. Then, when it appeared that the end of the Batista reign was inevitable, came the *Batistianos* themselves and the nonpolitical wealthy who got out with their nest eggs. That's when Miami first began to feel the tone of Cuban culture and social activity as the monied class began moving into the business world. setting up private clubs and restaurants.

Then, beginning on January 1, 1959, came the deluge. The seizure of power by Fidel Castro wrought as profound a change in Miami as it did in Cuba. At first the flow of exiles into the city was a slow stream moving through Miami's International Airport; then, as it became apparent that the ranting *barbudo* was taking his country toward Communism, the stream became a torrent.

Within a year after Castro took power, Cuban exiles were arriving in Florida at a rate of 1,700 a week. And as the Cuban exile population grew, so did the presence of the CIA.

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PHOTOGRAPH BY UPI

Richard Bissell (right), head of CIA covert operations, confers with Senator Frank Church, chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence Activities. Bissell was revealed during Senate hearings as a key man in the Bay of Pigs invasion and secret plots to assassinate Fidel Castro.

“They were new types of refugees,” wrote reporter Haynes Johnson [in a book on the Bay of Pigs](#). “Instead of a home, they were seeking temporary asylum. They found it along the sandy beaches and curving coastline of Florida. They arrived by the thousands, in small fishing boats, in planes, chartered or stolen, and crowded into Miami. Along the boulevards, under the palms, and in hotel lobbies, they gathered and plotted their counterrevolution. Miami began to take on the air of a Cuban city. Even its voice was changing. Stores and cafes began advertising in Spanish and English. New signs went up on the toll roads slicing through the city, giving instructions in both languages. Everyone talked of home only 100 miles away. And everyone talked about the great liberation army being formed in the secret camps somewhere far away.”

And with the exiles and their passion for a counterrevolution came the Central Intelligence

Agency. Well before the US Embassy in Cuba closed down in January 1961, the CIA had stepped up its Cuban activities. It had not only increased the personnel operating out of the embassy in Havana, but also placed covert operatives as businessmen, ranchers, engineers, and journalists—among other covers—in order to recruit and establish liaison with anti-Castro dissidents. As counterrevolutionary groups began to form within Cuba, the CIA began supplying arms and communications equipment and, for those threatened with exposure, help in escaping.

Within a year after Castro took power, more than 100,000 Cuban exiles had settled in and others were arriving at a rate of 1,700 a week. As the Cuban exile population of Miami grew, so did the presence of the CIA. Although eighteen government agencies dealt with exile reception, the CIA had its contacts in every one, including the mother agency, the Cuban Refugee Center. It also used the Immigration and Naturalization Service to set up and maintain a debriefing facility at the Opa-Locka air base in northern Dade County. More important, the Agency began assigning case agents and keeping tabs on the many anti-Castro groups that had begun spreading through the exile community like mangrove roots. At one point, the Agency had a list of almost 700 such groups, some of which had begun active military operations with CIA support. One veteran recalls that the boat traffic on Biscayne Bay got so heavy “you needed a traffic cop.” It confused the US Coast Guard, which didn’t always know whether it was chasing a “sponsored operation” financed by the CIA or just “crazy Cubans.”

The invasion of Cuba’s Bahia de Cochinos—the Bay of Pigs—occurred in April 1961. It was the brainchild not of the Cuban exiles but of the CIA. It was spawned at a meeting of the Agency’s top brass in January 1960. Originally, it was not going to be a massive operation. No more than thirty Cuban exiles were to be trained in Panama to serve as a cadre for bands of guerrillas recruited within or infiltrated into Cuba. However, by the time the plan had moved through the Agency’s bureaucracy and was adopted and nurtured by its covert operations chief—a lanky, stooped-shouldered Groton-Yale man named Richard Bissell—it had grown into a major project. The plan [President Dwight Eisenhower approved in March 1960](#) called for a “unified” Cuban government in exile, a “powerful propaganda offensive,” and a large paramilitary force. The White House project officer was Vice President Richard Nixon.

Years later the Senate Intelligence Committee was to discover, from files voluntarily given to it by the CIA, that a few of the Agency’s top officers—including Richard Bissell—had in that spring of 1960 begun setting in motion, as an adjunct to the Bay of Pigs operation, plans to assassinate Castro. The CIA told the committee that it had been involved in nine Castro-assassination plots in all, including those with the Mafia. Castro himself later produced a list of 24 CIA plots against his life.

As soon as John F. Kennedy was elected President in November 1960, CIA Director Allen Dulles and his covert-plans deputy, Bissell, flew to the Kennedy estate in Palm Beach and sold their new President on the Cuban operation. They [did not tell him that the plans had recently been upgraded](#) within the Agency to include an even larger paramilitary force and air strikes by US Navy planes.

In his recent book, [Bay of Pigs: The Untold Story](#), Peter Wyden wrote:

“If the CIA, acting out of control and independently, had not escalated its plans against Fidel Castro from a modest guerrilla operation into a full-fledged invasion, President Kennedy would have suffered no humiliating, almost grotesque defeat.”

Yet despite the defeat, what the Bay of Pigs plan provided was the historic opportunity for the CIA to begin domestic field operations on an unprecedented scale. For instance, although the main Cuban exile brigade was trained at a secret base in Guatemala, other special units were prepared within the United States by both military and CIA personnel. That was minor compared with the dimensions to which the CIA’s presence in Miami grew. The Agency’s officers, contract agents, informants, and contacts reached into almost every area of the community. The Bay of Pigs invasion gave birth to a special relationship between CIA operatives and the Cuban exiles. That relationship would intensify into a mutuality of interests that transcended presidential directives and official United States policy.

One of the factors that led the CIA to believe it could topple Castro was the success it had enjoyed in Guatemala in 1954. Using a force of only 150 exiles and a handful of World War II P-47 fighters flown by American contract pilots, the CIA brought down the Communist-leaning Guatemalan government in less than a week, firing hardly a shot, and installed the CIA’s hand-picked leader, Castillo Armas. When covert operations boss Richard Bissell was selecting Agency personnel to run the Bay of Pigs, he told them that the plan was based on “the Guatemala scenario.”

Because of the success of that scenario, Bissell picked its veterans for the Cuban operation. Named as the Agency’s political-liaison chief and given the job of bringing together Miami’s Cuban exile groups into a united political front was a pipe-smoking author of spy thrillers, E. Howard Hunt.

Among Agency personnel, Hunt had—and still has—a curious reputation. To some he is the caricature of the Hollywood spy—Hunt did serve a stint as a Hollywood scriptwriter—given to overplaying the cloak-and-dagger role. One of the more earnest of the Agency professionals liked to say that Hunt was consistent in his judgment: “Always wrong.” Yet down through the years and right up through Watergate, Hunt was chosen to be on the front lines of dirty-trick operations. Despite the many failures among those operations, Hunt’s star rose. He remained close to the shrewdest and most coldly professional of all CIA heads: Richard Helms.

It didn’t take long for Hunt to inject himself into Cuban exile politics in Miami. With his faithful sidekick (and later Watergate conspirator) Bernard Barker, Hunt set up a series of “safe” houses for clandestine meetings, moved through the shadows of Little Havana, and doled out packets of money. (Hunt carried as much as \$115,000 in his briefcase.) Although Hunt attempted to keep a separate identity—“Just call me ‘Eduardo,’ ” he told the Cubans—and tried to keep the source of



A shadowy presence in CIA clandestine operations in the 1960s was long-time CIA operative and Watergate conspirator E. Howard Hunt. Hunt coordinated the activities of Cuban exiles in Miami prior to the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion.

the funds a mystery, the exiles began referring to their benefactor as “Uncle Sam.”

It was Hunt’s job to form La Frente, the coalition of Cuban exile groups that would serve as the political umbrella for the military invasion. It was early apparent, however, that Hunt’s own rightwing views colored his handling of the exile groups, and he and Barker, wheeling and dealing among the politicians, started as many squabbles as they mediated. Immediately before the invasion, Hunt was removed—he says he quit—as the Agency’s political liaison because he wouldn’t go along with including in the exile coalition a democratic socialist named Manolo Ray. Hunt called Ray a Communist.



PHOTOGRAPH BY WIDE WORLD PHOTOS

“We are honorable men. You will simply have to trust us,” declared Richard Helms in explaining the CIA’s refusal to cooperate during congressional investigations. As deputy director of the CIA in 1961, Helms was intimately involved in the Bay of Pigs and Castro-assassination plots. Later he was convicted of lying to Congress about the CIA’s role in the overthrow of the Chilean government.

Hunt’s principal contribution to the Bay of Pigs invasion was his selection of the military brigade’s political leader, a fiery physician-turned-politician named Manuel Artime. Artime helped stop a political insurrection at the exile training camp. Years later he would become wealthy as a business partner of former Nicaraguan dictator Luis Somoza. His relationship with Hunt would grow into close friendship. They bought homes across the street from each other in Miami Shores and Hunt was the godfather of one of Artime’s children. (In 1975, an informant called the office of Senator Schweiker and said that a friend of Artime in Mexico City claimed that Artime had “guilty knowledge” of the Kennedy assassination. Artime, moving in and out of the country on business, could not be interrogated before Schweiker’s mandate expired. Later, as an investigator for the House Assassinations Committee, I contacted Artime to take his sworn statement.

Before I could, Artime went into the hospital and was told he had cancer. Two weeks later, Artime died. He was 45.)

Another contribution Hunt made to the Bay of Pigs operation was his help in selecting an old friend from the Guatemala scenario for an important Agency role. Pulled from his post as a covert operative in Havana was a tall, charmingly diffident counterintelligence expert named David Atlee Phillips. Phillips was a former actor and newspaperman. It was Phillips’s job to set up a propaganda shop, to blend the rantings of the exile groups into an effective symphony, to set up broadcast stations that would rally guerrillas within Cuba to join the invaders, and to establish communication links that would trigger the actual invasion. Most of all it was Phillips’s job to create the worldwide impression that the invasion was a spontaneous action by anti-Castro forces and that neither the US nor the CIA had anything to do with it.

What went wrong at the Bay of Pigs is history. President Kennedy told the world that he assumed “sole responsibility” for the debacle. Privately, he turned to his special counsel, Theodore

Sorensen, and asked: “How could I have been so stupid to let them go ahead?” But many top CIA people involved in the Bay of Pigs felt strongly that Kennedy was responsible for its failure. There would have been no slaughter of the exiles, no 1,200 brave men captured, if Kennedy had not at the last moment rejected massive air support. That was the word that filtered down to the CIA field operatives, the Cuban exile community, and the remnants of the invasion brigade. It produced bitterness at every level.

Agency operatives who had led the exiles were inconsolable. E. Howard Hunt, monitoring the defeat at CIA headquarters until the end, later noted: “I was sick of lying and deception, heartsick over political compromise and military defeat.... That night, laced through my broken sleep, were the words Sir Winston Churchill had spoken to a British Minister of Defense: ‘I am not sure I should have dared to start; but I am sure I should not have dared to stop.’... I saw in his words a warning for those Americans who had faltered at the Bay of Pigs.”

David Phillips would also reveal, years later, the emotional impact of the defeat. In his memoirs, *The Night Watch*, he, too, detailed the end:

“I went home. I peeled off my socks like dirty layers of skin—I realized I hadn’t changed them for a week.... I bathed, then fell into bed to sleep for several hours. On awakening I tried to eat again, but couldn’t. Outside, the day was sheer spring beauty. I carried a portable radio to the yard at the rear of the house and listened to the gloomy newscasts about Cuba as I sat on the ground, my back against a tree.

“Helen came out from the house and handed me a martini, a large one. I was half drunk when I finished.... Suddenly my stomach churned. I was sick. My body heaved.

“Then I began to cry....

“I wept for two hours. I was sick again, then drunk again....

“Oh shit! Shit!”

Following the Bay of Pigs, word went out from the White House that Kennedy was disillusioned with the CIA, that he was angry at his CIA advisers for pushing a scheme on him devised during the Eisenhower administration, that he had been ill-informed and misled and pressured by CIA brass who had an egocentric interest in pushing the plan. The President called for the resignation of CIA Director Allen Dulles and covert plans boss Richard Bissell, and, according to one aide, threatened to “splinter” the Agency into “a thousand pieces and scatter them to the winds.”

That was misleading. Kennedy was, indeed, mad at the CIA—not for planning the Bay of Pigs but for botching it. And he was mad at Castro who, in endless harangues and broadcast reviews



David Atlee Phillips, about 1960: He was recruited by E. Howard Hunt to be propaganda chief of the Bay of Pigs operation, responsible for creating the false impression that the invasion was spontaneous and not a CIA covert operation. When the invasion failed, Phillips got drunk and wept for two hours.

of the battle, kept rubbing the young President's nose in the humiliating defeat. Kennedy's initial reaction was reflexive: Don't get mad, get even. Appointing his brother Robert to oversee the Agency's covert operations, Kennedy did not splinter the CIA but infused it with new life. The toughening up of policy toward Cuba and the infusion of money to the CIA's anti-Castro front groups became known as "the Kennedy vendetta."



PHOTOGRAPH BY CHARLES L. TRAINOR/MIAMI NEWS

Dr. Manuel Artime, the fiery physician-leader of the anti-Castro forces in Miami, stands with John and Jackie Kennedy in the Orange Bowl after the 1961 Bay of Pigs fiasco. The President promised continued support for the exiled Cubans against Castro but withdrew the support after the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, angering anti-Castro guerrillas and their CIA controls.

\$100 million a year.

Between the Bay of Pigs in April 1961 and the Cuban missile crisis in October 1962, a secret war was launched against Castro. Kennedy's war, which made the preparations for the Bay of Pigs pale by comparison, slowly began altering the attitudes of the anti-Castro militants and the CIA operatives in the field, and although a good measure of bitterness and cynicism lingered, a more positive image of the President began taking shape.

Kennedy did his best to reinforce that image. "Cuba must not be abandoned to the Communists," he said in a speech shortly after the Bay of Pigs, and he spoke of a "new and deeper struggle." That was a euphemism for a campaign that eventually employed several thousand CIA operatives and cost more than

Again Miami was the focus of the effort. On a large, secluded, heavily wooded tract that was part of the University of Miami's South Campus, the Agency set up a front corporation called Zenith Technological Services. Its code name was JM/WAVE and it soon became the largest CIA installation anywhere in the world, with the exception of the Agency's Langley headquarters.

At the height of its activities, the JM/ WAVE station had a staff of more than 300 Americans, mostly case officers in charge of supervising and monitoring Cuban exile groups. Each case officer employed as many as 10 Cuban "principal agents." Each principal agent, in turn, would be responsible for as many as 30 regular agents. The Agency funded front operations throughout the area—print shops, real estate firms, travel agencies, coffee shops, boat-repair yards, detective agencies, gun shops, neighborhood newspapers—to provide employment for the thousands of case officers and agents operating outside JM/WAVE headquarters. It was said that if any Cuban exile wanted to open his own business, he had but to ask the CIA for start-up money. The CIA became one of the largest employers in south Florida.

The JM/WAVE station was a logistical giant within itself. It leased more than 100 staff cars and maintained its own gas depot. It kept warehouses loaded with everything from machine guns to caskets. It had its own airplanes and what a former CIA officer called "the third-largest navy in the Western Hemisphere," including hundreds of small boats and yachts donated by friendly millionaires. There were hundreds of pieces of real estate, from dives to waterfront mansions, used as safe houses or assembly points for operations. In addition, there were paramilitary training camps scattered throughout the Florida Keys and deep in the Everglades. (One of the

more active sites was a small, remote island north of Key West called No Name Key. One of the groups using it was called the International Anti-Communist Brigade, a collection of soldiers of fortune, mostly Americans, headed by a giant ex-Marine, Gerry Patrick Hemming. Like another ex-Marine, Lee Harvey Oswald, Hemming was trained as a radar operator in California. Hemming would later claim that Oswald once tried to join his IAB group. Co-founder of the IAB with Hemming was Frank Sturgis, a soldier of fortune who once worked in Cuba with Castro and later would become one of Howard Hunt's Watergate burglars.

Those were heady times for anti-Castro groups in Miami. With the CIA providing lessons in sabotage, explosives, weapons, survival, ambushes, and communications, the missions to Cuba began escalating in frequency and scale. Initially intent on infiltrating small guerrilla bands onto the island, the Agency was soon supervising raids aimed at blowing up oil refineries and sugar mills.

The JM/WAVE station in Miami became the international coordinating center for the secret war. Every CIA station in the world had at least one case officer assigned to Cuban operations and reporting to the Miami station. The station also controlled an international economic strategy, pressuring US allies to embargo all trade with Cuba and supervising a worldwide sabotage program against goods being shipped to and from Cuba. The operational level of the Agency was also—without Kennedy's knowledge, it now appears, and even without the knowledge of his newly appointed director, John McCone—continuing its program of assassination attempts against Castro. In giving the CIA a new life, funding, and the power and influence to conduct large-scale secret operations, Kennedy had created a force over which, as he himself would discover, he could not maintain total control.



PHOTOGRAPH BY WIDE WORLD PHOTOS

Did Fidel Castro invite the Russians to install missiles in Cuba—thus provoking the 1962 Cuban missile crisis—because of the CIA secret activities against him? Many Cuban exiles in Miami believed this—and were elated at the prospects of a Kennedy-Castro showdown.

That realization came with the Cuban missile crisis in October 1962.

It is not known whether Castro requested the installation of offensive missiles in Cuba or whether he accepted them at the suggestion of the Russians. There are many Cuban exiles in Miami who knew Castro well, who went to school with him, and who fought beside him in the mountains during the early days of the 26th of July Movement, and they believe Castro was driven to obtaining the missiles by the effectiveness of the secret CIA war against him. They think the unrelenting infiltration and sabotage operations created pressures that drove Castro to consider doing something bold.

The more fervent of the Cuban exiles were initially elated by the possibility that the missile crisis might provoke a showdown with Castro. President Kennedy himself boosted such hopes with hard-line responses to the buildup of the Soviet presence in Cuba. In September 1962, Kennedy

declared that the US would use “whatever means may be necessary” to prevent Cuba from exporting aggression “by force or threat of force.” In Miami, the anti-Castro exiles and their CIA bosses appreciated such tough talk and looked forward to real action.

