

## **LBJ: doubles and disinformation**

### **Garrick Alder**

*Lobster* readers will be aware of the relationship between US President Lyndon Johnson and his alleged personal hitman Malcolm 'Mac' Wallace, who is linked by forensic evidence to the assassination of JFK. This article explores some of the circumstances of another convicted murderer with alleged links to the Kennedy assassination, the late John Liggett.

One episode of Nigel Turner's much-slated TV documentary series, 'The Men Who Killed Kennedy', broadcast in 2003, featured an interview with 'Lois', the pseudonymous former wife of Dallas funeral technician John M Liggett. In the programme as aired, the former Mrs Liggett related how her husband had been called away from a funeral on the day of Kennedy's assassination and disappeared for 24 hours. During this time, Liggett is alleged to have called her from Parkland Memorial Hospital, where (the implication is) he was altering the dead Kennedy's wounds. This, the viewer is to infer, is the reason for the infamous discrepancy between what was observed at Parkland and what was subsequently recorded at the President's autopsy.<sup>1</sup>

Viewers saw one Charles Smith, identified only as a mortician, relate that Liggett was skilled in post-mortem reconstructive surgery. Mr Smith said:

'If he [Liggett] had to build a lip or nose or build an eye orbit or ear he may work all night long doing the reconstructive work on someone that had been maybe shot in the face or automobile accident. He was the best, he would tell you he was the best, and when he finished it the families would tell him he was the best.'

There is no doubt that post-mortem alteration of bodies is a

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<sup>1</sup> Much of the background information in this article relating to the Liggett case is available on the website of the noted JFK researcher Dave Perry, to be found at <<http://dperry1943.com/liggett.html>>.

skill among funeral technicians in general, who are often called upon to 'beautify' otherwise unpresentable corpses for 'open-casket' viewings by mourners.

This episode of Mr Turner's series attracted a defamation lawsuit because, along with her claims of her ex-husband's dealings at Parkland Hospital, Liggett's widow claimed he had met with his brother Malcolm Liggett in suspicious circumstances following the assassination. In particular, the authenticity of a photograph allegedly showing Malcolm Liggett with Jack Ruby was strongly contested. The History Channel settled out of court for an undisclosed sum in March 2004. This lawsuit does not appear to alter the rest of the former Mrs Liggett's claims, although it may cast some doubt on her reliability in general.<sup>2</sup>

In 1974 John Liggett was convicted of the attempted murder of Mrs Dorothy Peck, whom he had bludgeoned with a hammer before – apparently assuming Mrs Peck was dead – attempting to destroy the crime scene by arson. She lived long enough to identify Liggett as her assailant.

Dorothy Peck was the widow of Jay Bert Peck, a former Texan sheriff and supposedly a cousin of Lyndon Johnson, who bore something of a resemblance to Lyndon and played him in a brief and uncredited role in the 1968 Dean Martin film 'The Wrecking Crew'.<sup>3</sup>

According to a series of memos released to me by the LBJ Library, Peck was first brought to Johnson's attention in late July 1968 when Jack Valenti, a former White House aide to LBJ and president of the Motion Picture Association of America,

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<sup>2</sup> This episode and the controversy it generated is discussed at <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Men\\_Who\\_Killed\\_Kennedy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Men_Who_Killed_Kennedy)>. The episode about LBJ, which was withdrawn, 'The Guilty Man', is on YouTube at <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-F-LY1HblmE>>.

<sup>3</sup> Movie resource <[imdb.com](http://imdb.com)> identifies Peck as 'J. B. Pick' and confuses him with the (still living) English author of that name, who published the 1959 novel *The Last Valley* (filmed in 1971).

Dean Martin was certainly among pro-Democratic Party celebrity supporters at the time of LBJ's succession to the presidency, but I have not been able to establish any degree of personal familiarity between Johnson and Martin that might explain Jay Bert Peck's brief foray into film acting. Perhaps some expert on the 'Rat Pack's' connections could clear this up.

sent him a Columbia Pictures press release concerning Peck's forthcoming film role. In that press release, Peck was quoted as saying: 'I see my cousin from time to time on the ranch and am delighted that he has decided to retire from the Presidency. When he is no longer President and has some time, we've planned on some long chats.'

