

Deception and distraction strategies relating to the John F Kennedy Assassination

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Introductory note

This essay involves one of the most outrageous and intellectually toxic propositions of all time: the claim that intelligent extraterrestrials have not only visited Earth in modern history, but are continuing to do so, and that various governments – principally that of the USA – are concealing this knowledge from the general public.

For the record, I do not believe any such thing. It has been amply demonstrated that stories about UFOs and extraterrestrials serve various intelligence bodies as a useful way of discrediting people or other organisations. It is this discrediting tactic that is the focus of the present work.

1: Flights from reason

In 1999, private detective Milo Speriglio¹ published a document purporting to indicate that Marilyn Monroe had been murdered because she knew too much about the cover-up of human contact with extraterrestrials. Mr Speriglio said that this document had been passed to him by UFOlogist Timothy Cooper, who in turn claims to have received it from a retired CIA counterintelligence officer.² Mr Speriglio's document is supposedly a CIA eavesdropper's summary of a telephone call between popular columnist Dorothy Kilgallen and her friend Howard Rothberg, a Hollywood producer.³

¹ Speriglio died in 2002. His obituary describes some of his more theatrical tendencies. See <<http://www.nytimes.com/2000/06/05/us/milo-a-speriglio-62-high-profile-detective.html>>.

² A transcription of the anonymous letter that Mr Cooper claimed was sent with the 'Marilyn memo' can be read in *SS Brotherhood of the Bell: The Nazis' Incredible Secret Technology*. The first page of the letter can be read via the Google Books preview at <<http://tinyurl.com/y9bpz2ux>>. 'The Bell' is supposedly a secret weapon created by Germany during the Second World War, the near-magical properties of which are unbelievable in the extreme. This elusive secret weapon has been invoked as the explanation for a bell-shaped UFO that is said to have crashed in Kecksburg, Pennsylvania, in 1965. What is of interest here is that the researcher who 'discovered' the existence of The Bell claims to have learned of it via a contact in Polish intelligence. The author's evidence? Documents that he was shown, and allowed to copy, but not allowed to keep. In other words, the usual procedure for disseminating disinformation via credulous intermediaries. This will be a recurrent motif in the present work.

³ Rothberg died in 1992, well before Mr Speriglio released the memo that mentions him. His obituary is at <<http://variety.com/2012/scene/news/howard-rothberg-dies-at-72-1118049031/>>.

According to the memo:

'Rothberg told Kilgallen that she [Monroe] was attending Hollywood parties hosted by the "inner circle" among Hollywood's elite and was becoming the talk of the town again. Rothberg indicated in so many words that she had secrets to tell, no doubt arising from her trysts [*sic*] with the President and the Attorney General. One such "secret" mentions the visit by the President at a secret air base for the purpose of inspecting things from outer space.'

The date on the memo is 3 August 1962, and Marilyn Monroe died two days later in circumstances that are still disputed.⁴ Mr Speriglio was just one of the many investigators who were convinced that Monroe was murdered. In her column of 5 August 1962, Dorothy Kilgallen went over the odd circumstances of Monroe's death, but didn't suggest anything in particular, only that 'The real story hasn't been told, not by a long shot.'⁵

Ms Kilgallen herself also later died in circumstances that are still the subject of debate and reinvestigation. The usual theory is that she was murdered to prevent her from exposing a conspiracy behind the JFK assassination.⁶ With two mystery deaths on its roll-call, the ominous nature of the 'Marilyn memo' seems unavoidably obvious. The memo also mentions that Kilgallen:

' . . . replied that she knew what might be the source of visit. In the mid-fifties Kilgallen learned of secret effort [*sic*] by US and UK governments to identify the origins of crashed spacecraft and dead bodies, from a British government official.'