By October, Kennedy and Khrushchev were eyeball to eyeball. And then, suddenly, they started negotiating. The crisis ended on November 20, 1962. Kennedy announced that all IL-28 bombers were being withdrawn by the Soviets and that progress was being made on the withdrawal of offensive missiles. In return, Kennedy said he gave the Soviets and the Cubans a “no-invasion” pledge.

Those fighting the secret war against Castro were shocked by the “no invasion” settlement. To the men who had been risking their lives in a guerrilla war against Communism in the Caribbean, it was astounding that Kennedy should make a deal with Khrushchev. If the President’s actions at the Bay of Pigs had raised doubts about his determination to bring down Castro, his handling of the missile crisis more than confirmed those doubts. Over *café cubano* at the back tables of luncheonettes in Miami’s Little Havana, in the CIA safe houses in Coconut Grove, in the training camps in the Keys and the Everglades, wherever the exiles and their control agents gathered, the word “traitor” would be spoken.

And yet the anger at Kennedy for making the missile settlement was shallow compared with the reaction of the exiles and their CIA controls when it became apparent what the President’s “no invasion” policy actually meant. Suddenly the United States government began cracking down on the very training camps and guerrilla bases its own agencies had established. Regular infiltration raids into Cuba by the exiles, which automatically had been getting the government’s “green light,” were disavowed and condemned. The Cuban Revolutionary Council, a united front of exile groups established by the CIA, had its subsidy cut off.

The crackdown continued over the next several months to the confusion and anger of the exiles. On the one hand they were being encouraged and supported by the US government—wasn’t the CIA the US government?—and on the other hand they were being handcuffed and arrested. It was crazy.

The Coast Guard announced it was throwing more planes, ships, and men into policing the Florida straits. The Customs Service raided the secret camp at No Name Key and arrested the anti-Castro force in training there. The FBI seized a major cache of explosives at an exile camp outside New Orleans. Then the Federal Aviation Administration issued “strong warnings” to six American civilian pilots—including soldier-of-fortune Frank Sturgis and a few who had worked directly with the CIA—who had been flying raids over Cuba. The Secret Service arrested a prominent exile leader for conspiring to counterfeit Cuban currency earmarked for rebel forces inside Cuba—a plan that had all the hallmarks of a CIA operation.

Against this pattern of crackdown by federal enforcement agencies, there emerged a counter-grain of incidents relevant to the Kennedy assassination. These incidents involve a series of raids by anti-Castro groups that took place, despite the crackdown, between the time of the missile crisis in October 1962 and the assassination of President Kennedy in November 1963. At the height of the missile crisis—the most politically inopportune moment for Kennedy—one of the

largest and most militant of the Cuban groups, Alpha 66, launched a strike at a major port in Cuba, killing at least twenty defenders, including some Russians. A week later the same group sunk a Cuban patrol boat. On October 31, the day after Kennedy lifted his blockade of Cuba as a sign of peaceful intentions, Alpha 66 struck again. Then, after the crisis ended in November, Alpha 66 pledged further raids.

There were at least a dozen other actions that, despite the President's orders, indicated that some Cuban exile groups were continuing the secret war. The CIA denied it had any association with these continuing actions.

There were indications that Kennedy was confused. At a press conference in May 1963, in response to a question about whether the US was giving aid to the exiles, the President stumbled: "We may well be ... well, none that I am familiar with. ... I don't think as of today that we are." It was recently discovered that the CIA had been supporting at least one exile group under what the Agency termed an "autonomous operations" concept.

Few understood the significance of what was happening at the time, but one who did was a Democratic congressman from Florida, Paul Rogers. Citing "serious kinks in our intelligence system," Rogers called for a joint congressional committee to oversee the CIA. "And what proof have we," asked Rogers, "that this Agency, which in many respects has the power to preempt foreign policy, is not actually exercising this power through practices which are contradictory to the established policy objectives of this government?"

That was in February 1963. That month, in Dallas, a czarist Russian emigre, world traveler, and former French intelligence operative named George de Mohrenschildt decided to give a dinner party. He invited a young couple, Lee and Marina Oswald, who had returned from Russia the previous summer.

Twelve years later, with the call from Senator Schweiker, I began an odyssey into the Kennedy assassination that would be far more revealing than I ever anticipated. It was a journey into a maze that had grown, over the years, to bewildering proportions. Yet what emerged were similar images along many of the pathways, an indication—often only gossamer—of a concealed thread emanating from a common spool.

For instance, one of the first leads Schweiker asked me to check out 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, a former congresswoman, and US 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.

The chase began almost immediately after Schweiker announced the formation of the Kennedy assassination subcommittee. He was visited by Washington reporter Vera Glaser, who told him she had just interviewed Clare Boothe Luce and that Luce had given her information relating to the assassination. Schweiker called Luce, who confirmed the story she had told Glaser.



PHOTOGRAPH BY U.S. NAVY

Although the Cuban missile crisis resulted in a backdown by the Soviet Union and a withdrawal of their missiles from Cuba, the negotiations stunned the Cuban exiles. Kennedy pledged that the US would not invade Cuba, and after being encouraged, financed, and trained by the CIA, the anti-Castro fighters suddenly were targets of a US crackdown.

of any such incident. There was a record of Oswald having approached an anti-Castro leader in New Orleans and then subsequently getting into a street squabble with him when the leader saw him distributing pro-Castro leaflets, but Luce's story was embroidered with different details and, Schweiker thought, was worth checking out.

I spent weeks—in Miami, New Orleans, and even Pennsylvania and New York—attempting to locate this “Julio Fernandez.” To no avail. Later, with broader access to information as an investigator for the House Select Committee on Assassinations, I discovered why I could not find the right Julio Fernandez: The name, as Luce told then-CIA Director William Colby, with whom she was in touch at the time, was a concoction she had made up for Schweiker. Later, I interviewed Luce at her penthouse apartment at the Watergate and told her that her story reminded me of an Oswald incident in New Orleans in which he showed up at the store of an anti-Castro leader and volunteered his services. Luce said: “Why, yes, that’s the same type of thing that happened to my boys.”

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.

The last time I saw Luce was shortly after my interview with her. I attended a luncheon meeting of the Association of Former Intelligence Officers. Luce was the guest speaker. Her speech was a vigorous defense of the intelligence establishment and a review of its successes. Clare Boothe Luce, besides being a guest speaker at that meeting, is on the board of directors of the Association of Former Intelligence Officers. That organization was founded in 1975 by David Atlee Phillips.

Luce claimed that in the early '60s she had financially supported an anti-Castro Cuban group running guerrilla raids into Cuba from Miami. On the evening of the Kennedy assassination, she received a call from one of the members of the group, who told her that Oswald had tried to penetrate his organization and had offered his services as a potential Castro assassin. He said that his group distrusted Oswald, kept watch on him, and eventually penetrated a Communist cell where Oswald was tape-recorded bragging about being, as Luce reported it, “the greatest shot in the world with a telescopic rifle.”

Luce said she told her caller—whose name, she told Schweiker, was “something like” Julio Fernandez—to tell the FBI about the incident. However, when Schweiker checked the FBI files, he found no report

of any such incident. There was a record of Oswald having approached an anti-Castro leader in New Orleans and then subsequently getting into a street squabble with him when the leader saw him distributing pro-Castro leaflets, but Luce's story was embroidered with different details and, Schweiker thought, was worth checking out.



PHOTOGRAPH BY UPI

Did Clare Boothe Luce throw red herrings in the path of assassination investigators? Luce had strong ties to the CIA, and many fruitless hours were consumed tracking down leads she had given to the investigative staff.

Time and again during the Kennedy assassination investigation, the thread of an association with intelligence-agency activity would appear and reappear.

For instance, there was a man who called Schweiker's office with the information that he had seen Lee Harvey Oswald and Jack Ruby together at the Key West airport prior to the Kennedy assassination. They were with a group of young people, he said, going to Cuba to cut sugarcane for Castro. Yes, he said, he had reported the information to the FBI after Kennedy was killed. Again, Schweiker could find no record of it. But the man was a respected member of the community, a successful businessman and, when I talked with him, very credible.

One man with a history of muddying the Kennedy assassination waters showed up early in the investigations: Frank Sturgis, one of E. Howard Hunt's accomplices in the 1972 Watergate burglary.

I spent days in Key West attempting to verify the man's story. I questioned everyone I could find who had worked at the Key West airport in the early '60s. A few people remembered that a group did go through Key West to Cuba to help Castro cut sugarcane. A Cuban plane did regularly fly into Key West at one time, but not during the period the man said he recalled Oswald, Ruby, and the group waiting for it in the airport terminal. I checked every record, file, and newspaper clip available and came close to confirming bits and pieces of the man's story, but I could not pin down even one factor. Yet the man insisted his recollection was accurate. He took me to the exact spots where he said he had seen Oswald and Ruby in the airport terminal.

In checking out his story, I spent dozens of hours with this fellow. We got friendly. I met his family and was invited to dinner. One day he happened to show me the photo lab he had at the rear of his business. I was amazed at the collection of photographic and electronic gear stocked there. I was doubly amazed when I noticed sitting on the floor in a corner what appeared to be the housing of an aerial reconnaissance camera.

I began probing him 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 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 about the reconnaissance camera, he said he had flown a number of aerial photographic missions and proudly explained that he had designed a special device to permit him to trigger the camera, installed in the belly of his 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 asked, 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."

I asked who had paid for all his sophisticated photo and electronic equipment. 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 and said, "No comment."

Could there be a pattern of misinformation to the tips that Schweiker was being fed? The long ride from Key West to Miami along the Overseas Highway is one of scenic splendor, the sky blue and endless, the ocean a vista of whitecaps, the bay a glistening expanse of crystal serenity. The beauty escaped me as I drove home that evening. I kept thinking of Vince Salandria telling me how busy I would be kept.

Many of the early tips that Schweiker received contained elements similar to reports that sprung up immediately following the assassination of President Kennedy. These reports all indicated that Lee Harvey Oswald was tied to pro-Castro elements or was a Castro agent.

I've come to believe that a few of those early reports may have some relationship to what I later uncovered. Take the reports linked to Mexico City. Clare Boothe Luce maintained that she had received the telephone call from one of her young Cubans on the evening of Kennedy's assassination. She remembered that she had been watching television with her husband in her New York apartment when the call came through. The caller told her, she said, about Oswald and how he had left New Orleans to go to Mexico City before returning to Dallas. Yet, on the evening of November 22, Oswald's visit to Mexico City was known by a very few people, perhaps Marina Oswald and a handful of CIA officials—most notably, a few in the Agency's Mexico City station.

Another attempt to link Oswald to Castro came out of Mexico City immediately after Oswald was murdered by Jack Ruby. A young Nicaraguan named Gilberto Alvarado walked into the American Embassy and insisted he had a story to tell the American ambassador, Thomas Mann. Alvarado claimed that he had gone to the Cuban embassy in September and while waiting to conduct business had seen three persons talking on a patio a few feet away: Lee Harvey Oswald, a tall, thin Negro with reddish hair, and a Cuban from the consulate. Alvarado said he saw the Cuban give the Negro a large sum of money and then heard the Negro tell Oswald, "I want to kill the man." According to Alvarado, Oswald replied, "You're not man enough; I can do it," and the Negro then gave Oswald \$6,500 in large-denomination American bills.

Alvarado, it was later discovered, was an agent of the Nicaraguan intelligence service. Nicaraguan dictator Anastasio Somoza was a strong anti-Castroite and a cooperative ally of the CIA, having permitted the Agency to use his country as a training camp and assembly area for the Bay of Pigs invasion. At the time of the Kennedy assassination, Manuel Artime, dubbed by his fellow anti-Castro leaders as the CIA's "golden boy," still had two training bases in Nicaragua and a huge arsenal of equipment.

The Alvarado fabrication strikes some researchers as having the hallmarks of a counterintelligence scenario, another stone thrown in to muddy the already murky waters.

One man with a history of muddying the Kennedy-assassination waters showed up early in the Schweiker investigation: Frank Sturgis, one of E. Howard Hunt's accomplices in the Watergate burglary.

The names of both E. Howard Hunt and Frank Sturgis had been in the news in connection with the Kennedy assassination long before I joined Senator Schweiker's staff. A group of assassination researchers had contended that two of the three men in photographs taken in Dallas's Dealey Plaza on November 22, 1963, bore "striking resemblances" to Hunt and Sturgis. The men were reportedly derelicts—or "tramps," as the press came to call them—who were discovered in a boxcar in the railroad yard behind the grassy knoll. Taken to police headquarters, the tramps were escorted across Dealey Plaza, where [news photographers took photos of them](#). The tramps were questioned and released, without a record of their identities being kept.

The Sturgis-Hunt contention was examined in early 1975 by the Rockefeller Commission, which was appointed by President Gerald Ford to probe illegal CIA activities in the United States. Relying on comparative photo analysis performed by the same FBI expert who did all the Warren Commission's analyses, the Rockefeller Commission concluded that the men in the tramps photographs were not Sturgis and Hunt.

About the time Schweiker began his investigation, a new book again raised the Sturgis-Hunt story. Titled *Coup d'Etat in America*, it was written by Michael Canfield and Alan J. Weberman, with a [foreword by Texas Congressman Henry B. Gonzalez](#). The book incorporated a novel device: It came with film-positive photos of Sturgis and Hunt designed to be overlaid on photographs of the tramps. Superimposed, the images did bear striking similarities.

The FBI found Sturgis at home in Miami. They said, "Frank, if there's anybody capable of killing the President of the United States, you're the guy."

I would later discover that photo comparison and analysis is an exceptionally nonconclusive technique. The House Assassinations Committee spent \$83,154 on it. Among the photographs we submitted to a panel of experts for analysis and comparison were not only those of Sturgis and Hunt but also those of other individuals who resembled the tramps. The panel concluded that Sturgis and Hunt were not the tramps in the photographs. It did conclude that one of the tramps—the one who resembled Hunt—was most likely a man named Fred Lee Chrisman, a right-wing activist. When those results came in, Committee investigators were sent out to find out where Chrisman was on November 22, 1963. (Chrisman had since died.) They came back with official records and eyewitness affidavits that Chrisman was teaching school in the state of Washington the day Kennedy was assassinated. So much for the conclusiveness of photo analysis.

What was interesting, however, was the panel's conclusions in its comparison of photos of Frank Sturgis with those of the tramps. It used two comparative techniques. One it termed "metric traits" and the other "morphological differences." One was a comparison of the measurements of six facial features and their metric relationships; the other was simply whether or not various facial features were shaped the same. The panel concluded that the average deviation between the

tramp's features and Sturgis's features was "low enough to make it impossible to rule out Sturgis on the basis of metric traits alone." However, the panel said, it was the morphological differences that indicated that Sturgis was not the tramp. In other words, Sturgis just didn't look like the tramp.



Frank Sturgis: trusted Castro confidant in the early days of the Cuban revolution, militant anti-Castroite and CIA operator in Miami, finally a Watergate burglar.

The House Committee's staff in charge of the photo panel's work was an attorney named Jane Downey. One day she came to me and asked me to help gather some of the photographs that would be sent to the panel members for analysis. I recall asking her at the time to find out whether or not the experts would take into consideration the possibility that the tramps might be wearing sophisticated disguises. That had to be the case if they were not just real drifters in the wrong place at the wrong time. (As a member of Nixon's White House plumbers, E. Howard Hunt had obtained disguises from the CIA's Technical Services Division and used them on more than one job.) Downey promised she would ask the photo analysts about the use of disguises.

Several days later Jane Downey told me she had checked with the photo analysts. "I'm told that there is no way they can tell if disguises were used," she said.

"In other words," I said, "if the tramps were in disguise there would be no way the analysts could tell who they really are?"

"That's what I'm told."

"Then why do a photo comparison at all?" I asked. Downey shrugged her shoulders. "Well," I said, "I hope that point is mentioned in the final report."

"I'm sure it will be," said Downey.

It wasn't.

My initial interest in both Frank Sturgis and E. Howard Hunt was not predicated on whether they were the Dealey Plaza tramps. When the Rockefeller Commission concluded that Sturgis and Hunt had not been in Dallas on November 22, 1963, it raised more questions than it resolved. Although the Commission report claimed that Sturgis and Hunt had alibis for their whereabouts on November 22, 1963, **it concluded**: "It cannot be determined with certainty where Hunt and Sturgis actually were on the day of the assassination."

It can be determined where Frank Sturgis was on the day after the Kennedy assassination. The FBI found him at home in Miami. "I had FBI agents all over my house," he has said. "They told me I was one person they felt had the capabilities to do it. They said, 'Frank, if there's anybody capable of killing the President of the United States, you're the guy who can do it.'"

Now in his fifties and putting on weight, Sturgis has led a thousand lives, maybe more. He was born Frank Angelo Fiorini in Norfolk, Virginia. His parents separated when he was an infant and he grew up with his mother's family in Philadelphia's Germantown. (He would later change his name to his stepfather's, Frank Anthony Sturgis, when his mother remarried.)

Frank Sturgis turned seventeen two days after Japan bombed Pearl Harbor, and he dropped out of Germantown High to join the Marines. Sturgis was shipped to the Pacific jungles, where he volunteered for the toughest unit in the Marines, the First Raider Battalion, the legendary Edson's Raiders. He was taught how to kill with his bare hands, infiltrated into enemy encampments, airdropped on commando raids. He saw Guadalcanal, Iwo Jima, Okinawa, three serious combat wounds, malaria, jaundice, and, in the end, he was diagnosed as having "exhaustion and possible psychoneurosis." He had a stay at the Sun Valley Naval Medical Center before his discharge in 1945.

After World War II, Sturgis was a plainclothes cop in Norfolk, went to school part-time at William and Mary College, managed a few bars, trained as a radio gunner in the Naval Reserves, crewed as a merchant seaman, did a two-year stint with the US Army in Germany where he served with the Armed Forces Security Agency, was married, widowed, remarried, divorced, and married again.

