

WHO'S AFRAID OF JOSEPH MILTEER?

From an Office Building with a High-powered Rifle

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The First Rule of FBI Club: *Protect the Bureau!* The codicil to which is: *Protecting the Bureau trumps Truth, Justice, and everything else the great Republic holds dear.* This was how J. Edgar Hoover operated; as, indeed, did every other employee down to the lowliest staffer in some forgotten tank town west of Butte, Montana. But here amongst the staffers another codicil had been added: *Protect your ass.*

These were the unwritten, unspoken rules that might just as well have been etched in marble inside every Bureau office. Don Adams gives several examples of the rules in practice.

Adams was thirty-two when he joined the Feds and one of his first jobs was investigating Joseph Milteer, a far right racist from Quitman, Georgia, who was prominent in the National States Rights Party, a member of the White Citizen's Council of Atlanta, and the Congress of Freedom. He was also cosy with the leaders of the Ku Klux Klan and, to round off his catholic enthusiasms, was convinced there was a big Jewish/Communist conspiracy.

On 9 November 1963 Willie Somersett (a name straight out of James Ellroy), a professional police informant and childhood friend of Milteer, met with him and tape recorded the conversation. Amongst which was this:

SOMERSETT: I think Kennedy is coming here on the eighteenth, or something like that to make some kind of speech.....

MILTEER: You can bet your bottom dollar he is going to have a lot to say about the Cubans. There are so many of them here.

SOMERSETT: Yeah. Well, he will have a thousand bodyguards, don't worry about that.

MILTEER: The more bodyguards he has the easier it is to get

him.

SOMERSETT: Well, how in the hell do you figure would be the best way to get him?

MILTEER: From an office building with a high-powered rifle.

SOMERSETT: Do you think he knows he's a marked man?

MILTEER: I'm sure he does. I'm sure he does. Yes.

SOMERSETT: They are really going to try to kill him?

MILTEER: Oh yeah, it's in the working.

SOMERSETT: Hitting this Kennedy, I'll tell you is going to be a hard proposition, I believe. Now you may have it figured out to get him from an office building and all that, but I don't know how, the Secret Service, they'd cover all them office buildings and anywhere he's going. Do you know whether they'd do that or not?

MILTEER: If they have any suspicions, they will of course. But without suspicions the chances are they wouldn't. You wouldn't have to take a gun up there. They'd take it up in pieces, assemble it and take it out in pieces. All those guns come knocked down and you can take them apart.

SOMERSETT: Boy, if that Kennedy gets shot, we have to know where we are at. Because you know that will be a real shake if they do that.

MILTEER: They wouldn't leave any stone unturned there, no way. They will pick somebody up within hours afterwards, if anything like that would happen. Just to throw the public off.

What Milteer says here has largely been interpreted by the critical community as advance knowledge of the assassination, but is it?

A less widely reproduced part of the tape has Milteer saying a sharp shooter in a hotel overlooking the White House could pick JFK off in the garden, and he even names a possible assassin, a Jack Brown (who he?).

Had Milteer described some unique way of killing JFK and had that transpired, then his statement would have carried some weight, but it doesn't. He suggests instead what must

be one of the most obvious ways of getting the president bar an up close 'suicide' mission with a gun or bomb. Others, too, were concerned about a high-powered rifle from a tall building. Here's Forest Sorrels of the Secret Service giving testimony to the Warren Commission:

STERN: Did you consider or discuss with Mr. Lawson the possibility of any danger to the President from the buildings along the route?

SORRELS: Well —

STERN: Did you think about any of the buildings as presenting any particular problem?

SORRELS: All buildings are a problem, as far as we are concerned. That, insofar as I have been concerned — and I am sure that every member of the Service, especially the Detail — that is always of concern to us. We always consider it a hazard. During the time that we were making this survey with the police, I made the remark that if someone wanted to get the President of the United States, he could do it with a high-powered rifle and a telescopic sight from some building or some hillside, because that has always been a concern to us, about the buildings.

And he wasn't the only one. The presidential aide Kenny O'Donnell also had concerns that he expressed to the Commission:

O'DONNELL: Well, as near as I can recollect he [JFK] was commenting to his wife on the function of the Secret Service and his interpretation of their role once the trip [Dallas] had commenced, in that their main function was to protect him from crowds, and to see that an unruly or sometimes an overexcited crowd did not generate into a riot, at which the president of the United States could be injured. But he said that if anybody really wanted to shoot the president of the United States, it was not a very difficult job, all one had to do was get a high building some day with a telescopic rifle, and there was nothing anybody could do to defend against such an attempt on the president's life.

Are we now to conclude that JFK had advance knowledge of his own assassination?

Don Adams believes that Milteer was in Dealey Plaza at the time of assassination, had a role in it, and points to the widely reproduced photograph by James Altgens that shows someone who does, on first blush, look rather like Milteer. A closer look however reveals the figure to be bald at the front of his head whereas Milteer had a more luxuriant growth than Barton Fink.

Adams also relies on the later utterances of Willie Somerset. Now, the First Rule of Paid Informer Club is: *Tell them what they want to hear, you'll earn more money*. With the codicil: *Let your imagination be unconfined!* (Who could forget Curveball's role in the Iraq debacle?) And Somerset certainly let his imagination run wild.

So, Adams goes out looking for Milteer, eventually finds him, and puts to him the five questions that he has been ordered to put to him. Just these five, and no others. He then writes up a report and hands it to his superior, The bulk of the chapters are then taken up with what happened to this report: how it disappeared, how parts were lifted and attributed to others, how parts were backdated, and so on. Adams interprets these serpentine shenanigans as evidence of agents within the Bureau protecting Milteer whereas there is a more obvious interpretation, and that is the Fed agents protecting *themselves*, making sure that they are seen to be doing their job and, more importantly, being seen protecting the Bureau by those higher up the totem pole. Adams comes across as a decent and honest individual; but here he is misguided, I feel, despite his insider knowledge of how the Bureau operated.

In the extremist far right world that Milteer moved around in there were probably plenty of individuals who were going to whack this liberal or whack that 'negro' and, by and large, it was just empty idle talk, bravado. Perhaps someone Milteer came across was more convincing than all the others. That would have been the origin of the carefully vouchsafed information given to Somerset.

The more one reads about Milteer the more unlikely it seems that he would be privy to any clandestine job. He drove around in a clapped out VW bus with far right slogans stuck all over it, published a weekly racist newsletter, campaigned for office in his hometown on a whole raft of wacky issues, and so on.

He died in 1974 after suffering 40% burns when a bathroom heater blew up.

The 'foreknowledge' of the assassination was a coincidence or, to borrow a phrase from Oscar Wilde, one of life's exaggerations Art can't afford.

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