Johnson immediately asked aides to find out who Peck was and in August that year a memo to his secretary Juanita Roberts stated that the FBI had been unable to find anything indicating a family connection between Peck and Johnson. Peck had previously written to Johnson in 1965 and in that letter (also released to me under FOIA) he reminisced at length about his supposed family connections with Johnson. Of course LBJ may never have seen this letter.

Johnson crony and convicted swindler Billie Sol Estes claimed that Peck was used as an LBJ impersonator and stood in for the then Vice President in Fort Worth, Texas, the evening before the assassination. Estes claimed this was to allow LBJ to attend some sort of conspiratorial meeting concerning Kennedy's imminent death.<sup>4</sup>

Even putting to one side LBJ's apparent ignorance of the man claiming to be his cousin, is this impersonation claim plausible? A publicity still of Jay Bert Peck and 'Wrecking Crew' co-star Elke Sommer appeared in the *Spokesman-Tribute* in July 1968, in advance of the movie's release.<sup>5</sup> I have a

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<sup>4</sup> I am relying here, as I am for many of the newspaper reports concerning John Liggett's known criminal career, on the website of JFK researcher Dave Perry (see note 1 above). As the Billie Sol Estes *Le Dernier Temoin* (Last Man Standing) book is currently only available in a French-language edition (and since my French is beyond execrable), I am trusting to the accuracy of the translation and summary of the relevant contents provided by Mr Perry. It is interesting that Estes did not apparently mention Liggett until the same year that the Nigel Turner documentary episode featuring Liggett was screened. Estes repeated his claims in *A Texas Legend* (2005), claiming that Liggett flew a 'duped' corpse to Bethesda Naval Hospital and that JFK's autopsy photographs were mixed up with photographs from this second body (the 'donor' remains unnamed by Estes).

<sup>5</sup> Online at <<http://tinyurl.com/mm239sc>>. The movie is referred to under its alternate title 'The House of Seven Joys'.

Another, better print of the photograph was (in April 2014) at <<http://tinyurl.com/jwbplsq>>.

contemporary duplicate (from the original negative) of that photograph and this first image is from that.



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The second image is a scan of a photocopy of the photograph of Peck that Peck sent to LBJ with a letter (supplied by the LBJ Library).



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The third image, showing Peck and LBJ side by side, is the first photograph on the screen if you search Google images for 'Jay Bert Peck'.



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There is certainly a strong resemblance between LBJ and his supposed cousin, but could Peck could pass convincingly as his double among those familiar with LBJ? Peck's ears and nose appear too large and his head appears too small. On the other hand, from a distance the deception might work. But unless we posit an elaborate conspiracy by Peck and LBJ to establish LBJ's ignorance of his 'cousin's' existence, it appears that Estes' account of the Peck 'cousin' standing-in for LBJ is untrue.

Nonetheless: in addition to a 'second Oswald' and (per Robert Morningstar <sup>6</sup>) a second JFK, we also now have a second LBJ!<sup>7</sup>

We may also have a *third* JFK. In an extract from his posthumous memoir, Howard Brennan, one of the key Dealey

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<sup>6</sup> Noting the physical similarities between JFK and Dallas police officer Tippit and Tippit's head wound on the right temple, Morningstar wondered if Tippit's body had been used for some of the autopsy photographs. See <<http://www.redicecreations.com/article.php?id=17710>>

<sup>7</sup> The supposed 'doubling' of LBJ the night before the assassination could perhaps be confirmed by professional analysis of the wire service photograph of LBJ that was taken in Fort Worth at 11.50pm on 21 November 1963, which I have been unable to trace. Estes also claimed that Liggett shot Peck and then informed Mrs Peck that her husband had committed suicide.