Sturgis says he got involved in Cuban activities in the early '50s when he went to Miami to visit an uncle who was married to a Cuban. That's how he got friendly with exiled former Cuban President Carlos Prio, he says. Prio, close to the American mob who ran Havana's gambling casinos, was funding Castro's guerrilla war against General Batista. (Prio would later be convicted of arms smuggling with a Texan, Robert McKeown. After the Kennedy assassination, McKeown told the FBI that he was approached by Jack Ruby about a deal to sell military equipment to Castro. In 1977, a week before he was scheduled to interview Prio, he went to the side of his Miami Beach home, sat on a chaise outside the garage, and shot himself in the heart. He reportedly had financial problems.)

What struck me about that initial interview with Sturgis was his Archie Bunker-like directness. He said he thought the Kennedy assassination was definitely a conspiracy and that Oswald was a patsy.

It was through Prio, Sturgis says, that he infiltrated Cuba to join Castro in the mountains. Soon he was a trusted Castro aide, an emissary on arms deals all over the United States and Latin America, a daring pilot who flew loads of weapons into mountain airstrips. He became friendly with another daredevil pilot, Pedro Diaz-Lanz, and when, after the revolution, Castro appointed Diaz-Lanz chief of the Rebel Air Force, Sturgis was named the Air Force's director of security. Nine months after Castro took power, Diaz-Lanz and Sturgis publicly condemned Castro's Communism and fled to Miami. A month later, they were dropping propaganda leaflets over Havana.

Frank Sturgis says he was never an official, paid agent of the Central Intelligence Agency. The CIA has confirmed this. Yet, before the Bay of Pigs and afterwards, during the height of the

JM/WAVE's secret war against Castro, Sturgis used equipment, flew planes, and directed assault craft that were supported by the CIA. He has admitted that the B-25 he flew on his first leaflet-drop was maintained with \$10,000 from E. Howard Hunt.

In terms of the Kennedy assassination, it was Sturgis's relationship with Hunt that drew my attention. Both testified under oath to the Rockefeller Commission that they first met just prior to the Watergate burglary—Hunt said in 1972, Sturgis said in late 1971 or early 1972. That seemed strange in view of their active involvement in Miami's anti-Castro activities in the early '60s. Sturgis claims that although he knew of "Eduardo" at the time, all his contacts with him and the funds that came from him were through Hunt's assistant, Bernard Barker.

In October 1972, writer Andrew St. George interviewed Frank Sturgis in his home in Miami while Sturgis was awaiting his Watergate sentence. It was before the tramp photos were publicized, before cries for another Kennedy assassination investigation began to peak, before the Rockefeller Commission was formed. St. George was an old friend of Sturgis from their days with Castro in the mountains. Sturgis was glad to see the gregarious St. George and, stung by his arrest at Watergate and the headlines that made him appear a bungling burglar. Sturgis—according to St. George—blurted out the real story behind Watergate. A few months later, St. George visited Sturgis in the Washington, DC, jail. "I will never leave this jail alive," he says Sturgis told him, "if what we discussed about Watergate does not remain a secret between us. If you attempt to publish what I've told you, I am a dead man."

In August 1974, St. George published his [interview with Sturgis in *True* magazine](#). In it, he quotes Sturgis as saying: "The Bay of Pigs—hey, that was one sweet mess. I met Howard Hunt that year; he was the political officer of the exile brigade. Bernard Barker was Hunt's right-hand man, his confidential clerk—his body servant, really."

Sturgis today denies he ever said that and curses St. George.

Today, Sturgis is not hesitant to admit his disgust with Kennedy after the President made the Cuban-missile arrangement with the Russians. Sturgis was one of the six pilots specially warned by the Federal Aviation Administration for making raids over Cuba at the time Kennedy was negotiating the delicate deal. Sturgis was also the co-founder of the International Anti-Communist Brigade, some of whom were arrested at their training site on No Name Key after the missile crisis.

My first interview with Frank Sturgis came not long after he was released from his Watergate sentence. For many months he remained a low-profile figure in Miami, not moving around much, not getting his name in the newspaper, not yet back in action. That night he talked effusively, chain-smoking and drinking Coke. (Sturgis is a heavy smoker, but never touches alcohol.)

What struck me about that initial interview with Sturgis was his Archie Bunker-like directness. He said he thought the Kennedy assassination was definitely a conspiracy, that Oswald was a patsy, and that the government agencies—the FBI, the Secret Service, and the CIA—were all involved in a coverup. He spoke of the possible motivations of the anti-Castro groups and their

dislike for Kennedy after the Bay of Pigs. (“I even hated him, too,” he said.) He said he once refused to join the CIA even though it gave him an application because he thought it was infiltrated at its highest ranks with double agents—“possibly the same people who conspired to kill Kennedy.” He said his theory was that the Kennedy assassination was a conspiracy involving intelligence agents in Russia’s KGB, Cuba’s intelligence service, and the CIA. Actually, as Sturgis rambled on, there wasn’t a conspiracy theory he didn’t espouse.



Senator Richard Schweiker headed the Senate Intelligence Committee’s investigation into the assassination of John F. Kennedy and urged a complete re-investigation.

Several months later, Frank Sturgis made that initial interview more interesting. The Schweiker report had just been released. The Church Intelligence Committee staff had built it on the blocks of Castro assassination plots that the Warren Commission had not been told about, thus making the Castro retaliation theory its strong theme.

The evening after the report was released, Sturgis telephoned. He said he had just run across an old friend, a “guy with the Company,” who “revived” his mind about something he had completely forgotten to tell me. He now recalled that he had heard about a meeting in Havana about two months before the Kennedy assassination. At the meeting were a number of high-ranking men, including Castro, his brother Raul, Ramiro Valdez, the chief of Cuban intelligence, Ché Guevara and his secretary, Tanya, another Cuban officer, an American known as “El Mexicano,” and—oh, yeah—Jack Ruby. And the meeting dealt with plotting the assassination of John F. Kennedy.

That’s what Sturgis had “completely forgot” to tell me. Just a bit of information, with names.

Suddenly Sturgis was pushing Castro-did-it stories again.

Immediately after the Kennedy assassination, Sturgis was involved in other stories that proved to be without foundation. According to FBI documents, one involved a reporter named James Buchanan who had written an article for the Pompano *Sun Sentinel* that quoted Sturgis as saying that Oswald visited Miami in November 1962 to contact Miami-based supporters of Fidel Castro and that, while in Miami, was in telephone contact with Castro’s intelligence service.

I was intrigued by why Frank Sturgis would inject himself into the Kennedy assassination investigation. I was also intrigued by the character of the information he circulated, imbued as it was with just the right amount of detail and tenuous relation to some sort of documentary evidence. I wondered if here, too, there was a counterintelligence overlay to what was happening.

There were other moments that made me think I was taking Frank Sturgis too seriously. One evening I was chatting with him on the telephone. At the time I was checking into a fellow called “El Mono”—the Monkey—who had been described to me as “one of the CIA’s best-trained Cuban operatives.” Sturgis talked about him for a while and then said he had a friend who could

tell me a lot more about El Mono. The friend, whom I'll call Paul, was an American who had spent seven years in Castro prisons. He was charged with plotting to blow up a building housing Russian agents. Paul had operated a small bar in Havana as a front, was married to a Cuban who worked for the CIA, and was deeply involved in Miami's anti-Castro Cuban activity. Sturgis said he would make arrangements for me to meet Paul, but he didn't want to tell Paul that he was setting him up. He said he would be having breakfast with Paul the next Saturday morning at the Westward Ho restaurant in Little Havana and that I should just stroll in. "He don't know you're gonna be there, so when you get there I'll just put him on a little bit," said Sturgis. "We're old friends; I've known him for years. It'll be funny. We kid with each other a lot. He's a funny guy."

I spotted Sturgis and his friend in a back booth when I walked into the Westward Ho. Sturgis had his back to the door. I strolled up and slapped him on the shoulder. "Hey, Frank!" I greeted him. "Howya been? What've you been doing? Haven't seen you around lately." Sturgis looked up with a surprised yet blank expression. "Hey, I know you," he said. "Sure you do!" I said, sitting down beside him. "Where do I know you from?" he wondered aloud. "Frank, how can you forget?" I said. "Now wait a minute, don't tell me," said Sturgis, "I'll think of it." He cupped his chin in his hand and thought hard. He was a very bad actor and I couldn't keep a grin from crossing my face. Paul just stared at us, wondering what was going on.

Sturgis kept the act up for about five minutes, pounding his forehead and taking shots at different names. "Oh, I know I know I know," he would say in mock frustration, "but I'm drawing a blank wall!" I couldn't help laughing, more at his display at over-dramatics than at Paul's puzzlement. Finally, I reached across the table and introduced myself by name to Paul. He shook my hand and then turned to Sturgis. "Well, now do you remember who he is?" Paul asked him. Sturgis was feigning a mild convulsion. "Oh, sure, sure," he admitted, "I really know who he is. I was just puttin' you on!"

"Oh," Paul said, not getting the point of the charade.

"Gaeton here," Sturgis said, still laughing, "is a friend of mine who is with the, uh, whattaya callit, you know, the government committee that's looking into the assassination, you know, the assassination of John F. Kennedy." "Oh," Paul said, "you mean the guy you killed."

Sturgis's face froze. The smile was gone. Then he shook his head and smiled again. "Oh, yeah, sure," he said. Paul laughed at catching Sturgis off guard.

I started laughing, too. He was right. Paul was a funny guy.

During the first few months I worked for Senator Schweiker, I spent a lot of time thrashing about in murky waters. Then, one afternoon early in January 1976, I received a call from Dave Marston in Schweiker's office. Marston was Schweiker's staff coordinator on the Kennedy investigation. "You can give up on Silvia Odio," he said. "The guys over on committee staff told me they got word she's in Puerto Rico. They're getting ready to track her down."

“Do we have to tell them, Dave?”

“Tell them what?”

“I was talking with Silvia Odio this morning in Miami.”

The Senate Committee staff had decided that their final report on the Kennedy assassination could be written from documents given them by the FBI and CIA. The staffers figured they didn't have time for any investigation in the field. But the “Odio incident” bothered them, just as it had bothered the Warren Commission.

If the Warren Commission had found that Silvia Odio was telling the truth, its final conclusion that Oswald was not part of a conspiracy would have been undermined. Odio claimed that Oswald was one of three men who came to the door of her apartment in Dallas one evening in the last week of September 1963. The Commission dismissed Odio's testimony because, it said, it had “considerable evidence” that Oswald had not been in Dallas at all that September.

It had nothing of the sort. The Warren Commission's problem was that if Oswald had gone to Dallas on his way from New Orleans to Mexico City, he would have had to have private transportation and, because he did not have a car and could not drive, that meant that others were involved with him. And the Warren Commission did not want to have to deal with that.

My discovery of Silvia Odio in Miami was important because in investigating her story I would open a new area of evidence with explosive potential. Silvia Odio's background is relevant. She was the oldest of ten children spirited out of Cuba when their parents became active in anti-Castro activity. Her father, Amador Odio, was among Cuba's wealthiest men, owner of the country's largest trucking business and once described by *Time* as the “transport tycoon” of Latin America. But both he and his wife, Sarah, were idealists and had fought against dictators from the time of General Machado in the '30s. They were among Castro's early supporters and among the first to turn against him when “Fidel betrayed the Revolution,” as Amador Odio would later say. With liberal leader Manolo Ray, they helped to form one of the first anti-Castro groups within Cuba.

Amador and Sarah Odio were arrested by Castro in October 1961 at their country estate outside Havana. (The Odios had once been hosts at the wedding of one of Castro's sisters on that estate.) Later Castro would turn it into a national women's prison and Sarah Odio would spend eight years incarcerated there.

When her parents were arrested, Silvia Odio was 24 years old, living in Puerto Rico with her husband and four young children. She had attended law school in Cuba for a while. After her parents were arrested, her husband was sent to Germany by the firm for which he was working and subsequently deserted her and their children. Destitute, she began having emotional problems. By that time, Silvia's younger sisters, Annie and Sarita, were settled in Dallas. Sarita, a university student, had become friendly with a Dallas clubwoman named Lucille Connell, who was active in both the Cuban Refugee Center there and the Mental Health Association. When Sarita told Connell of Silvia's plight, Connell made arrangements to have Silvia and her children move to Dallas and for Silvia to receive psychiatric treatment.

Lucille Connell became Silvia's closest confidante. Connell would later tell me that Silvia's emotional problems resulted in attacks of sudden fainting when, according to Connell, "reality got too painful to bear." Connell said she witnessed Silvia suffer these attacks when she first arrived in Dallas, but with psychiatric help they ended—until the Kennedy assassination.



Silvia Odio swore to the Warren Commission that she met Lee Harvey Oswald in the company of two Cubans in Dallas in September 1963. If she could be believed, that would mean a probable conspiracy. She was not believed.

Silvia Odio had moved to Dallas in March 1963. She wanted to lead a quiet life, but her desire to do something to help get her parents out of prison led her and her sisters to maintain contact with Cuban exiles who were politically active and to join the anti-Castro group called JURE, which was founded by her father's old friend, Manolo Ray. (This was the same Manolo Ray who clashed with E. Howard Hunt before the Bay of Pigs.)

By September 1963, Silvia Odio was established in Dallas's Cuban-exile community. She had a decent job, had her emotional problems under control, and was planning to move into an apartment more comfortable than the rental unit in which she and her four children were squeezed. Moving day was set for Monday, October 1, 1963. The week before she was scheduled to move, her sister Annie, then seventeen, came to the apartment to help her pack and to babysit. When the doorbell rang early one evening in that last week of September, Annie went to the door to answer it.

Later I would talk with Annie Odio, who is now also living in Miami. She is married to an architect and has two children. She remembered the evening at Silvia's apartment in Dallas. One of the men asked to speak to Sarita. He initially spoke English, but when Annie answered him in Spanish he spoke Spanish. Annie told him that Sarita didn't live there. "He then said something—I don't recall exactly what, something about her being married—which made me think that they really wanted my sister Silvia. I recall putting the chain on the door while I went to get Silvia."

Annie told me that two of the men were Latin-looking and that one was shorter than the other and heavysset, had dark, shiny hair, and "looked Mexican." She said the third man was an American.

Annie Odio recalled that Silvia was initially reluctant to talk with the visitors because she was getting dressed to go out, but she remembers Silvia coming out of the bedroom in her bathrobe to go to the door.

Silvia Odio had told me she had been getting dressed to go out when the three men came to the door. The men were standing in the vestibule just inside the small front porch. Both the porch and the vestibule had bright overhead lights. Silvia said the men told her they were members of JURE and spoke as if they knew both Manolo Ray and her father. Her conversation, she said, was exclusively with the taller Latin, who identified himself as "Leopoldo," although he admitted he was giving her an alias or a "war name," the use of which was common among anti-Castro activists at the time. She said she was less certain of the other Latin's name—it might have been "Angelo"—but she described him as her sister did, "looking more Mexican than anything else."

The third visitor, the American, was introduced to her as “Leon Oswald.” She said “Leon Oswald” acknowledged the introduction with a very brief reply, perhaps in idiomatic Spanish, but she later decided he could not understand Spanish because of his lack of reaction to her Spanish conversation with “Leopoldo.”

There is no doubt in Silvia Odio’s mind that this visitor was Lee Harvey Oswald: She was with the men more than twenty minutes and, although she did not permit them in her apartment, she was less than three feet from them as they stood in the well-lit vestibule. She said Oswald and the other two men appeared tired, unkempt, and unshaven, as if they had just come from a long trip.

The third visitor, the American, was introduced to her as “Leon Oswald.” She said the three men appeared tired, unkempt, and unshaven, as if they had just come from a long trip.

“Leopoldo” told Silvia Odio that the reason they had come to her was to get her help in soliciting funds, in the name of JURE, from local businessmen. “He told me,” she recalled, “that he would like for me to write them, in English, very nice letters and perhaps we could get some funds.”

Silvia was suspicious of the strangers and avoided any commitment, and the conversation ended with “Leopoldo” giving her the impression he would contact her again. After the men left, Silvia locked her door and went to the window to watch them. She saw them pull away in a red car that had been parked in front of the apartment.

The following day or the day after—Silvia was never certain about that—she received a call from “Leopoldo.” She is relatively certain about the gist of what “Leopoldo” told her in that telephone conversation, and it is consistent with her testimony to the Warren Commission. She said that “Leopoldo” told her that “the gringo” had been a Marine, that he was an expert marksman, and that he was “kind of *loco*.” She recalled: “He said that the Cubans, we did not have any guts because we should have assassinated Kennedy after the Bay of Pigs.”

On the day President Kennedy was assassinated, both Silvia and Annie remembered the visit of the three men. Before she saw a photograph of Oswald or knew that he was involved, the news of the President’s death brought back to Silvia’s mind what “Leopoldo” had said about assassinating Kennedy. She had just returned to work from lunch, was told that everyone was being sent home, suddenly felt frightened, and, while walking to her car, fainted. She remembers waking up in the hospital.

Across town, Annie Odio was watching television at a friend’s house. She and some friends had gone to see the President’s motorcade pass several miles before it reached Dealey Plaza. “When I first saw Oswald on television,” she told me, “my first thought was, ‘My God, I know this guy and I don’t know from where!’ I kept thinking, ‘Where have I seen this guy?’ Then, I remember, my sister Sarita called me and told me that Silvia had fainted at work and that she was sending her boyfriend to take me to the hospital. When I walked into the room Silvia started crying and

crying. I think I told her, ‘You know this guy on TV who shot President Kennedy? I think I know him.’ And she said, ‘You don’t remember where you know him from?’ I said, ‘No, I cannot recall, but I know I’ve seen him before.’ And then she told me, ‘Do you remember those three guys who came to the house?’ ” That’s when, Annie said, she knew she had seen Lee Harvey Oswald before.

Based on background and character, Silvia and Annie Odio were highly credible. The subsequent checking I did of their story absolutely convinced me they were telling the truth. One of the major factors was that Silvia Odio had told more than one person of the incident *before* the Kennedy assassination.

She wrote to her father, Amador, in prison and told him of the visit of the three strangers. The Warren Commission obtained a copy of his reply, which warned her to be careful because he did not know them. I spoke to Amador Odio. He and his wife were released from Cuban prison a few years ago and are also living in Miami now. No longer wealthy—he works at night for an airline—he confirmed receiving the letter from Silvia and his reply.