This tallies well with a story about 'flying saucers' that Ms Kilgallen filed from London on 23 May 1955, and which was published in several US newspapers. In this story, Ms Kilgallen stated:

'British scientists and airmen, after examining the wreckage of one mysterious flying ship, are convinced these strange aerial objects are not optical illusions or Soviet inventions, but are flying saucers which originate

⁴ You can read the whole memo at <<http://www.blackmesapress.com/page4.htm>>. The accompanying commentary stakes a claim to the memo's authenticity. This is based on the fact that it was submitted as part of an 'appeal of the CIA's refusal to release transcripts of government wiretaps on Marilyn Monroe's telephones' and that the appeal was subsequently approved. The logic of this argument seems to be that the CIA would not place any value on a fake document. This might very well indicate that the 'Marilyn memo' is indeed a document created by the CIA, but it is far from being evidence that the 'Marilyn memo' is a genuine record.

⁵ <<http://thedorothykilgallenstory.org/dorothy-kilgallen-in-words.html>>

⁶ Ms Kilgallen has been the subject of renewed interest after a book published in 2015 prompted Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus Vance to open a new investigation into the circumstances surrounding Kilgallen's death. See <<http://tinyurl.com/me8ek4d>> or <<http://nypost.com/2017/01/29/manhattan-das-office-probing-death-of-reporter-with-possible-jfk-ties/>>.

on another planet. The source of my information is a British official of Cabinet rank who prefers to remain unidentified [who said] "We believe, on the basis of our inquiry thus far, that the saucers were staffed by small men – probably under four feet tall. It's frightening, but there is no denying the flying saucers come from another planet."

Did Ms Kilgallen simply invent this entire yarn, or were important figures from the British Government really putting out such information? It appears that the latter is the case.

In his autobiography, *Sounds from Another Room*,⁷ former Air Marshal Sir Peter Horsley recounted a distinctly odd experience from 1954. Sir Peter tells how he made the acquaintance of a military man (to whom he refers only as 'General Martin') and as a result was introduced to a conspicuously talkative extraterrestrial in an anonymous flat in Chelsea, London.

This supposed alien, who was called 'Janus' (perhaps related to the fact that the mythological Janus was a god with two faces) sat and chatted with Sir Peter at great length about affairs earthly and otherwise. For example, as well as delivering an anti-nuclear weapons message, 'Janus' expressed a desire to meet Prince Philip, declaring the Duke to be a wise man who could solve many of the world's problems. (Sir Peter told him that, unfortunately, this would be difficult to arrange). What did Sir Peter's alien interlocutor look like? Alas, his chattiness was the only conspicuous thing about this self-declared visitor from another world. Sir Peter recalled: 'It was difficult to describe him with any accuracy; the room was poorly lit by two standard lamps and for most of the time he sat in a deep chair by the side of a not very generous fire.'

This ridiculous encounter strongly suggests that a UFO-themed disinformation operation was taking place in Britain during the period 1954-55, and that Ms Kilgallen and Sir Peter Horsley were two of its unwitting pawns. It's unclear whether this operation related to anything else happening at the time, or if it was part of a general project to get false information into circulation in case it could be useful later on. In any event, something was going on in London in the 1950s that required these respectably-sourced tales to be circulated.⁸

⁷ Peter Horsley, *Sounds from Another Room* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Books, 1997)

⁸ I believe, but cannot prove, that there were actually two disinformation operations taking place in these incidents, as indicated by the discrepancy between the 'small men under four feet tall' in Kilgallen's story and the distinctly human-sized Janus met by Sir Peter. The operation that ensnared Dorothy Kilgallen was related to the USA's U-2 spy plane project, which started in 1954, and the UFO legend was therefore 'surfaced' in the US via Ms Kilgallen in 1955. The CIA's internal history of the U-2 project claims that the high-altitude reconnaissance aircraft accounted for more than half of UFO sightings in the 1950s and 60s. The US Air Force's investigation of UFOs – the famous Project Blue Book – got under way in 1952, and checked regularly with the Agency in order to eliminate U-2 flights from their catalogue of sightings. See <<http://tinyurl.com/yzqbj5>> or <<https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/books-and-monographs/the-cia-and-the-u-2-program-1954-1974/u2.pdf>> (page 39 onward).