Plaza witnesses, wrote the following:

As we started to pass pleasantries, another man stepped from the shadows on the porch where I had only seen his figure and moved into the light. Louise gave an audible gasp that all of us could hear and I felt a shock run through me. There standing in our little hallway was John F. Kennedy, alive again. At least that's what I thought at that instant. The man standing there was the exact double of the late President in every detail. Had I not known that the President was dead, I would have staked my life that I was being visited by him. Every feature about him, his face, his hair, his build, even his clothes looked exactly like the President. It was as if a ghost had suddenly appeared. Even his voice sounded so much like Mr. Kennedy's. My mind simply couldn't absorb it all and Louise was struck dumb, her eyes wide open in amazement. Lish introduced the double as a fellow agent and apologized for not preparing us for this shocking experience. We all sat down at the kitchen table. Later I would learn that many American Presidents have had doubles, including President Roosevelt. All my life I had heard that there is someone, somewhere who looks exactly like you, but until that night I'd never known it for the truth. The agent told us some of his experiences doubling for the President. They were fascinating.<sup>8</sup>

Jay Bert Peck was murdered by gunshot on 5 July 1969, and to judge by the archival silence on the matter, his killer was never identified.<sup>9</sup> Estes claimed that this was another of Liggett's killings, although he did not say why Liggett would wait several years (and until LBJ had quit politics and died) to kill Peck's widow, too. The obvious implication is that Mrs Peck's death was connected to knowledge of her late husband's role as LBJ's 'body double'. At his trial Liggett was

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<sup>8</sup> <<http://educationforum.ipbhost.com/index.php?showtopic=7860>> In his Warren Commission testimony Brennan refers to Lish as an FBI agent. See <<http://jfkassassination.net/russ/testimony/brennan.htm>> p. 149.

<sup>9</sup> *San Antonio Light*, 13 July 1969

convicted of several murders similar to that of Mrs Peck. He was imprisoned and in 1975 he was fatally shot in the back while trying to escape custody.

The Liggett connection is intriguing, and in the course of preliminary research into his history I came across many interesting claims. The most interesting originated with a Dallas funeral technician named Daniel Rocco-Rusk. *Inter alia*, during an e-mail exchange with an interested researcher in 2003,<sup>10</sup> which is well worth reading in full, Mr Rocco-Rusk made the following claims:

He was personally acquainted with John Liggett and found it difficult to believe that Liggett was guilty as charged concerning the Dallas murders.

Liggett was known to frequent Jack Ruby's Carousel Club.

He (Rocco-Rusk) used to transport Jack Ruby between prison and Parkland Hospital when Ruby was being treated for cancer.

Mr Rocco-Rusk mentions Dallas funerean 'Peg' O'Neal, whose firm's involvement in the handling of Kennedy's body is a topic of discussion among funeral professionals.<sup>11</sup> Mr Rocco-Rusk also alludes cryptically to the 1971 burial of eccentric Dallas millionaire O.L. Nelms (who was briefly associated with Jack Ruby through a dance hall venture in the 1950s), saying 'I hope they never open that guy's coffin.'

I attempted to contact Mr Rocco-Rusk via the networking site <LinkedIn.com> and then via two findable e-mail addresses, but at the time of this article appearing he had not responded. I have therefore been unable to discuss Mr Rocco-Rusk's claims with him, in particular his relationship with the CIA, with whom he claims to have served (for an unspecified period) as a political analyst.<sup>12</sup>

Given the old adage that 'One does not quit the

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<sup>10</sup> <<https://groups.google.com/forum/#!topic/alt.assassination.jfk/wUUbBv4tRUU>>

<sup>11</sup> See <<http://www.professionalcarsociety.org/forums/showthread.php?t=7350&page=8>>.

<sup>12</sup> See <<https://www.facebook.com/public/Daniel-Rocco-Rusk>>.

Agency', we might speculate that Mr Rocco-Rusk is disseminating disinformation concerning the Kennedy assassination, for whatever reason. As Mr Rocco-Rusk himself put it (on FaceBook in December 2013): 'Honesty is not the job of the Central Intelligence Agency. Protecting our lives and serving our foreign policy is.'

On the other hand, Mr Rocco-Rusk's previous CIA affiliations may be totally unrelated and he may yet prove to be a valuable source of insight into the events surrounding Kennedy's death.