Another confirmation came from Dr. Burton Einspruch, the psychiatrist counseling Silvia at the time. He recalled that she had told him prior to the assassination of the visit of the two Latins and the American, and he remembered calling her on the day of the assassination. He said she mentioned “Leon” and, in “a sort of histrionic way,” connected the visit of “Leon” to the Kennedy assassination.

Also of relevance, I thought, was the fact that the FBI found out about the visit only inadvertently. Both Silvia and Annie had immediately decided, in the hospital, not to say anything to anyone about what they knew. “We were so frightened, we were absolutely terrified,” Silvia remembered. “We were both very young and yet we had so much responsibility, with so many brothers and sisters and our mother and father in prison. We were so afraid, not knowing what was happening. We made a vow to each other not to tell anyone.”

They did not tell anyone they did not know and trust. But their sister Sarita told Lucille Connell, and Connell told a trusted friend, and soon FBI agents were knocking on Silvia Odio’s door. She says it was the last thing in the world she wanted to do but that when they came she felt she had to tell the truth.

What I recall best about meeting Silvia Odio in Miami was the fear. It was still with her after all these years.

Even before I met Silvia and Annie Odio and could evaluate their credibility, I was intrigued by two aspects of the FBI documents and the Warren Commission records of the Odio incident. First, they seemed to contain the potential of something of keystone significance in any attempt to grasp the truth about Lee Harvey Oswald and the Kennedy assassination. If the incident did occur as Odio contended, then any plausible theory of the assassination would have to account for it. Second, this was the very point the Warren Commission itself quickly recognized. The Commission was therefore forced, by its own conclusions, to pummel the facts about the incident

into conforming lies.

The Warren Commission was hampered, of course, by the FBI's initial bungling in investigating the incident. Silvia Odio had provided good physical descriptions of her visitors and details about their car. The FBI did not vigorously pursue those leads but instead spent most of its time questioning people about Silvia's credibility and her emotional problems. The Bureau's first interview with Silvia Odio was on December 12, 1963. On August 23, 1964, with the first drafts of the Warren Commission report being written. Chief Counsel J. Lee Rankin wrote to J. Edgar Hoover: "It is a matter of some importance to the Commission that Mrs. Odio's allegations either be proved or disproved." A month later, with the report in galley form, the Odio incident was still a concern to some staffers. In a memo to his boss, staff counsel Wesley Liebler wrote: "There are problems. Odio may well be right. The Commission will look bad if it turns out that she is. There is no need to look foolish by grasping at straws to avoid admitting that there is a problem."

The FBI did attempt to alleviate that "problem" when it interviewed a soldier of fortune named Loran Eugene Hall on September 26, 1964. Hall claimed he had been in Dallas in September 1963 trying to raise anti-Castro funds with two companions, one of whom might have looked like Oswald. The Warren Commission, grasping at a straw, cited the Hall interview in its final report, giving the impression that Hall and his companions were Odio's visitors. It then concluded: "Lee Harvey Oswald was not at Mrs. Odio's apartment in September 1963."

The Warren Commission did not mention that Loran Eugene Hall was one of the anti-Castro guerrillas arrested at No Name Key after Kennedy's Cuban-missile crackdown and also was a member of the International Anti-Communist Brigade, whose members and leaders had fed a series of phony stories to Kennedy assassination investigators. Neither did the Warren Commission note in its final report—even though it knew—that the subsequent FBI interviews revealed that Hall's two companions denied having been in Dallas, that neither looked like Oswald, that Silvia Odio, shown their photographs, did not recognize them, and that Loran Eugene Hall, when questioned, admitted he had fabricated the story.

What I recall best about meeting Silvia Odio in Miami was the fear. It was still with her after all those years. She was working as an assistant in the legal department of a large firm, but she had remained home that morning so we could talk. Her husband, Mauricio, who is involved in Spanish-language publishing, had also remained home until he saw that his wife felt comfortable. Silvia, then in her late thirties, still youthful and attractive, was nervous but bright and morning fresh when we began talking. After several hours of discussing the incident and her experiences with the Warren Commission, she looked older.

Silvia Odio had been reluctant to talk at all. She kept asking, "Why? Why are they bringing it all up again? What good will it do? I told them the truth but they did not want to hear it. Why do they want to keep playing games with me? *Why?*" Her voice had a nervous edge but she was articulate and rational. "Why didn't the FBI investigate immediately? Why did they wait so long after first talking with me before they came back? Do you think they really want to know what the answer to the Kennedy assassination is?"

She admitted that she had become disillusioned with the US government because of the way the FBI and the staff of the Warren Commission treated her and because, in the end, she was officially termed a liar.

“It gets me so mad that I was just used,” she told me. I gave her my assurances that this time it would be different. I told her that I believed that it was necessary for Americans to learn the truth about the Kennedy assassination. I told her I believed that Senator Schweiker was an honorable man and would not be involved in anything but an honest investigation. We spoke on the telephone several times before Silvia Odio finally agreed to visit with me. Eventually she came to trust me.

In the end the House Committee on Assassinations was forced to conclude that Silvia Odio was telling the truth—reluctantly, in its final report: “The committee was inclined to believe Silvia Odio.”

Waffling as that admission is, it meant that Silvia Odio, in the Committee’s opinion, was telling the truth. As if once that was acknowledged, it could be put aside—a curtsy to truth—and the dance could go on.

Yet the Odio admission hammers cracks in the foundation of the House Committee’s conclusions that elements of organized crime were the probable conspirators in the Kennedy assassination. The report was forced to cross the bounds of rationality: “It is possible,” it noted, “despite his alleged remark about killing Kennedy, that Oswald had not yet contemplated the President’s assassination at the time of the Odio incident, or if he did, that his assassination plan had no relation to his anti-Castro contacts, and that he was associating with anti-Castro activists for some other unrelated reason.”

The Committee did not speculate on that “other unrelated reason.” That would have opened a door marked CIA.



For J. Lee Rankin, chief counsel to the Warren Commission, Silvia Odio’s story posed problems, for it cast in doubt the ultimate finding that there had been no conspiracy. “We are supposed to be closing doors, not opening them,” he said in refusing to credit her testimony.

“It’s a queer thing to hear the chief Senate investigator talking as if he and the CIA were partners in the search for the truth. It does not seem to have occurred to him that the CIA is in the business of deception.”

But all that was to come long after my first talk with Silvia Odio. And although I sensed her story was important to understanding the truth behind the Kennedy assassination, I didn’t realize how significant the pursuit of it would be in my own investigation.

About the time I found Silvia Odio in Miami, an independent researcher named Paul Hoch sent Senator Schweiker a copy of an article that was going to appear a few weeks later in the *Saturday*

Evening Post. He had written it with George O'Toole, a former CIA computer specialist and the author of *The Assassination Tapes*, which revealed that psychological stress analysis of Oswald's voice indicated he was telling the truth when he denied killing President Kennedy. Hoch, a physicist at the University of California at Berkeley, was a Warren Commission critic known for his plodding, analytical research of government documents.

The article was titled "Dallas: The Cuban Connection" and it dealt with the Odio incident. "The *Saturday Evening Post* has learned," said the article, "of a link between the Odio incident and one of the many attempts on the life of Cuban Premier Fidel Castro carried out by the Central Intelligence Agency and Cuban émigrés in the early 1960s."

In his research, Hoch had discovered that Silvia Odio's parents had been arrested by Castro because they had harbored a fugitive named Reinaldo Gonzalez, who was wanted for plotting to kill Castro in October 1961. The plotters had planned to use a bazooka, which would have been fired from an apartment near the presidential palace when Castro was making one of his marathon speeches. The apartment was rented by the mother-in-law of the principal plotter, Antonio Veciana. The plot failed: The bazooka never was fired, the potential killers were arrested, and Gonzalez was later picked up on the Odio estate. However, Veciana, the organizer of the plot, escaped to Miami, where he founded Alpha 66, which came to be one of the largest, best-financed, and most aggressive of the Cuban-exile groups.

The article pointed out that Alpha 66 had chapters all over the country, that Veciana made frequent fund-raising trips to these chapters, and that one of the chapters he visited was in Dallas at 3126 Hollandale. In the mounds of Warren Commission documents, Hoch found a report by a Dallas deputy sheriff saying that an informant had told him that a person resembling Oswald had been seen associating with Cubans at "3128 Harlendale."

The article concluded: "Like the two Cubans who, with 'Leon Oswald,' visited Silvia Odio in September, 1963, Antonio Veciana was: 1) an anti-Castro activist, 2) engaged in raising funds for the commandos, and 3) acquainted with Silvia Odio's father. While this falls short of proving it, a real possibility exists that Veciana was one of the two Cubans who visited Silvia Odio, or that he at least can shed some light on the Odio incident."

I was intrigued by another possibility, which Paul Hoch raised in a separate memorandum to Schweiker. In analyzing one of the early Church Committee reports on assassination plots against foreign leaders, Hoch wondered why the 1961 Veciana attempt against Castro was not mentioned. Hoch was contending, in effect, that because the Veciana plot did not appear in the Church report, it was one the CIA was trying to hide.

At about that time there appeared in *Esquire* a column by its Washington watcher, Timothy Crouse, who suggested that the CIA, in revealing such flashy "secrets" as its deadly shellfish toxin and toxic dart gun, was taking the Church Committee through a primrose maze. Crouse was disturbed because the committee's chief counsel, F.A.O. Schwarz Jr. ("He has the innocent look of one of the trolls they sell at the toy store his great-grandfather founded"), was accepting at face value the CIA's own enumeration of its misdeeds. "It's pretty unusual," Schwarz admitted to Crouse, "to find that the defendant has developed large parts of the case. It's very helpful."

Wrote Crouse: "It's a queer thing to hear the chief Senate investigator talking as if he and the CIA were partners in the search for the truth.... It does not seem to have occurred to Schwarz that the CIA was, is, and always will be in the business of deception."

I found Antonio Veciana listed in the Miami telephone directory. When I called I spoke to his wife, Sira, and there was a nervous edge to her voice when she told me her husband wasn't home. I said I was working with Senator Schweiker and asked the best time to reach her husband. She said I should talk to her son Tony. A college student and the oldest of Veciana's five children, Tony told me his father was in Atlanta. I asked when he would return. Tony had a muffled conversation with his mother. "Well, he's in Atlanta and he won't be home for a while," he said. I asked if I could reach his father in Atlanta. Another muffled conversation with his mother. He asked why I wanted to talk with his father. I said I was a staff investigator for Senator Schweiker and that Schweiker was a member of the Church Intelligence Committee and that I wanted to learn the relationship between federal agencies and anti-Castro Cubans during the early 1960s.

There was another muffled conversation with his mother. "Well, you see," he said, "he's in Atlanta." The third time Tony told me his father was in Atlanta it struck me that there was a federal penitentiary there. Was he trying to tell me his father was in prison? That, it turned out, was exactly what he was trying to tell me.

Tony would not tell me why his father was in prison. "I think there are some people who want him in there," he said, "but I would rather you get the details from him." He said if I could identify myself officially he would write to his father and ask him to have me put on the visitor list.

A few days later I went to show Tony my official identification. The Veciana home was small and modest, with a green stucco facade. It was on a quiet street on the northern edge of Miami's Little Havana. In the front yard was a small, white statue of the Madonna and Child.

It would be another month before I could talk with Antonio Veciana. Shortly after he put me on the prison's visitor list, he was told that he would be getting an early parole, so I decided to wait until he came home. I was in no hurry, because I didn't think the interview was of pressing importance.

While I was waiting to see Veciana, I tried to do what checking I could into him and Alpha 66. There was not much in the newspaper files about Veciana's early years, but I learned that he was an accounting graduate of the University of Havana and that in his early twenties he had been considered the boy wonder of Cuban banking and rose to become the right-hand man of Cuban's major banker, Julio Lobo, the millionaire known as the "Sugar King" of Cuba. Veciana was 31 when Castro took control of the country in 1959.

Alpha 66 emerged early in 1962, with Veciana its founder and chief spokesman. It seemed to receive more press attention than other militant exile groups because it appeared better organized, better equipped, and more successful in its guerrilla operations.

Alpha 66 seemed to taunt President Kennedy. Not content to limit its assaults to Cuba and Castro's forces, it attacked any foreign ships supplying Castro and conducted assassination raids against Russian troops in Cuba.

At the height of the missile crisis, when Kennedy was conducting delicate negotiations with Khrushchev, Alpha 66 continued its raids into Cuba and assaults on Castro's patrol boats. "We will attack again and again," Veciana vowed.

II

The Secret Agent

That morning thirteen years later the incongruity of it struck me as I approached this cozy green home on a quiet street in Little Havana—to see the man who had been at the vortex of such international turmoil.

He was now 46, but the only image I had of the man was from an old newspaper clipping: much younger, the anti-Castro terrorist, his face contorted as he declared his defiance.

The man who opened the door appeared as little like a menacing terrorist as one can imagine. He was a soft-looking man, fairly tall, with a smooth, full face, wavy black hair, and dark eyes. He was not at all muscular but had a certain heft and a paunch. He was casually but neatly groomed, with pressed dark trousers and a fresh white *guayabera*—nondescript attire in Little Havana. What struck me most when I first met Veciana—something particularly striking in Miami—was his pallor. It was very much a prison pallor—something that comes from more than just not being in the sun, something that has to do with the spirit. The prison was still in Veciana's eyes.

We sat in the small front living room. There were two Spanish Provincial couches, one red and one green, fitted with clear plastic covers, large photographs of each child adorning one wall, a coffee table with a formal family portrait propped in the center, crocheted doilies on the end tables.

As soon as I saw Veciana, I decided he could not have been one of Silvia Odio's visitors, as Paul Hoch had speculated in his *Saturday Evening Post* article. Veciana has a large and noticeable mole or birthmark above his mouth, too prominent to go unnoted by anyone trying to identify him. When I asked Veciana about the Odio visitors, he said he knew Amador and Silvia Odio but knew nothing about the incident.

I told Veciana what I had told his son—that I wanted to talk with him in general about the relationship of US intelligence agencies and anti-Castro Cuban groups. I said nothing of my interest in the Kennedy assassination and, because Schweiker had gotten relatively little press in Miami compared to the headlines then being made by the Church Committee, there was little

reason for Veciana to assume I was working on Kennedy.

Although Veciana said he would answer my questions, there was an initial defensiveness. “I will tell you what you want to know,” he said, “but I am worried about certain things that can be used against me.” He said he had gone to prison on a drug-conspiracy charge. He said he would talk with me only if I could assure him that anything he told me would not be used against him.

That puzzled me, but I assumed he was concerned about United States laws he may have broken during the course of his anti-Castro activity. I assured him our talk would be confidential and would not be made public. I felt I could trust Schweiker to back me and keep that promise, and he did. But I didn’t realize then that anything sent to Washington went into files and might be used for somebody’s political ends.

I asked Veciana how he had gotten involved in anti-Castro activity. He said that as president of the association of certified public accountants in Cuba he had been interested in politics. He had been among the leaders of a group of professional association presidents who had secretly worked on Castro’s behalf during Batista’s dictatorship. As a result, when Castro took over he was asked to join the government as a finance minister. He turned down the offer, he said, because he had a good position in Cuba’s major bank, but he did know and worked closely with high-ranking officials in the Castro government.

It was his knowledge of what was going on within the government, Veciana said, that gave him an early indication that Castro was not an idealistic reformer but a Communist. Veciana’s disillusionment grew, and soon he was talking with close friends about working against Castro. Then, he said, people came to him and started talking about eliminating Castro.

For some reason, the way Veciana put that made me think of the letter Paul Hoch had sent to Schweiker raising the possibility that the CIA may have been involved in the planned bazooka attempt on Castro’s life, which Veciana planned. I asked him if any of the people who spoke about eliminating Castro were representatives of the US government. Well, said Veciana, that was something he had never spoken about before, but there was an American he had dealt with who had very strong connections with the US government.

For the next hour and a half, I questioned Veciana about this American, who eventually became the secret supervisor and director of all Veciana’s anti-Castro activities. He said the American, who went by the name of Maurice Bishop, directed not only the Castro assassination attempt in Cuba in October 1961 but also a plan to kill Castro in Chile in 1971.

Bishop, said Veciana, was the person who suggested the founding of Alpha 66 and guided its



PHOTOGRAPH BY UPI

Cuban exile leader Antonio Veciana (left) with fellow anti-Castro leader Cecilio J. Vazquez during the height of CIA-inspired commando raids against Cuba in the early 1960s. Veciana’s report of seeing a CIA operative named Maurice Bishop with Lee Harvey Oswald in Dallas two months before the assassination was a major breakthrough in the investigation.

overall strategy. Bishop was the person who pulled the strings in the US government when financial and other support was needed and who involved Veciana not only in anti-Castro activity but in anti-Communist activity in Latin America as well. Veciana said he worked with Bishop for thirteen years—until 1973.

I realized I had stumbled onto something important: a US intelligence-agency connection—a direct connection—with an anti-Castro group. The CIA had always denied—and still does—a supervisory role in the activities of anti-Castro groups *after* the Bay of Pigs. The Agency claimed it only “monitored” such activity. Here was Veciana, the key leader of the largest and most militant anti-Castro group, revealing much more than just a monitoring interest on the Agency’s part—revealing, in fact, an involvement in two Castro-assassination attempts the CIA had not admitted to the Church Committee. I wondered how the Committee would handle this one—if they gave a damn at all, now that they were frantically trying to wrap up their final report.

It was all fascinating but not especially relevant to the Kennedy assassination. I could see no connection between Veciana’s activities in Miami and what had happened in Dallas, although Veciana did say his meetings with Bishop took place over the years in cities besides Miami, including Dallas, Las Vegas, and Washington, and in Puerto Rico and Latin America. When Veciana started talking about chapters of Alpha 66 he had set up across the country, it gave me the opportunity, without making reference to the Kennedy assassination, to ask him about the one in Dallas. He told me he had spoken at some fund-raising meetings at the home of the Alpha 66 delegate there.

I asked him if he knew a “Jorge Salazar.” That was the name mentioned in the Dallas deputy sheriff’s report about the gathering of Alpha 66 members at “3126 Hollandale.” But I did not mention this or that Lee Harvey Oswald had reportedly been seen there.