Returning to the 'Marilyn memo', we can infer that the purpose was to link the deaths of Monroe and Kilgallen to 'UFO cover-up' stories. The purpose of doing so becomes a little clearer when the reader observes that there is a third mysterious death that is being linked to secrecy about flying saucers – that of President Kennedy, who supposedly visited a 'secret underground base' to witness these alien exhibits with his own eyes. With just one piece of paper, these three deaths are contaminated by their proximity to the idea that there is a huge and all-encompassing conspiracy to conceal the existence of aliens from the easily alarmed public.

Does this contamination extend into the Oval Office and touch President Kennedy himself? Yes, it does. In 2011, a memo surfaced in which JFK demanded that CIA Director John McCone provide him with a report on what was and was not known about the UFO phenomenon. That memo is dated 12 November 1963, and JFK was murdered 10 days later. This document was released to author William Lester by the CIA as the result of a Freedom of Information Act request.⁹ Whether it is genuine or not – and there's no way of knowing, since the space that should contain the signature of the memo's author has been totally redacted – it has produced much excitement among extraterrestrial intelligence (ETI) conspiracists. But it is worth looking at it with a slightly more analytical eye. The author – supposedly Kennedy – states his justification for the order as being his concern that the Soviet Union might think that US interest in extraterrestrials was a cover for intelligence operations aimed at probing Soviet defences. This sounds altogether more plausible, and even suggests that Kennedy was already aware of such subterfuge; but again we are unable to assess the memo on that basis alone.¹⁰

The 12 November 1963 memo was seized upon by triumphant ETI conspiracists chiefly because it seemed to fit perfectly with a separate memo that had surfaced three years earlier, in 2008. This document was supposedly a CIA memo dating from some time during the JFK administration, and refers to the UFO phenomenon in familiar terms before stating melodramatically: 'As you must know LANCER has made some inquiries regarding our activities

Footnote 8 continued

The operation that reeled in Sir Peter Horsley was related to Britain's 1952 entry into the nuclear arms race, hence the interest shown by 'Janus' in world peace and avoiding nuclear conflict. The aim of this would be to discredit anti-nuclear campaigners by association with far-out tales of interplanetary peaceniks. This was a regular theme among the 'UFO contactees' of that period, who described meeting distinctly human-looking extraterrestrials who delivered anti-nuclear messages about Earth becoming a member of 'Galactic Federations of Harmony' and the like.

⁹ You can examine it at <<http://tinyurl.com/ya3o87oj>> or <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/74/Letter_written_by_John_F_Kennedy_to_the_head_of_the_CIA.jpg>.

¹⁰ At a meeting between Soviet and US meteorologists in May 1975, a Soviet delegate said that he and his colleagues were not receiving reports of UFO sightings any more and that the cessation must have been due to someone making 'a political decision'. Those familiar with the sardonic nature of Russian humour will recognise that this was a rather pointed remark. See <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/DOC_0000028609.pdf>.

which we cannot allow.’ Edge of the seat stuff, to be sure.

This memo was supposedly rescued from its intended destruction in a CIA ‘burn bin’ following the 1987 death of CIA counter-intelligence chief James Angleton and sent to the aforementioned Timothy Cooper in July 1999. For that reason, it is referred to as ‘the burned memo’, a title that is ironic considering that it has shed more heat than light upon the debates of the ETI conspiracists.¹¹

LANCER (mentioned in the ‘burned memo’) was the Secret Service codename for President Kennedy, and the ‘we’ refers to members of the elusive Majestic 12 committee, which has been discussed by ETI conspiracists ever since papers supposedly identifying the group came to light in the 1980s. The documents that started the entire rigmarole are supposed to be the minutes and memos of a high-ranking cabal within the American Deep State, which oversees and coordinates all manner of covert chicanery related to the grand UFO cover-up. The documents have been debunked over and over again, but phantom things die phantom deaths and so they still keep coming up decades later.

In 1988 the FBI investigated the alleged leak of the documents and concluded that they were bogus. However, as a 2017 FOIA request revealed, the FBI conducted its investigation in an uncharacteristic way.