“No,” said Veciana, “I do not know the Salazar that is mentioned in the magazine article on Dallas. And I never saw Oswald at that home where we met.”

I was taken aback that Veciana should mention Oswald, but then I realized, as Veciana himself would point out to me after he went to his bedroom and returned with the magazine, that the Hoch and O’Toole article had been published in the *Saturday Evening Post*. Veciana said he had just read the article the day before.

“No,” he was saying, “I never saw Oswald at that place where we held the meetings ...”

I was jotting that down in my notebook and was not looking at him, but I heard him continue.

“... but I remember once meeting Lee Harvey Oswald.”

I did not look up, and tried not to react. “Oh, really?” I said in a forced monotone. “How did you meet him? Where? When?”

Veciana said he met Oswald with Maurice Bishop in Dallas sometime near the beginning of September 1963.

There, in a modest green house in Little Havana, almost thirteen years after the assassination of John F. Kennedy, the reality of what I was involved in struck me. The killing of a President was no longer a series of lingering TV images, bold black headlines, thick stacks of documents, books and files. It was something that had actually happened, and there were living people with direct strings through time to that moment. As much as the substance of the information itself, it was the absolutely coincidental way it came up that stunned me. First impressions are inherently circumstantial, but I had no doubt then—and have none now—that Veciana was telling the truth.

The details are what make the case.

One morning in the late summer of 1960—about a year and a half after Castro took power—Antonio Veciana’s secretary at the Banco Financiero in Havana handed him a business card from a man waiting to see him. The name on the card was Maurice Bishop. Veciana does not remember the name of the business imprinted on the card but now believes it may have been a construction firm headquartered in Belgium. Veciana’s first thought was that his caller was a possible customer for his bank.

The man who said he was Maurice Bishop did not lead Veciana to think otherwise initially. Although he spoke excellent Spanish, Bishop said he was an American and wanted to talk with Veciana about the state of the Cuban economy and where it appeared to be going. They talked awhile, and around noon Bishop suggested they continue over lunch. Bishop took Veciana to an expensive restaurant, the Floridita, once one of Ernest Hemingway’s favorites.

During their conversation at the restaurant, Veciana recalls, Bishop began to express concern about the Cuban government’s leaning toward Communism and let it be known that he was aware of Veciana’s feelings toward Castro. That surprised Veciana because he had told only a few close friends about his disillusionment with Castro’s government. (Among those he told, however, were two who, it later became known, had direct contact with the CIA. One was his boss, Julio Lobo, who later in exile was designated to set up an “independent” front committee to raise \$20 million for the return of Bay of Pigs prisoners, and the other was Rufo López-Fresquet, who, for the first fourteen months of the revolution, was Castro’s Minister of the Treasury and the CIA’s liaison with the new government.)

As their conversation continued, it became obvious to Veciana that Bishop knew a good deal about him personally. It also became obvious that Bishop was not interested in Veciana’s banking services but, rather, in recruiting him as a participant in the growing movement against the Castro government. “He tried to impress on me the seriousness of the situation,” Veciana recalls.

Veciana was ripe for recruitment. Through contacts high in government, he had come to the conclusion that Castro, by moving toward tighter control than even Batista, had betrayed the revolution. Veciana had come to despise him. He told Bishop that he was willing to work with him. Bishop offered to pay him for his services. Veciana told him that he did not need payment to fight against Castro but they could settle accounts when the job was over, if Bishop insisted. In the summer of 1960 Veciana did not think it would take long to topple Castro.

There were several more meetings, and Veciana and Bishop got to know each other better. Finally, Bishop told Veciana that he would like him to take a “training program” to prepare him for the work ahead. This turned out to be a series of nightly lectures and instruction in the nondescript office of a building that Veciana recalls as being on El Vedado, a commercial strip. He remembers seeing the name of a mining company in the building and, on the ground floor, a branch of the Berlitz school of languages.

Although he was given technical training in the use of explosives and sabotage techniques, Veciana’s lessons dealt mainly with propaganda and psychological warfare. “Bishop told me several times,” Veciana recalls, “that psychological warfare could help more than hundreds of soldiers, thousands of soldiers.” Veciana was also trained in techniques of counterintelligence, surveillance, and communications. The thrust of his training was to make him proficient not as a guerrilla operative but as a higher-echelon planner. As Veciana put it, “The main purpose was to train me to be an organizer, so I was supposed to initiate a type of action and other people would be the ones who would really carry it out.”

The training sessions lasted only a few weeks. By that time Bishop and Veciana were concocting schemes to undermine Castro’s regime. With Veciana’s contacts in the Cuban government, several plots were evolved to discredit key Communists and funnel the government’s own money into the hands of anti-Castro guerrillas. In one instance, Veciana successfully schemed to get Castro’s top aide, Ché Guevara, to sign a \$200,000 check, which, unknown to him, went to the underground. Veciana also set in motion a propaganda program that resulted in destabilization of Cuban currency and public distrust in its value.

At Bishop’s direction, Veciana began taking a more active role in the organized underground movement. “Bishop always wanted to be kept informed about what was going on with the various groups,” Veciana told me. With his supervisory training and technical expertise, Veciana soon became chief of sabotage for one of the largest underground groups, the Movimiento Revolucionario del Pueblo, which was formed by Manolo Ray and was the predecessor of JURE. Like others in the underground movement, Veciana used “war names.” One he used frequently was “Carlos.”

Although he was given technical training in the use of explosives and sabotage, Veciana’s lessons dealt mainly with propaganda and psychological warfare.

Although Maurice Bishop refused to acknowledge to Veciana any connection with the US government, he was familiar with personnel in the American Embassy in Havana. Before the embassy was closed in January 1961, Bishop suggested that Veciana contact specific individuals there to get direct assistance and supplies for the anti-Castro movement. Bishop, however, asked Veciana not to mention his name or the fact that Veciana had been sent by an American. Nor did Bishop indicate whether these individuals were intelligence agents.

One of the American Embassy personnel Bishop suggested Veciana contact was a “Colonel

Kail.” Kail, who was in the Army, told Veciana the US government could not directly support him in any way. But Kail said that he could assist with the issuance of passports and visas for plotters who wanted to escape. The American Embassy closed down shortly after Veciana last talked with Kail.

According to Veciana, Bishop left Cuba before the Bay of Pigs invasion of April 1961. He says he had not met with Bishop for some months prior to the invasion. However, after the Bay of Pigs, Bishop returned to Cuba (probably, Veciana learned, with a Belgian passport). Veciana recalls that he and Bishop had long discussions about what had happened during the invasion. He says Bishop told him that Kennedy’s failure to provide air support was the key to the failure of the operation. Bishop felt a frustration about that because, according to Veciana, “at that time Bishop decided that the only thing left to be done was to make an attempt on Castro’s life.”

It was decided to have Castro killed during a scheduled public appearance on the balcony of the presidential palace in early October 1961. Veciana had his mother-in-law rent an apartment on the eighth floor of a building within range of the balcony and then made arrangements for her escape to the US by boat the day before the assassination attempt. (He had flown his wife and children to Spain as a precaution as soon as he began plotting.) He then recruited the men to do the actual shooting and obtained the weapons. (Availability of weapons was not a major problem to the anti-Castro underground as a result of the supply air-dropped by the US prior to the Bay of Pigs.) The apartment was stocked with automatic rifles, grenade launchers, and a bazooka. A massive attack was planned so that all the key Castro aides on the balcony would also be killed.

Shortly before the scheduled attempt, Veciana learned that he was considered suspicious by Castro’s intelligence agency, the G2. His cousin, Guillermo Ruiz, a high-ranking G2 officer, asked him why he had been visiting the American Embassy. Veciana said it was only to see about obtaining passports for some friends. Ruiz said if that was the case, he had been using the wrong entrance. Veciana took this as a warning that he was still being watched. Bishop also told Veciana that Castro’s intelligence agents suspected Veciana of subversive activity and that he should consider leaving Cuba.

The assassination attempt never came off because the triggermen, fearing that the G2 had learned of the plot, fled the apartment. (The G2 did know that something was going to happen, but it was only later that it found the apartment and seized the weapons.) The night before the planned attack, when Veciana was to have put his mother-in-law aboard the escape boat, it was discovered that the landing site was under surveillance and the boat could not dock. Because his mother-in-law couldn’t swim, Veciana said later, he had to push her into the water and swim out to the boat with her. At that point, he decided that it was too dangerous to return to shore and that he would go with her to Miami.

Shortly after Veciana arrived in Miami, Maurice Bishop was back in touch with him. Soon they were meeting regularly and planning strategy to continue the fight against Castro. The result was the founding of Alpha 66—which, according to Veciana, was Bishop’s brainchild. The name was a collaboration: Alpha was meant to symbolize the beginning of the end of Castro and 66 represented the number of fellow accountants Veciana recruited at the start of his anti-Castro activities.

While Veciana established himself as Alpha 66's chief executive officer and fund-raiser, he recruited as military leader a former Rebel Army officer. Major Eloy Gutierrez Menoyo. A daring soldier, Menoyo had the reputation among Cuban exiles of being a Socialist. Veciana says Bishop expressed some doubts about his loyalty, but Veciana convinced Bishop he could be trusted.

With strong management, clever propaganda, influence with the media, skill in fund-raising, and expertise in locating weapon caches and planning military operations. Alpha 66 soon was in the forefront of the anti-Castro exile groups. Veciana was all over the place, buying guns and boats, recruiting and organizing training sites, making speeches, issuing public communiques claiming successful raids into Cuba. At one point Veciana announced he had a war chest of \$100,000 and that all the major exile organizations were backing Alpha 66's efforts. Except for one minor slip, which no one paid any attention to at the time, Veciana gave not a hint to Alpha 66 associates that there was an American guiding his strategy. At a press conference recorded in the *New York Times* on September 14, 1962, Veciana announced a series of forthcoming Alpha 66 attacks and, in passing, added that the planning was being done by those "I don't even know."

According to Veciana, the headaches that Alpha 66 created for President Kennedy before and during the Cuban missile crisis were planned by Maurice Bishop. The timing of the raids on Cuba at the height of the missile crisis, when Kennedy was negotiating with Khrushchev, was Bishop's idea. So was a press conference in Washington after the crisis when Veciana announced that Alpha 66 had just attacked a Russian ship in a Cuban harbor and engaged in a firefight with Russian troops. The conference was planned at the time Kennedy was in Costa Rica trying to gain support for his new Cuban policy. "The purpose was to embarrass Kennedy publicly and force him to move against Castro," Veciana now admits.

Although Maurice Bishop often suggested specific tactical moves, he was more concerned with the overall strategy of Alpha 66 and Veciana's anti-Castro activity. He was not in constant contact with Veciana. In fact, Veciana never saw him more than a dozen or so times in any one year.

The understanding between them—arrived at early in their relationship—and the arrangement they had for meetings were right out of a covert operations manual. Although an unspoken trust developed, there was no true personal relationship between Bishop and Veciana; no matters were discussed that did not bear upon their mutual anti-Castro mission.

Every meeting was instigated by Bishop. Bishop would call and set the time and place. Usually it was in a public place, on a corner or in a park, and they would walk and talk. Veciana remembers meetings in Havana, however, that took place at a country club and, once, in an apartment across the street from the American Embassy. Later, if Veciana was in another city. Bishop would come to his hotel. The majority of his meetings with Bishop over the years were in Miami and Puerto Rico. Veciana assumed that Bishop flew in for these meetings because often Bishop would meet him in a rented car. Over the years, meetings with Bishop took place also in Washington, Las Vegas, and Dallas and, during a period when Veciana had a job in South America, in Caracas, Lima, and La Paz.

During the most active period of Alpha 66's operations, Veciana was constantly on the move

and, for security reasons, not very visible. At that time, Veciana told me, he made arrangements whereby Bishop could find out where he was at any moment. A third party, someone Veciana trusted, was designated as the link.

It took me three years to learn her identity and location, but when I did, the House Assassinations Committee did not permit me to interview her. Eventually, a journalist did and confirmed what Veciana had said.

Shortly after Veciana left Cuba, he had a revealing meeting with Maurice Bishop. They met on a downtown Miami street corner. Bishop spoke about how the fight against Castro might be more difficult and last longer than they had envisioned, how he and Veciana would have to work together closely, and how they must develop mutual trust and loyalty. Veciana agreed. Would Veciana, Bishop asked, be willing to sign a contract to that effect? Of course, said Veciana. Bishop then led Veciana to the Pan American Bank Building, a five-story office structure in the heart of Miami's business district. Veciana recalls that they took an elevator and that Bishop had the key to an unmarked office door. The office was spartanly furnished with a desk and a few chairs, and an American flag stood in one corner.

The arrangement they had for meetings was right out of a covert-operations manual. Every meeting was instigated by Bishop. He would call Veciana and set the time and place—on a corner or in a park—and they would walk and talk.

There was no one in the office when Bishop and Veciana entered. Bishop went through another door and returned with two men and some documents, which he asked Veciana to read and sign. Veciana believes the documents he signed were contracts and loyalty oaths. He was not given copies. He recalls that in the contract was a space for a salary figure, which was left blank. Veciana now believes the incident was a “commitment” ceremony. “It was a pledge of my loyalty, a secret pledge,” he says. “I think they wanted to impress on me my responsibility and my commitment to the cause.”

Veciana had considered the possibility that Bishop worked for an intelligence agency other than the CIA. Among the most active US organizations monitoring anti-Castro activity was Army Intelligence. Veciana recalls being contacted in 1962, in Puerto Rico, by an American who called himself Patrick Harris. After several long conversations with him, Veciana came to the conclusion that he was in Army Intelligence. Harris told Veciana that he might be able to provide some support for Veciana's anti-Castro activities but first wanted to inspect Alpha 66's operational base in the Bahamas. Veciana came to trust Harris and provided him and several associates a tour of the base, over military chief Menoyo's objections. Harris never came through with any aid. “I told Bishop about that,” Veciana now says, “and he told me not to bother with them, that they could not help me. He was right.”

In 1968 Maurice Bishop helped Veciana get a job with the US Agency for International Development (AID) in La Paz, Bolivia, as an adviser to Bolivia's Central Bank. The job paid well, and his checks came directly from the Treasury Department in Washington. "I was very surprised I was hired, because I was a known terrorist," Veciana says today. "The State Department, which hired me, once ordered me confined to Dade County because of my anti-Castro activity. Then in La Paz they put my office in the American Embassy. For sure, Bishop had very good connections."

Veciana worked for AID for four years, receiving more than \$31,000 a year to provide advice to Bolivia's banking industry. (It has since been learned that the CIA has used AID as a front in other instances, once getting one of its own proprietary companies a multimillion-dollar AID contract to train Thailand's border police.) Veciana says he did very little financial advising during the four years. Instead, he spent almost all his time in anti-Castro and anti-Communist activities directed by Bishop.

Bishop was interested in more than assassinating Castro. With Bishop's blessing and financial support, Veciana traveled around Latin America, involving himself in propaganda ploys aimed at the character assassination of leading Communist politicians and weakening the financial stability of left-leaning governments. (Once, when I was questioning Veciana about Bishop's apparent incompetence based on the latter's failures to assassinate Castro, Veciana simply smiled and said, "No, we did not kill Castro, but there were many other plans, many other plots that did work." He would not elaborate.)



PHOTOGRAPH BY WIDE WORLD PHOTOS
Salvador Allende, Marxist President of Chile, was overthrown by a secret task force from the CIA headed by David Atlee Phillips.

Early in 1971 Bishop told Veciana that Castro would probably be making a state visit to Chile late that year. He suggested that Veciana begin planning another assassination attempt. "He told me," Veciana says, "that it was an opportunity to make it appear that anti-Castro Cubans killed Castro without US involvement."

Veciana set up his planning headquarters in Caracas, where the Venezuelan bureaucracy is deeply infiltrated by both anti-Castro Cubans and the CIA and where Veciana knew an experienced group of terrorists. Among them were two gunmen willing to do the killing. On its surface, the plan was relatively simple. It had become known that toward the end of his visit to Chile, Castro would hold a press conference attended by as many as 400 journalists. Press credentials for the two gunmen would be obtained from a Venezuelan TV station and, although there would be tight security, their weapons would be smuggled into the conference room inside a television camera.

Maurice Bishop had a major role in setting up the operation, according to Veciana: Bishop provided the weapons and made arrangements with officers in the Chilean military—which would be providing Castro security at the conference—for the assassins to be grabbed after killing Castro and arrested by Chilean soldiers before the Cuban premier's bodyguards could kill them. According to Veciana, Bishop said he would arrange the assassins' escape from Chile

later.

At that time the head of the Chilean government was leftist President Salvador Allende. Two years later, in September 1973, Allende would be overthrown in a coup d'état. The overthrow of Allende was supported and largely financed by the CIA and several American multinational corporations, chiefly International Telephone & Telegraph. At one point the CIA set up a secret task force to work with Chilean military brass who opposed Allende. The chief of the task force was David Atlee Phillips.

The attempt to assassinate Castro in Chile failed because at the last moment the two gunmen decided they would never get out of the conference room alive; they did not believe that Veciana had made arrangements for their capture. Veciana could not tell them of Bishop or how the arrangements had been made.

Other anti-Castro Cubans whom Veciana had recruited in Caracas as part of the assassination plot had also not believed that Veciana had arranged an escape for the shooters and had developed a subplot, without Veciana's knowledge. The subplot was based on the assumption that the gunmen would themselves be killed immediately after assassinating Castro. When the existence of this subplot came to light, Veciana says, it produced the crack that eventually led to the end of his relationship with Maurice Bishop, in 1973.

Among the associates Veciana says he recruited in Caracas were two veterans of the war against Castro—Lucilo Peña and Luis Posada. Both have backgrounds as men of action.

Peña, the general director of a major chemical firm, had once been involved in Alpha 66's "Plan Omega," a plot to invade Cuba from a base in the Dominican Republic. When I interviewed Posada in 1978, he was in jail in Caracas—having been arrested, with a well-known exile terrorist, Dr. Orlando Bosch, for blowing up a Cubana Airlines plane and killing 73 persons, including many Russians. He was a veteran of the Bay of Pigs, a member of JURE, a former lieutenant in the US Army (where he was trained in intelligence), a former agent for the CIA, and, until his arrest, the owner of a successful private-detective agency in Caracas. In 1971, when Veciana was working with him, he was chief of security and counterintelligence in the Venezuelan secret police.

According to Veciana, it was Peña and Posada who provided the necessary credentials and documents that enabled the two gunmen to establish false identities and get into place in Chile in 1971. What they also did—without telling him, says Veciana—was plant phony documents so that the trail of the two men who were going to assassinate Castro would lead, if they were caught and killed, to Russian agents in Caracas.

Lengthy false surveillance reports were slipped into the files of the Venezuelan secret police, indicating that the Cubans had been seen meeting Russian agents, one of whom was a correspondent for *Izvestia* and another a professor at the University of Central Venezuela. Also in the file were manufactured passports, diaries, and notes allegedly found in one gunman's hotel room, confirming his contact with Russian agents. Intended to be the most damaging evidence

was a photograph showing what appeared to be one of the gunmen leaning into a car window and talking with one of the Russian agents. Actually, the photo was of another Cuban who resembled the gunman. Without being told the reason for it, this Cuban had been instructed to stop the Russian agent's car as he left his home in the morning, lean in, and ask him for a match. A telephoto shot was taken of this encounter.

More than two years after failure of the plot to assassinate Castro, Maurice Bishop learned of the subplot. He was furious, Veciana says. He accused Veciana of taking part in the planning of it or, at the very least, knowing about it and keeping it a secret from him. Veciana insisted then, as he does now, that he had been unaware of the secondary scheme. He says Bishop later said that he believed Veciana but that in any future operations the scar of his early suspicion would linger. Considering the type of operations in which they were involved, Bishop said, a relationship that was less than totally trustworthy would be no good. He suggested that they sever their relationship.

**The overthrow of Salvador Allende was supported and largely
financed by the CIA and several American multinational
corporations, chiefly International Telephone & Telegraph.**

At the time, Veciana was insisting on further terrorist action—he may already have instituted some himself—and calling for more dangerous assassination attempts. Perhaps Bishop feared that Veciana was getting out of hand. Then, in December 1973, Veciana was sent to prison, and at the time Veciana believed that Bishop had had something to do with it.

At the time of my first interview with Veciana, he had just spent 27 months in a federal prison on a charge of conspiracy to import narcotics. He was convicted in a New York federal court, largely on the testimony of a former partner with whom he had been in the sporting-goods business in Puerto Rico. The former partner, arrested with ten kilos of cocaine, implicated Veciana. In doing so, he avoided a long jail term himself. He was the only witness against Veciana, who maintains his innocence.

There is no indication from any source, including the confidential records of several law-enforcement agencies, that Veciana had any association with narcotics prior to his arrest. In the bitterly competitive world of Cuban exile politics, Veciana's reputation is unspotted.

At the time of the first interview, Veciana was defensive in his attitude and somewhat confused. He hinted that what had happened to him was directly connected with his relationship with Maurice Bishop. He suggested the possibility that his final disagreements with him might have caused Bishop to take steps to put him out of action. That's why, he said, he wanted to find Bishop and confront him with that possibility. Then he would know.

Over the months following that interview I watched Veciana change. Soon the tentativeness, the cautious wariness, the prison gray in his eyes began to fade as he resumed his patriarchal confidence, began moving in his old circles, and got back into anti-Castro activity. As he did, his feeling about Bishop's involvement in his going to prison began to change. One day he told me

he was sure he had been set up by Castro's agents. He still wanted to find Bishop, he said, but now for a different reason: Bishop could again be of some help to him.

When Bishop told Veciana he would like to sever their relationship, he also said he thought that Veciana deserved compensation for working with him through the years. Because Veciana had initially rejected the idea of being paid to fight Castro, Bishop had only provided him with expense money. Now Bishop insisted that Veciana be compensated for the thirteen years he had worked with him.

It was July 26, 1973. Veciana recalls commenting to his wife that day on the irony of the date and its association with Castro's own movement. Bishop had called and asked Veciana to meet him in the parking lot of the Flagler Dog Track, not far from Veciana's home. The parking lot was crowded. Veciana spotted Bishop waiting in a car at the designated spot. Bishop got out of the car with a briefcase. With him were two clean-cut young men in dark suits. The men stood out of earshot while Bishop and Veciana spoke. Bishop said that he regretted that their relationship had to end but that it would be best for both of them in the long run. He shook Veciana's hand and wished him luck. Then he handed him the briefcase. In it, he said, was the compensation that was due Veciana. When Veciana got home he opened the briefcase. It was filled with cash. Exactly \$253,000, says Veciana.

That, says Veciana, was the last time he saw or spoke with Maurice Bishop.

It is not generally known but there is a period of Lee Harvey Oswald's stay in New Orleans that is largely undocumented. On August 9, 1963, Oswald was arrested after distributing pro-Castro leaflets and scuffling with anti-Castro activist Carlos Bringuier. On August 16, Oswald was seen again, passing out leaflets in front of the New Orleans Trade Mart; his activity was shown that evening on television newscasts. On August 25, Oswald had a radio debate with Bringuier arranged by New Orleans broadcaster William Stuckey, a self-styled "Latin-American-affairs expert." Despite the fact that Oswald seemingly went out of his way to court such public attention as a Castro supporter, as soon as he got it he immediately dropped out of sight. Between August 25 and September 17, there is no validated indication of Oswald's whereabouts.



PHOTOGRAPH BY WIDE WORLD PHOTOS
Lee Harvey Oswald was flamboyantly conspicuous in New Orleans during the summer of 1963, advocating a pro-Castro stance for the US through his "Fair Play for Cuba Committee."

Aside from a visit to the home of his aunt and uncle on Labor Day, Marina Oswald said her husband spent this time reading books and practicing with his rifle. Through the years, Marina Oswald's testimony has been inconsistent, contradictory, and sometimes false. The House Assassinations Committee found several credible witnesses who saw Oswald during this period in Clinton, Louisiana, about 130 miles from New Orleans, during a black voter-registration drive. With him were David Ferrie, who had been involved in anti-Castro activity, and New Orleans

businessman Clay Shaw, who had intelligence-agency connections. The Committee could not determine what Oswald had been doing in Clinton, but there was no doubt he had been there.

The Warren Commission had found records that it said accounted for some of Oswald's activity during this period of late August and September. None of these records could be later authenticated and some were discovered to be false. He reportedly visited the unemployment office, cashed some unemployment checks, and withdrew a number of library books. The FBI could not authenticate Oswald's signature on the unemployment documents. Of the seventeen firms where he reported he had applied for work, thirteen denied it and four did not exist. Even if one trusts such records, there is one span of time, between September 6 and September 9, when his whereabouts are not known.

Initially, Antonio Veciana recalled that it was late in August or early September of 1963 when Bishop asked to meet him in Dallas. Later, after reflection, he said it was probably in early September, perhaps towards the end of the first week of the month.

It was not the first time that Bishop had asked Veciana to meet him in Dallas. He had met him there a number of times previously. Partially because of that, Veciana had come to suspect that Bishop was from Dallas or had family there. Moreover, he recalled the time in Havana when Bishop sent him to talk to a Colonel Sam Kail at the American Embassy. The last time Veciana saw Kail was prior to Christmas in 1960, when Kail said he would consider Veciana's request for support but would like to discuss it further with him when he returned from his Christmas leave. Kail told Veciana he was going home to Dallas for Christmas. When Veciana reported back to Bishop, he got the impression that Bishop knew Kail, or at least his background, and that they had something in common. In my very first interview with Veciana, he said, "I think that maybe Bishop is from Texas."

On the day that Kennedy was assassinated, Veciana recognized the news photographs of Lee Harvey Oswald as the young man he had seen with Maurice Bishop in Dallas.

The meeting that Veciana recalls with Bishop early in September of 1963 took place in the busy lobby of a large downtown office building. From Veciana's description of its distinctive blue-tile facade, it probably was the Southland Center, a 42-story office complex. Veciana says that when he arrived, he saw Bishop in a corner of the lobby talking with a young man whom Veciana remembers as pale, slight, and soft-featured. He does not recall if Bishop introduced him by name but does recall that Bishop continued his conversation with the young man only briefly after Veciana arrived. Together Bishop and the young man walked out of the lobby and stopped outside, behind Veciana, for a moment. Bishop and the young man had a few words there, and then the latter gestured a farewell and walked away. Bishop then turned to Veciana and they discussed the current activities of Alpha 66 as they walked to a nearby coffee shop. Bishop never spoke to Veciana about the young man, and Veciana didn't ask.

On the day that Kennedy was assassinated, Veciana recognized the news photographs and television images of Lee Harvey Oswald as that of the young man he had seen with Maurice Bishop in Dallas; there was no doubt in his mind. When I asked him if the man could have been someone who resembled Oswald, Veciana said: “Well, you know. Bishop himself taught me how to remember faces, how to remember characteristics. I am sure it was Oswald. If it wasn’t Oswald, it was someone who looked *exactly* like him. *Exacto, exacto.*”

To anyone unfamiliar with the relationships among those who work in intelligence, government security, or some areas of law enforcement, it would seem incredible that Veciana did not ask or even mention Oswald to Bishop after the Kennedy assassination. Yet to those familiar with such relationships, it would seem peculiar if he had. One of the cardinal principles of security operations is that information is passed on or sought after only on a “need-to-know” basis. Many employees at Langley who have known each other for years, go to lunch together daily, and have become close personal friends may not know what the other actually does there—and would never ask. That’s the way it is. Veciana did not ask Bishop about Oswald.

“I was not going to make the mistake of getting myself involved in something that did not concern me,” he says. He recalls, however, feeling very uneasy at the time. “That was a very difficult situation because I was afraid.”

What increased Veciana’s fear of his possibly becoming involved in the Kennedy assassination was a visit to his home by Cesar Diosdato within a few days of the murder. Diosdato ostensibly worked for the US Customs Service in Key West. He was a well-known figure among the anti-Castro activists in Miami because, technically, it was in the Custom’s Service jurisdiction to prevent violations of the Neutrality Act, which occurred every time an anti-Castro raiding party took off from Miami or the Keys. With a radio-equipped patrol car, the pistol-packing Diosdato, a beefy, mustachioed Mexican-American, roamed the Keys like a traffic cop, monitoring the launching sites of the exile raiding groups. He didn’t stop them all, and the word among anti-Castro raiders active during JM/WAVE’s secret war was that no group could launch an attack from the Florida Keys without permission from Diosdato. “He gave us the green light,” one former group leader told me. “Without word from him, we couldn’t go.” As a result, most of the Cubans thought Diosdato was really working for the CIA.

Veciana did. That’s why he was apprehensive when Diosdato asked him if he knew anything about the Kennedy assassination or Lee Harvey Oswald. Veciana says he recognized him because he had frequently gone to Key West to get clearance from Diosdato. It was not an “official” visit, Diosdato now told Veciana. “He said he had been instructed to ask a few of the exiles if they knew anything, that’s all,” Veciana recalls.

Veciana did not ask himself why a US Customs agent would be investigating the Kennedy assassination among Miami Cubans and come from Key West to do it. It crossed Veciana’s mind that he was being tested. In any event, he decided he was not going to tell Diosdato anything.

Several weeks later Bishop called Veciana to arrange a meeting in Miami. At that meeting Bishop never mentioned Oswald or the encounter in Dallas. They did speak about the Kennedy

assassination, but their discussion was confined to the event's impact on the world and on their anti-Castro activities. Bishop, says Veciana, appeared saddened by the assassination. Yet he said something that suggested a strange sort of involvement.

The way Veciana recalls it is this: At the time, newspapers were carrying stories about Oswald's having met with a Cuban couple in Mexico City. Veciana recalls that the stories reported that the wife spoke excellent English. Bishop said he knew Veciana had a cousin, Guillermo Ruiz, who was in Castro's intelligence service and was stationed in Mexico City. Ruiz's wife spoke excellent English. Bishop asked Veciana if he would attempt to get in touch with Ruiz and offer him a large amount of money if Ruiz would say that it was he and his wife who had met with Oswald.

Bishop asked Veciana to try to get in touch with Ruiz and offer him a large amount of money to say that it was he and his wife who had met with Oswald.

Veciana took it as a ploy that might work because, as he puts it, "Ruiz was someone who always liked money." Bishop, he says, did not specify how much Ruiz should be offered, only that it should be "a huge amount." Veciana, however, was never able to present the offer to his cousin because Ruiz had been transferred back to Havana and Veciana could not find a safe way to contact him. A couple of months later, when he mentioned his difficulties to Bishop, Veciana says that Bishop told him to forget it. "He told me it was no longer necessary," Veciana recalls. That was the last reference he and Bishop ever made to the Kennedy assassination.

In May 1964, John A. McCone, then director of the Central Intelligence Agency, provided an affidavit to the Warren Commission in which he swore that, based on his personal knowledge and on "detailed inquiries he caused to be made" within the CIA, Lee Harvey Oswald was not an agent, employee, or informant of the CIA. In addition, McCone swore: "Lee Harvey Oswald was never associated or connected, directly or indirectly, in any way whatsoever with the Agency."

On March 12, 1964, Richard Helms, then deputy director for plans (DDP) of the CIA, met with Warren Commission General Counsel J. Lee Rankin. Helms was in charge of the Agency's covert operations. The minutes of that meeting show that Helms told Rankin that "the Commission would have to take his word for the fact that Oswald had not been an agent" of the CIA.

More than ten years later, in November 1975, the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence issued a report which concluded that Helms had deliberately kept secret from his boss, McCone, the existence of certain covert operations.

In that light, the implications of what Antonio Veciana revealed on March 2, 1976, had historic relevance: That an individual—Maurice Bishop—apparently associated with the CIA, was in contact with Lee Harvey Oswald prior to the assassination of President Kennedy. And that this

CIA operative was involved in Castro-assassination attempts in which, for some reason, the Agency was not admitting participation.

III

In Search of Maurice Bishop

The discovery of Antonio Veciana could not have come at a worse time for Senator Church and the Committee staff. Church had told the staff, which had already gone beyond its deadline more than once, it was getting its absolutely final extension, another month to finish up the Schweiker report. Church was anxious to get into the 1976 presidential sweepstakes. The Church Committee had gotten attention with its reports on assassination plots against foreign leaders and illegal intelligence agency snooping, and now he had other priorities.

Senator Schweiker had recognized the significance of Veciana's story both in relation to the Kennedy assassination and, as Paul Hoch had suggested, to whether or not the CIA had been honest with the Committee about all its Castro plots. Schweiker thought the new information was explosive enough to reopen hearings. On that, he ran into a stone wall with both Church and the staff leaders.

Schweiker was upset. In a letter to subcommittee co-chairman Gary Hart, but obviously directed at Church, Schweiker wrote: "I feel strongly Veciana should be called to testify under oath, to evaluate his credibility, create an official record of his allegations, and examine them.... I recognize that this involves some difficulty at this stage of our proceeding, but in view of Veciana's direct link to intelligence community activities subject to the Select Committee's jurisdiction, I do not believe we can responsibly refuse to evaluate his allegations."

That put the Committee on the spot. I called Dave Marston in Schweiker's office to ask him what was going to happen. "Well, I think they'll do something," he said. "I think what they'll do is screw it up. I think they'll go the most direct way—that is, make an official inquiry. So then there will be an official inquiry and if there is anything there, it'll be gone."

That's what the Committee staff did. I was asked to bring Veciana to Washington, where he was sworn in at a closed hearing and questioned by a staff attorney for less than an hour. Only the barest details of his story got on the record. A transcript of the hearing would go into restricted security files. Not a word about it would be mentioned in any of the Intelligence Committee's reports. The question of whether the CIA was involved in Veciana's attempts to assassinate Castro in Cuba and again in Chile was not confronted. Veciana was not asked about them.

To my frustration and that of his other staff members, Schweiker was scrupulous about keeping from us the details of the Committee's work. Nevertheless I could deduce what the Committee's efforts to follow up the Veciana testimony were producing.

For instance, the CIA told the Committee it had no employee named Maurice Bishop and no record of any agent ever using that alias. I also deduced, from a discussion with an Army Intelligence “asset” I had been sent to interview in New Orleans, that the CIA told the Committee that Veciana and Alpha 66 had been monitored not by the Agency but by Army Intelligence. I thought this was a misdirection. I pointed out that Veciana had been aware of his contacts with Army Intelligence, that they covered only a limited period of his anti-Castro activities, and that they were distinct from his relationship with Maurice Bishop. After the CIA denied an interest in Veciana, the Committee pursued the Army Intelligence angle until the end.

Schweiker could see what was happening. It became apparent that if we left it to the Committee to pursue the Veciana lead it would die. Dave Newhall, Schweiker’s administrative assistant and a former investigative reporter himself, called me. “We just don’t seem to be able to get through to the Committee staff about the significance of this,” he said. “They’re good Wall Street-type lawyers but they don’t have street smarts and they don’t have enough background in this case. Besides, most of them are packing their bags and looking around for other jobs by now. I think we’d better start moving on our own.”

It was the first indication I had that Schweiker was willing to pursue the Kennedy-assassination investigation beyond the life of the Select Committee and his own subcommittee. To his credit and against the grain of senatorial protocol, Schweiker chased the Veciana lead for months beyond his subcommittee’s demise and even beyond the issuance of its final report. It was only after Reagan strategists lured him into a sacrificial role as a vice-presidential candidate that he decided to drop it.

Also to Schweiker’s credit in pursuing the Veciana lead was the fact that it directly contradicted the thesis being pushed in his own subcommittee’s report. The report revealed that the Warren Commission had not been told of the Castro assassination plots by the CIA, and suggested that it was possible that Castro killed Kennedy in retaliation for those plots. The Veciana lead ran counter to the Castro-retaliation theory. Rather, it linked Oswald to US intelligence.

What I considered a factor in judging Veciana’s credibility was his own feelings about the Kennedy assassination. I had spoken to a number of anti-Castro exile leaders, most still dedicated and many fanatically determined to get rid of the Cuban dictator. None, I have come to believe, were more deeply committed than Veciana. Yet almost to a man these exile leaders touted the same theory about the Kennedy assassination: Castro did it. They knew little of the evidence or the facts; they knew only that Castro did it.