‘Despite the FBI saying they looked into this case because of “a potential violation of federal law under our jurisdiction that we did investigate”, the Bureau neither investigated the espionage angle they opened the file for, nor any of the potential violations of federal law involved in forging government documents.’¹²

This is self-evidently significant. A major hoax involving phoney government records was being carried out on an international scale. Yet the FBI’s investigation consisted of writing a letter to the US Air Force’s Office of Special Intelligence (OSI), to which the OSI eventually replied, telling the Bureau that the documents were fake. At that point, the FBI shut the book on the entire affair. It seems obvious that this was one of those inter-agency games of Blind Man’s Bluff that bedevil the US Deep State. The FBI realised it had simply blundered across an officially-sanctioned disinformation project and that it was in the interests of national security to keep it under wraps.

The long and the short of which is that the ‘burned memo’ cites documents that have been comprehensively debunked by everyone who has ever investigated them properly. However, the ‘burned memo’ does seem to relate to an apparently genuine memo from President Kennedy – the aforementioned memo of 12 November 1963, released to William Lester in

¹¹ You can read all about the ‘burned memo’ and examine some images of the document itself, in the essay by pro-ETI journalist Linda Moulton Howe at <http://globalintelhub.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/6404101-JFK-MJ12.pdf>.

¹² <https://www.muckrock.com/news/archives/2017/jun/05/fbi-majestic-12/>

2011 – the meaning of which was apparently moderated by the pre-emptive 'leak' of the 'burned memo'.¹³ So again we run into an instance in which JFK assassination research has been contaminated by association with forged documents relating to a huge cover-up of extraterrestrials and 'flying saucers'.

All this indicates some kind of distraction and deception project related to the Kennedy assassination. But all of the so-called leaks discussed in the above took place after the assassination. This probably means that the assassination was simply being thrown into the mix to bamboozle and mislead researchers and readers looking into either the assassination or the supposed 'UFO mystery'. But when we look at some apparent connections between the ETI hypothesis and the JFK assassination that existed at the time of the murder itself, things take on an altogether darker appearance.

2: Flight from justice

In June 1947, a month before the supposed 'Roswell incident', a man called Fred Crisman was involved in an allegation of a UFO sighting at Maury Island, in Washington State, during which a strange craft did various inexplicable things (there are conflicting eye-witness accounts, not relevant here). Crisman claimed to have visited the scene of the sighting and picked up some mysterious metal that was supposedly emitted by the flying object. He later started telling people that he had been harassed by 'Men In Black', who wished him to keep his mouth shut (although they obviously didn't have much success). This marked one of the first appearances of the sinister dark-suited agents, who would go on to make frequent visits to alarm and dismay supposed UFO witnesses throughout subsequent decades.¹⁴

According to the FBI file on the Maury Island case, on 25 July 1947 (so a fortnight after the supposed 'Roswell Incident' which unfolded on 7-8 July 1947), an unidentified third party (n.b.) was responsible for Crisman being contacted by another UFO witness. This other 'UFO witness' was Kenneth Arnold, whose sighting of nine unidentified flying objects over Mount Rainier, Washington State, gave the world the term 'flying saucers'. (It should be noted that Mr Arnold's sighting had taken place on 24 July 1947 - i.e. on the previous day to the introduction). Mr Arnold and Mr Crisman met in a hotel room in Tacoma, Washington State, on 30 July, where they discussed the possible implications of what they had seen. While they were talking, no fewer than five separate anonymous phone calls were made to local newspapers, pinpointing the room in which the meeting was taking place and detailing the nature of

¹³ I suspect, but have not been able to establish, that William Lester's FOIA request was submitted before the 'burned memo' surfaced in 2008, and that the latter was created to establish its apparent relationship to the former.

¹⁴ The full FBI file on the Maury Island incident was obtained by the excellent FOIA activists at Muckrock.com and, if you have the patience, can be read at <<http://tinyurl.com/glj6goy>> or <<https://www.muckrock.com/news/archives/2016/dec/05/fbis-real-x-files-documents-strange-connection-bet/>>.

their discussions. (The FBI later determined that those calls were not made from the hotel room, but believed Crisman was behind them anyway).