Except Veciana. Down through the years, I have discussed various theories about the Kennedy assassination with him and he has been consistent in his reaction: “I don’t think Castro did it,” he says. “I know Castro. He is crazy. Once, when he was down to his last twelve men in the mountains, he said, ‘Now there is no way we can lose!’ He is crazy, but he did not kill Kennedy. That would have been much too crazy. I think it was a plan, sure.” By “a plan” Veciana means a conspiracy.

The office of a US senator carries, in itself, a certain amount of clout. But a senator does not have

subpoena power, a punitive force, or the right to demand answers from anyone. Nevertheless, in terms of substantive investigation results, Schweiker's staff would accomplish more in the Veciana area in a few months than the House Assassinations Committee would in two years.

The question from the beginning: Was Veciana telling the truth? There were parts of his story that would be difficult, if not impossible, to corroborate. There were many other parts that could be easily checked. Confirmation of these would be an indication of his credibility.

His background checked out, as did his professional standing and his position in the Havana banking system. An official Cuban government newspaper detailed his role in the 1961 Castro assassination attempt and confirmed the details as Veciana had reported. His founding of Alpha 66 and his anti-Castro activities were part of the records from that period.



PHOTOGRAPH BY PARKER/LIASON AGENCY

Richard Schweiker's aide David Marston, later a controversial appointee of Jimmy Carter to be US attorney for Philadelphia, predicted what the Church Committee would do with Antonio Veciana's startling testimony: "They'll screw it up."

There were a few pieces of special significance. One of the points that Veciana himself made about the influence of Maurice Bishop and his obvious connection with the US government was the fact that Bishop had gotten him a position with the US Agency for International Development despite Veciana's documented record as an anti-Castro terrorist. During this time, the Bishop plan to assassinate Castro in Chile was developed in Caracas. Schweiker asked the US State Department to check its files. The State Department wired its confirmation from La Paz: Veciana did work as a "commercial banking expert" for Bolivia's Central Bank, the telegram reported. His contracts were financed by AID. They were for the salary and for the time period Veciana said they were. During this period he claimed a legal residence in Caracas.

The State Department telegram also contained, in passing, an unusual revelation. Veciana's application for federal employment, it noted, had an unexplainable omission: It was unsigned.

There were many other aspects of Veciana's story that, as I checked into them, added to his credibility. For instance, a confidential source, a veteran of the US Customs office in Miami, told me that Cesar Diosdado, the Customs agent who had questioned Veciana briefly about the Kennedy assassination, was indeed working for the CIA in Key West, as Veciana had suspected. Customs was reportedly reimbursed for his salary by the CIA. This was confirmed by another source, who was close to the former head of the local Customs office. (Diosdado is now with the Drug Enforcement Administration in California.)

Another key factor in Veciana's story is his statement that he was given \$253,000 in cash by Bishop at the termination of their relationship. When I asked if he could prove he had the money or what he did with it, he said that he could show how he disbursed it through several channels but that Senator Schweiker would first have to guarantee him immunity from action by the Internal Revenue Service. Schweiker could not do that. As a result, when Veciana's sworn

testimony was taken before the Senate Select Committee, at Veciana's request that area of questioning was omitted. (He would later also refuse to show the House Assassinations Committee proof of his disbursement of the money without being given immunity from IRS action.)

Another point I thought could be readily checked was the existence of specific individuals at the American Embassy in Havana—the individuals Bishop had sent Veciana to see.

I was talking with the late Paul Bethel in Coconut Grove one day. Bethel was a right-winger, once a congressional candidate, an author, and the head of the US Information Agency in Havana when Castro took over. I asked Bethel if he recalled a fellow named Kail at the American Embassy. "Sure," said Bethel. "I knew Sam well. Military attaché. I believe he's retired now, probably back home in Dallas."

Sam Kail was listed in the Dallas telephone directory. When I told Veciana I had found him, Veciana said, "You know, I would like to call him. Perhaps he remembers Bishop." He suggested I listen to the call. "Do you remember me?" Veciana asked Kail after he had introduced himself. Kail seemed hesitant and cautious. "Well, I'm not sure." he said.

"Remember," coaxed Veciana, "the last time I saw you, in December 1960, you were going home for Christmas." Kail said, "Yes, I did come home that Christmas."

"Then you remember me?"

No, Kail said, he couldn't remember.

"At any rate," Veciana went on, "I am trying to find a friend, the American who sent me to you. He was a big help to me in fighting Castro. Now I need to find him. Do you remember Maurice Bishop?"

Kail was silent for a moment. "Bishop?" he asked. More silence. "Bishop," he said again. Finally, Kail said that off the top of his head he didn't recall the name, but he would like to give it more thought. He said he would think about it for a day or two and then call Veciana back.

Kail never called Veciana. A couple of weeks later I suggested to Veciana that he call Kail again. He did and Kail said he had given some thought to the name of the American that Veciana had asked him about, but he couldn't recall knowing anyone named Maurice Bishop, or anyone named Bishop who fit the description Veciana had given. Sorry he couldn't be of any help, said Kail.

During the remaining months of Schweiker's investigation, I showed Veciana more than a dozen photographs of people who came close to fitting his description of Maurice Bishop. Some were sent by the staff of the Select Committee and, I assumed, were mostly Army Intelligence operatives. Most of the ones I dug up were people who, at some point or other—and usually at not more than one point—had been in the right place at the right time and had some association with the CIA or Oswald or investigations of the Kennedy assassination.

Part of the problem initially was that it was hard to get from Veciana a handle on Bishop's physical characteristics. Veciana had known and been in contact with Bishop over a period of thirteen years. The man had obviously changed and Veciana's current mental image of him was an amalgam of those changes. It had occurred to me in listening to Veciana describe Bishop as he appeared at the many meetings through the years that perhaps Bishop used small disguises, which changed his appearance only slightly but were enough to raise doubts about his identity in the mind of anyone who happened to see him with Veciana.

Although Veciana's general description of Bishop may appear to have been a bit blurred, he did provide discriminating details that made Bishop a specific character. He said, for instance, that Bishop was always a meticulous dresser, neat and well-groomed. In his later years, he wore glasses more often, but took them off to ruminate, putting the stem to his lips. He was usually tanned and under his eyes there was a blotchiness, a spotty darkness, as if from being in the sun too long. He had brown hair, later given to some gray. He was a good-looking man.

At our initial meeting, Veciana seemed sincere enough when he said he wanted to find Maurice Bishop. He seemed determined then to find out if the reason for his being in prison was a result of his relationship with Bishop. Veciana said that as soon as he was settled down and out from under the restrictions of parole and free to travel again, he was going to have an artist make a sketch of Bishop from a description he would provide. That, he said, might help him in looking for Bishop.

I didn't think much about that idea until I had shown Veciana a score of photographs and gotten negative results so abruptly. Then I realized that although each of the suspects had at least one characteristic that fit Veciana's description of Bishop, a comprehensive image would have eliminated the suspects immediately. Veciana agreed. A professionally drawn composite sketch of Maurice Bishop would help narrow the focus.

Security was one of my main concerns from the beginning. Cuban-exile politics in Miami has its share of fanatics as well as professional assassins, as the pattern of bombings and ambushes in Little Havana through the years shows. A few months before I first spoke with Veciana, an exile leader named Rolando Masferrer, known as El Tigre when he headed Batista's secret police, condoned the rash of bombings in a local magazine article. "You do not beg for freedom," he wrote, "you conquer it ... In the meantime, dynamite can speak in a uniquely eloquent manner." A week later, half of Masferrer was found in what remained of his car when he tried to start it. A uniquely eloquent retort.

Veciana agreed that it would be prudent to have the composite sketch of Maurice Bishop done outside the Miami area. Through a contact in a police department in another city, I arranged for Veciana to spend most of a day with its best composite artist. I had given the police artist a rough description of Bishop by telephone before we arrived so that he had been able to make some preliminary sketches to use as a base. Veciana then spent a couple of hours going through about 300 police mug shots and picking out individual features from those that came closest to resembling Bishop's. "The problem," Veciana sighed as he flipped through the mug shots, "is all these individuals look like criminals. Bishop, he was a gentleman. He *looked* like a gentleman."

Veciana's session with the police artist caused him to focus much more intensely on Bishop's specific features. He described, for instance, a distinctive lower lip, a nose straight but not sharp, a face longer than it was round, and—again, perhaps the most striking feature—a darkened area under the eyes. Veciana said that all of Bishop's face appeared a bit suntanned most of the time, but that the area under his eyes looked almost leathery.

It was late in the afternoon when the police artist finished a sketch that Veciana proclaimed was "pretty good." The artist had warned that composite sketches aren't meant to be exact resemblances of individuals. They are designed to elicit a chain of recall in witnesses and spark recollection of images that lead to some suspects and eliminate others. Veciana said the sketch of Bishop was not really what Bishop looked like, but he appeared to be satisfied that it was "close."

Veciana returned to Miami, and the next morning I took the Bishop sketch and copies of it to Schweiker's office in Washington. Dave Newhall looked at the sketch with a new fascination. "You know, it looks exactly like I thought it would from the description we were working on," he said. "I think the boss will want to see this right away."

Schweiker was attending a hearing of the Senate health subcommittee, one of his permanent posts. We got word to him and, during a break in the hearing, we huddled in a corner of the anteroom of the chamber. The health subcommittee chairman, Senator Edward Kennedy, glanced quizzically at the three of us hunched over the sketch as he hurried through the anteroom. (Schweiker, as a courtesy, had written a note to Kennedy prior to calling on the Church Committee to establish a special subcommittee to investigate President Kennedy's murder. Senator Kennedy's reaction was not negative, which Schweiker interpreted as a signal to go ahead.)

Schweiker looked at the sketch. At first he mumbled, "That's pretty good," as if commenting on the quality of the artwork. Then he said, "I've seen that face before."

Newhall and I laughed. For an instant we both thought he was being kiddingly glib. But Schweiker was serious. "That's a *very* familiar face," he said, staring at the sketch. "Perhaps ... maybe it was someone from State who briefed me on something recently. We've been getting a lot of those." He paused and thought a bit. "No, maybe not." He kept staring at the sketch. "He's very familiar," he said.

"Does it look like Harvey?" asked Newhall. William Harvey had been cited by the Church Committee as the CIA's coordinator in its Castro assassination plots with the Mafia.

"No, it's not Harvey," Schweiker said. Finally he sighed. "I've got to get back to the hearing," he said. "Why don't you take a copy down to the Committee staff? I'll give it more thought later."

The Intelligence Committee staff worked out of a sprawling arrangement of cubicles on the ground floor of the old Dirksen Office Building. Newhall and I signed in at the security desk and a staff attorney who had been working with Schweiker on the Kennedy subcommittee emerged from the inner recesses. We showed him the sketch. He looked at the photograph. "Fine," he said. "That's fine." He gave no indication that the sketch reminded him of anyone in particular.

He took a copy of it and, I assume, stuck it in the Committee's classified files.

That night I flew back to Miami. It was a Friday early in April, about a month after my first interview with Veciana. During that interval I had spoken with him more than a dozen times. I had two more interviews with him during which I tried to extract every possible detail he could recall about Maurice Bishop. More important, we began to establish a relationship. I would drop in at his home and call him on the telephone frequently just to ask a question or two about a minor detail. We also got to know each other better as we traveled back and forth to Washington and around Miami to the sites where he recalled meeting Bishop. From those interviews and discussions, I began to accumulate not only a structured image of Maurice Bishop as an intelligence operative—the hard data of his character and activities—but also a sense of the man himself as Veciana saw him.

“The problem,” Veciana sighed as he flipped through the mug shots, “is that all these individuals look like criminals. Bishop, he was a gentleman. He looked like a gentleman.”

At that point, this is what I knew about Maurice Bishop:

He was in Havana in the summer of 1960 when Veciana first met him. He was working undercover, probably using some business association or firm as a front. He may have had a relationship with some business in the building where Veciana was given his training instruction, maybe with the American mining company or the Berlitz language school. Bishop was familiar with personnel at the American Embassy. He appeared to be a specialist in propaganda, psychological warfare, and counterintelligence.

Considering the character of his Spanish, he probably had been formally schooled in the language and even before arriving in Havana he probably had spent time in a Spanish-speaking country. He was very intelligent, very literate, very articulate. He was, as Veciana put it, a gentleman, perhaps from the South, more likely from Texas.

The Church Committee had discovered that there had been secret operations and ultra-sensitive missions conducted outside the CIA's normal chain of command. Given that, Bishop may have been among a select group within the Agency and, as such, trusted enough to be given an “unofficial” Castro assassination mission. Because Veciana's activities in the late '60s began to broaden beyond Cuban affairs and encompass other anti-communist operations in Latin America, it also appeared likely that Bishop had moved up the Agency's executive ladder.

At the time of the Kennedy assassination, Bishop appeared to be particularly knowledgeable about intelligence operations in Mexico City. He not only was aware of Oswald's activities there but also knew that Veciana's cousin was a Castro intelligence officer in the Cuban Embassy in Mexico City.

By the early '70s, Bishop had broadened his interests and contacts throughout Latin America.

Bishop's role in the 1971 Castro assassination attempt in Chile, his ability to reach key military personnel there, indicated he had a special relationship in that country. The week before we constructed the composite sketch of Bishop, I wrote a memo to Schweiker indicating what I initially thought would be primary areas of investigation. The memo noted: "Veciana strongly believes that Bishop had something to do with the downfall of Allende in Chile."

Finally, another indication of Bishop's position in more recent years derived from the large amount of money that Veciana said Bishop paid him at the end of their relationship in 1973. Bishop had to be in a position to have access to such funds and, perhaps, also have the power to cover them—or be in association with someone who did.

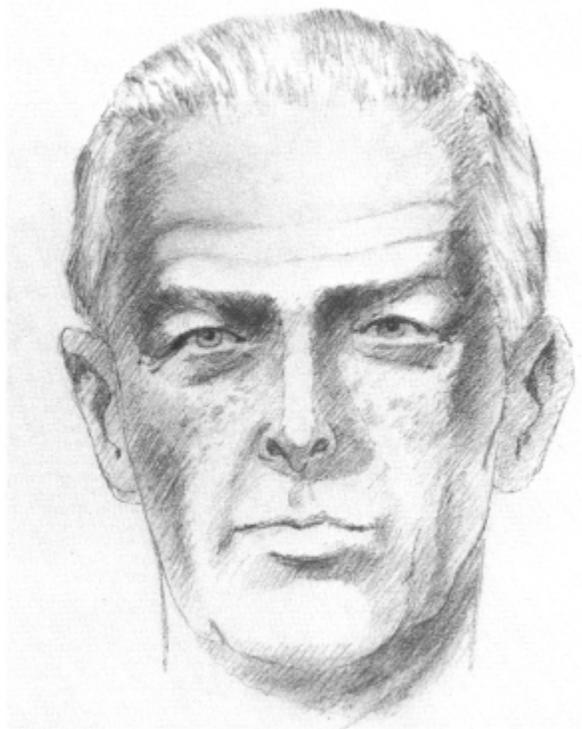
On Sunday evening the weekend I returned from Washington after the composite sketch was drawn, I received a call from Dave Newhall. He said he had just gotten a call from Schweiker in Pennsylvania. "The boss was driving home when he suddenly remembered who the guy in the sketch reminded him of," Newhall said. "He stopped the car and called me from a phone booth."

The sketch of Maurice Bishop reminded Senator Schweiker of David Atlee Phillips.

David Phillips had come before the Senate Intelligence Committee on more than one occasion. The Committee was interested especially in two phases of Phillips's career: One was as head of the CIA's task force to prevent the election of Salvador Allende in Chile; the other was his role as chief of the Agency's unit in Mexico City responsible for sending to the Warren Commission photographs of a man erroneously identified as Lee Harvey Oswald.

Phillips had announced his retirement, after 25 years of service with the CIA, in the spring of 1975. At the time, the nation was being stirred by a barrage of press revelations about the illegal activities of the intelligence agencies. Veciana was still in prison and not yet up for parole. Phillips called a press conference at his retirement and announced he would lead an association of retired intelligence officers in defense of the CIA.

According to Phillips, one of the major factors that led to his retirement was "the rash of sensational headlines in the world press that leave the impression the CIA is an organization of unprincipled people who capriciously interfere in the lives of US citizens at home and abroad." He said he wanted to "straighten out the record."



The composite sketch of Maurice Bishop, the elusive American spymaster. Senator Schweiker was the first to say whom he thought the sketch resembled: David Atlee Phillips.

Newhall is usually a laconic man, but there was an edge in his voice that evening he called to tell me about Schweiker homing in on David Phillips. “The boss thinks the resemblance is pretty damn close,” he said. He asked if I could dig up an old newspaper clip of Phillips’s press conference and show the photo in it to Veciana.

The next morning I checked the date of the press conference, picked up a back issue of the *Miami Herald*, and went to Veciana’s place. He wasn’t home. His wife said she didn’t expect him back until evening and didn’t know how to reach him. I returned home to another call from Newhall.

“We’ve found a good photo of Phillips in the June 23 issue of *People* magazine,” he said. “It did a feature about his forming that retired-intelligence-agents group. Do you think you can pick up a copy?” I said I would try because the *Herald* photo, a wire-service reproduction, was a poor one. However, after trying several sources, I couldn’t locate that back issue of *People*. The public library had already put it into a bound volume. Because it appeared that I wouldn’t be able to get a reproduction of the article until the next day, I decided I would call Veciana and ask him to join me at the public library the next morning. We could look at the magazine in the bound volume together.

The Church Committee discovered that there had been ultra-sensitive missions conducted outside the CIA’s normal chain of command. Given that, Bishop may have been given an “unofficial” Castro assassination mission.

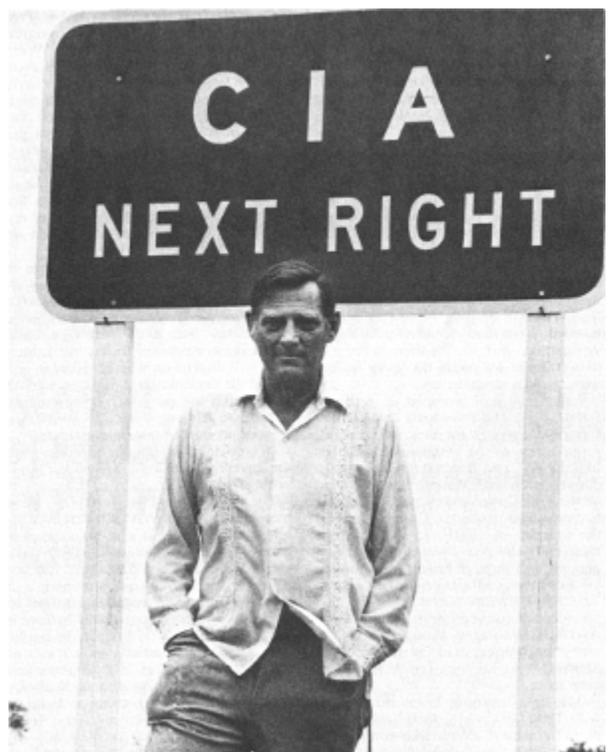
That evening, while waiting to talk with Veciana, I glanced at the story that appeared in the *Herald* when Phillips announced his retirement. There were scant details about his background. It noted that he had once been a professional actor, had been recruited by the CIA when he edited an English-language newspaper in Chile in the early 1950s, had been assigned posts in Mexico and Venezuela, and had been working undercover in Cuba when Castro took over. Later he was CIA propaganda chief for the Bay of Pigs invasion.

Phillips retired before the Church Committee was formed and before the CIA admitted to some of the activities that would later get the Committee its headlines. In defending the Agency at his press conference, Phillips vigorously denied charges about the CIA that were around at the time. The CIA did not financially support the strikes that led to Allende’s overthrow, he declared. Also, he said, the CIA never plotted the assassination of Fidel Castro. Phillips’s final point: He said he assumed that many would claim his retirement was phony and that the association he was forming was really a CIA operation. “It is not.” he declared. The facts would later indicate he was wrong on at least two out of those three contentions.

When I contacted Veciana that evening he said he did not know the name “David Phillips” or remember seeing photographs of the man. He said he would come to the public library with me the next morning. “I will call Dr. Abella and ask him to come with us also,” he said. “Then we can do two things.”

In talking with Veciana over the previous weeks about the Kennedy assassination, it appeared

that for the first time he was becoming interested in some of the details. One day he told me he had been talking with a close friend. Dr. Manuel Abella, about the assassination. He said Abella mentioned having seen a photograph of the crowd in Dealey Plaza just prior to the assassination. He thought the photo was in *Life* or *Look*; he wasn't sure. Abella said that in the crowd he recognized a man he knew from Cuba as a Castro agent. I had spoken with Abella and checked back issues of the magazines he suggested, but didn't find the crowd shot he described. Veciana had said that someday he would take Abella to the library and help him search for the magazine. Now Veciana saw our visit to the library as an opportunity to do that also.



PHOTOGRAPH BY JOHN NEUBAUER/PEOPLE WEEKLY © 1975
Antonio Veciana intently studied this *People* magazine photograph of David Atlee Phillips to determine whether he was Maurice Bishop. He finally spoke: "It is close, but it is not him."

The next morning Dr. Abella, a cigar-chomping, pudgy little man, was waiting with Veciana at his home. We drove downtown to the Dade County Public Library in Bayfront Park, the site of the ever-burning Torch of Freedom donated by Miami's Cuban exile community. That morning there was a demonstration in progress at the Torch. A shouting group of masked Iranian students was calling for the ouster of the Shah. Veciana looked at them, smiled slightly, and shook his head. He was used to more forceful expressions of dissent.

At the periodical desk I asked for the bound volume of *People* with the Phillips article and for the volumes of *Life* and *Look* with issues that might have crowd photos of Dealey Plaza. We took them to an empty table at one end of the room. Veciana sat down and put on his glasses. I stood beside him and found the article about Phillips in *People*. There was a half-page black-and-white photo of him standing under a highway sign, near Langley. The sign said: CIA NEXT RIGHT. Phillips was depicted almost full-figure,

casually dressed in a *guayabera*, standing with his hands in his pockets. The resemblance to the Bishop sketch was clear: The square jaw, the distinctive lower lip, the straight nose, the forehead, and, yes, the darkened area under the eyes. Only the hair was different.

Veciana looked at the photo. And looked at the photo. I watched his face for some reaction, but there was none. He kept staring at the photo. "Is it him?" I asked. Veciana didn't answer. His face was totally expressionless, but his eyes were intensely focused on the photo. Finally, he turned the page of the magazine. There were two more photos of Phillips, both smaller and both showing Phillips's face less directly. Veciana turned back to the larger photo. "Is it him?" I asked again. Almost half a minute had passed and the suspense was pressing on me. Without taking his eyes from the photo, he said: "It is close."

I wanted to shout at him: *It is close? What the hell do you mean, it is close! Is it him or isn't it him?* I leaned closer and asked again softly: "Is it him?" Veciana did not take his eyes off the photo. "Does he have a brother?" he asked. The question took me aback. "I don't know," I said,

“but is he Bishop?” Veciana finally shook his head. “It is close, but it is not him.” I felt relief at the end of the suspense. “Are you sure it’s not him?” I asked. “No, it’s not him,” Veciana said again. Well, I thought, that sounds pretty definite, and turned to the volumes that Dr. Abella was waiting to look through. Then Veciana, still looking at the photo, added: “But I would like to talk with him.”

“You would like to talk with Phillips?” I asked, not getting his point. “Do you think Phillips is Bishop?”

“No, he is not Bishop,” Veciana said, “but he is CIA and maybe he could help.”

Maybe he could, I thought, and turned to help Abella, who was leafing through the other volumes looking for the crowd shot with the Castro agent. Abella had described the photo precisely, but it was in neither *Life* nor *Look*. Then Abella said that maybe it was in *Argosy* or *True*, because he remembered articles about the Kennedy assassination in those magazines. So I went to get the bound volumes of those publications and we began looking through them. Again we had no luck. Veciana, meanwhile, remained seated at the table staring at the photo of David Phillips.

Before the Schweiker investigation came to a close, more than a dozen individuals had been considered, however fleetingly, as being the man who called himself Maurice Bishop. Most of them came to our attention because of their involvement in anti-Castro activity. The staff of the Senate Intelligence Committee continued to look for Bishop mostly in the area of Army Intelligence, despite my trying to make clear to them that Veciana very much doubted that Bishop was with the military.

I continued to show Veciana photographs of individuals sent to me by the Committee staff and others I dug up myself. Some bore a closer resemblance to the sketch than others, but none came as close as David Phillips. Occasionally, Veciana would mention that. Sometimes he would add, “Well, you know, maybe it would help if I could talk with him.”

We began considering the possibility of bringing Veciana together with Phillips in a direct confrontation. The Committee staff, however, had decided not to call Phillips back for additional questioning under oath, so whatever we did we had to do on our own and unofficially.

As the Church Committee was winding down, it became clear that only a sensational new revelation could force it to reopen a full-scale investigation.

We did not have the opportunity to have Veciana confront Phillips until September, just before Schweiker decided to close down his investigation. Between my first interview with Veciana and September, I felt I was on a fast-moving train trying to spot a smoking gun in the blur of passing woods. As the Church Committee was winding down, it became clear that only a sensational new revelation, simple and obvious enough for the public to grasp its significance instantly, could force the Committee to reopen a full-scale Kennedy investigation. The Veciana lead was a crack

in the door, but it would take time and resources to develop it. I pursued it as best I could. Over the months. I tried to locate and talk with everyone Veciana had named. We had limited resources, because Schweiker's staff budget didn't include travel and expenses for a Kennedy assassination investigation and he could not use Committee funds.

At the end of June 1976, the Senate Select Committee issued its "final report": *Book V—The Investigation of the Assassination of President John F. Kennedy: Performance of the Intelligence Agencies*. The press called it the Schweiker report. Dave Marston had air-expressed an advance copy to me the night before Schweiker was scheduled to release it at a press conference. I thought the report had historical significance as the first official confirmation of the invalidity of the Warren Commission report. I objected, however, to its over-emphasizing the possibility of the Kennedy killing being a Castro retaliation simply on the basis of the Warren Commission not having been informed of the CIA's Castro assassination plots. I was discussing that with Marston on the telephone the next afternoon when Schweiker returned from his press conference. Marston asked Schweiker to pick up the line. "We've got one of your standard skeptics here. Senator," he said.

"I thought all our skeptics were at the news conference!" Schweiker said in mock anguish.

I congratulated him on the report but told him I thought that critics of the Warren Commission were going to have a legitimate objection. "How could the Committee have failed to pursue the possible relationship of Oswald to the intelligence agencies," I asked, "when the Committee discovered the intelligence agencies admitted a cover-up with the Warren Commission?"

"Because," said Schweiker, "they took the position that they had no relationship with Oswald. And there were no documents in their files, they said, which revealed that there was. We pressed them on that several times and each time they said they had nothing. We hit a blind alley. I don't disagree with you, but considering the type of probe the Committee was conducting and the limited access to the intelligence agencies' files, there was not much we could do about it."

Despite the direction that the Schweiker report had taken and the public attention it had received, Schweiker wanted me to keep quietly pursuing the Veciana lead. He said he didn't know how long he could continue such an unofficial investigation, but he felt there were still many things we could do, even on our own, before we gave up.

Late in July, I wrapped up a trip to Puerto Rico and flew back to Miami. I came back with some new information, found a few of the witnesses I had been looking for, and had a long and fruitful conversation with Manolo Ray, the head of the anti-Castro organization Veciana had originally joined in Cuba and, later, the founder of JURE, to which Silvia Odio had belonged. I was tired and dragging my way through Miami Airport when I noticed the headlines on the newsstand. The Republicans were holding their presidential convention in Kansas City. And Ronald Reagan, though not yet the party's nominee, had chosen Richard Schweiker as his vice presidential running mate.

The next morning I was on the line with Troy

Gustavson, then Schweiker's press secretary. (With Marston getting ready to move to Philadelphia—Schweiker had him selected as US attorney for the region—Gustavson was taking over as the Kennedy liaison.) "I imagine you've seen the papers," he said. "Were you flabbergasted?" That was a good word. "We all were," he said. "Only Schweiker and Newhall knew about it since Tuesday. Schweiker was on vacation in New Jersey when he got the call from Reagan's campaign manager, who said he wanted to meet him in Washington. The Senator and Newhall kicked it around and decided it was the last chance for the moderate wing of the party. Schweiker's really psyched up about it."

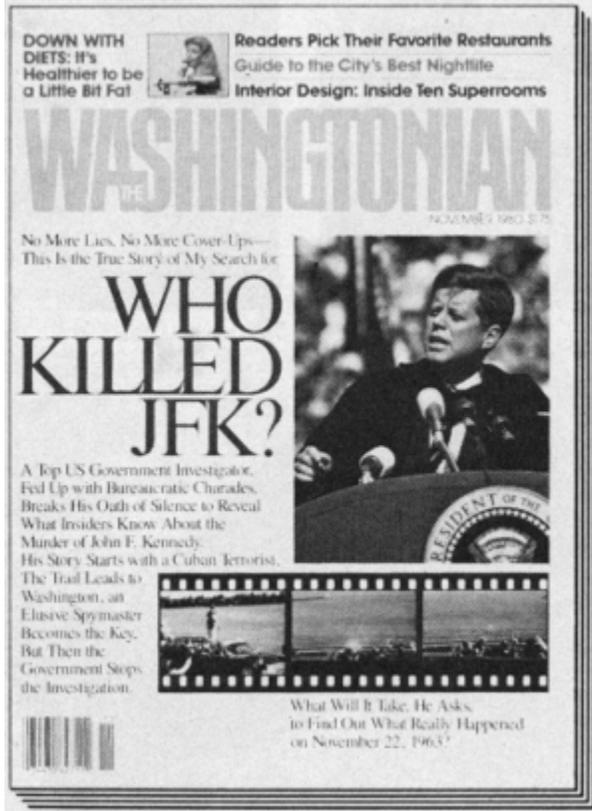


PHOTOGRAPH BY WIDE WORLD PHOTOS
When Ronald Reagan tapped Richard Schweiker to be his vice-presidential running mate in a desperate attempt to secure the 1976 Republican presidential nomination, Schweiker abandoned his one-man investigative efforts to unravel the Kennedy assassination.

I wondered what it meant in terms of Schweiker continuing a Kennedy assassination investigation. "I don't know," Gustavson said. "I haven't had a chance to discuss it with him. I know he really has a sincere passion for it, but I think a lot will depend on whether Reagan and he get the nomination. I think he's going to question the propriety of continuing it because it's automatically politicized as soon as he becomes a candidate." We decided we should continue with the investigation until Schweiker himself called us off.

By early September, however, there were indications that Schweiker's attempt to conduct a one-man investigation into the assassination had gone about as far as it could. Reagan had not received the Republican nomination in Kansas City, and Schweiker returned to Washington very depressed. I believe it led him to reevaluate his role in public life. Then, too, partially as a result of the Schweiker report, the ground swell for a new investigation into the Kennedy assassination was beginning to build in the House of Representatives. If the House wanted to investigate the Kennedy assassination, Schweiker had decided, he would end his efforts.

Letters



The Washingtonian
February 1981, pp. 22-23.

The JFK Assassination: A 'Great White Whale'?

I write to set the record straight, at least insofar as a two-page letter can adequately respond to an 80,000-word article, Gaeton Fonzi's "Who Killed JFK?" [November 1980].

Mr. Fonzi's thesis is that the investigation of the House Select Committee on Assassinations was a fraud. For those who care about the truth, I refer them to the committee's 686-page final report and its accompanying 27 volumes of supporting hearings and related materials. They speak for themselves.

But Mr. Fonzi goes beyond a general characterization of the public portion of the committee's work and levels a number of specific charges against me personally. Each of them is either simply false or, worse, a half-truth that misleads by what it omits. Their publication without giving me an opportunity to respond was shoddy journalism.

To note one example: Mr. Fonzi suggests that I came to the investigation professionally biased, believing that organized crime had had a hand in the President's death. Not true. In fact, I personally thought it highly unlikely that a conspiracy had led to the assassination and that, if it

had, it would not have included organized crime, as the assassination of the President would have been too risky a venture for the mob. Nevertheless, I did not let my personal feelings affect my professional conduct.

Subject to inevitably finite resources, the committee's investigation was, therefore, structured to pursue all conspiracy hypotheses, including, most importantly, official involvement, whether domestic or foreign, as well as those embracing a variety of other relevant groups within our society, not excluding organized crime.

To take another example: Mr. Fonzi quotes me as saying that the committee's investigation was going to be the "last investigation," as if I had arrogantly believed that no one could add to or subtract from anything that I directed. A half-truth. In fact, I said it would be the last investigation *unless* it resulted in a major breakthrough that radically changed the view not only of the American people but also of its governmental leaders about those tragic events in Dallas seventeen years ago. If so, we then had the reasonable expectation that the Department of Justice would reopen the investigation and bring our congressional efforts to a lawful conclusion in a judicial forum.

On that score, I readily concede that I turned out to be wrong. We did make a major breakthrough—the development of scientific and other evidence showing two shooters in the plaza—but nothing that the Department of Justice has done since our final report shows any sign of a willingness on its part to reopen the investigation.

I have, however, neither the time nor the inclination to respond to each of Mr. Fonzi's misstatements of fact or distortions of the truth. Suffice it to say that he was not hired by me, as he was so lacking in professional objectivity that I would never have employed him in the first instance. As an investigator for Senator Richard Schweiker, he had come upon a lead that purported to connect Lee Harvey Oswald to the CIA. He was convinced that he had *the* answer to the meaning of the President's death. (Staff members derisively referred to him as an "Ahab" and to his quest as a search for "Moby Dick.")

Nonetheless, I decided to retain him because I thought that his obsession would help assure that his aspect of the committee's investigation (Mr. Fonzi was but one investigator on one of two teams of lawyers, researchers, and investigators working on Oswald leads; he headed neither team) would receive its full due. In fact, it consumed a significant portion of our resources—personnel, money, and time.

The committee's investigation failed to find Fonzi's "Great White Whale," not because we—Fonzi *and* I—did not try but because the evidence was not there. Mr. Fonzi's article, in short, is not the truth about the committee's investigation but a sad self-revelation of a single man's monomania.

G. ROBERT BLAKEY
Professor of Law
Notre Dame Law School
Notre Dame, Indiana

(Blakey was chief counsel and staff director of the House Select Committee on Assassinations.)

Gaeton Fonzi replies: It's unfortunate that Professor Blakey's response should deteriorate into personal invective while failing to address the main thrust of the article: that the Assassinations Committee's effort was not a "full and complete investigation" as mandated by congressional resolution; that Blakey himself directed that the scope and nature of the inquiry be limited and the priority be given not to conducting a valid investigation but to producing a report; and that the committee did not sufficiently pursue evidence indicating a relationship between the CIA and Lee Harvey Oswald.

I, too, urge those who have read the article also to read the committee's report and its accompanying volumes. (I do, however, think it odd that the professor should now contend that the report and its volumes "speak for themselves," when he felt it necessary upon leaving the committee to write his own book amplifying the report's suggested contention that organized crime killed President Kennedy.)

I was not aware that my fellow staff members viewed my efforts with derision, but perhaps the chief counsel was more privy than I to their candid opinions. (Those with whom I have spoken since the article's publication expressed appreciation of it.) It's true that I was not hired by Blakey, but the professor had the option of firing me when he first arrived—as he did some staffers whose backgrounds dissatisfied him—or later, when he abruptly dismissed the bulk of the investigative staff as a result of a sudden "budget crunch." Blakey not only retained me, but he also did, in fact, make me an acting team leader in his effort to meet the report deadline. That's attested to in the record of attribution for [almost all the reports in Appendix Volume X](#).

Blakey accuses me of "monomania" and terms my determination to find an answer to the murder of President Kennedy an "obsession." My view of the assassination of a President is basic: I believe it was a violation of our democratic system and it warranted—and still warrants—a full and complete investigation. If that's an "obsession," so be it. I regret the professor does not feel as strongly. I stand by the article.