At some point, Crisman handed his box containing the metal samples to two Air Force Intelligence Officers, who also spoke to Mr Arnold and (according to Mr Arnold) told him that they had already obtained fantastic-sounding evidence of flying saucer activity, including clear photographs of one of the disc-like craft.

If this sounds recognisably like a disinformation project, what happened next seems a little more serious. The day after meeting Messrs Crisman and Arnold, the two airforce intelligence officers departed in a B-25 aeroplane and were killed when the aircraft crashed shortly after takeoff. Soon after that, mysteriously-sourced stories started appearing in regional newspapers stating that the dead men had been carrying proof that flying saucers had visited Earth – this evidently being Crisman’s metal samples.

Interviewed by the FBI about the metal samples, Crisman stated that if he were obliged to be identified in relation to this, he would tell people that the entire story about the metal had been a hoax, justifying this to the FBI by saying that the affair had caused him too much trouble already.¹⁵ Evidently Crisman had some concerns about being prosecuted and appearing in court – although it’s not clear what crime the FBI believed they were investigating.

All of which seems a long way indeed from the JFK assassination. However, the FBI’s file on the entire Crisman-Maury Island affair contains a detailed report dated 24 August 1947 by Guy Banister, the Bureau’s SAC (Special Agent in Charge) in Butte, Montana. This is the same Guy Banister who would later turn up in close proximity to Lee Harvey Oswald in New Orleans.¹⁶ It’s not clear why Banister was investigating an incident that took place at Maury Island since he was based in Montana and the Maury Island affair took place in Washington State.¹⁷

In 1968 Fred Crisman was subpoenaed as part of the freewheeling JFK investigation conducted by New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison, who believed Crisman to be a CIA officer or agent. Crisman appeared before a Grand Jury to determine whether he should appear as a witness in the Clay Shaw trial. During his Grand Jury appearance Crisman equivocated on the question of whether he had ever met Jack Martin, the unpleasant drunk who was pistol-whipped by Guy Banister shortly after the assassination and who, essentially, set Garrison’s entire investigation in motion. (Banister himself was dead before Garrison’s calamitous probe got under way).

¹⁵ He did not tell the FBI that he had committed a hoax, as has been erroneously claimed by some researchers.

¹⁶ See Banister's 1964 obituary at <<https://www.newspapers.com/newspage/75138205/>>.

¹⁷ It may be relevant that during this period, Butte, Montana was J Edgar Hoover’s equivalent of Siberia, and the place of exile for FBI agents who were in Hoover’s bad books or had somehow disgraced themselves. See <<http://tinyurl.com/y9yk2duk>> or <http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1996-04-14/news/9604140299_1_ron-kessler-butte-montana>.

Crisman also hemmed and hawed over his relationship with a Tom Beckham.¹⁸ In his testimony Crisman recalled that Beckham possessed phoney FBI credentials and claimed to have been handling the bank accounts of anti-Castro mercenaries. Crisman further indicated that he probably heard Beckham mention the name 'Sergio Arcacha-Smith'¹⁹ – an anti-Castro would-be revolutionary associated with Garrison suspect David Ferrie. Arcacha-Smith had non-connecting offices with Guy Banister in the Newman Building at the junction of 531 Lafayette Street/544 Camp Street, New Orleans. Of course Lee Oswald was ostentatiously and inexplicably drawing attention to this address by handing out his pro-Castro leaflets with '544 Camp Street' as his contact address.²⁰

The knot of connections here is extraordinarily tight. Any serious post-assassination investigation of Oswald could soon lead to Banister, Arcacha-Smith, and Beckham – and from there would run straight into the welcoming arms of Fred Crisman, a teller of tall tales who was connected to two famous UFO incidents: Maury Island and Kenneth Arnold's sighting. This is precisely the fate that nearly befell Jim Garrison in 1968, from which he was only rescued by the Grand Jury's decision to reject his attempt to subpoena Fred Crisman.

What was Crisman up to, exactly? As mentioned, Garrison believed Crisman to be a CIA officer, or perhaps agent. An internal CIA memorandum – dated 4 March 1970 and sent to the deputy director of the Agency's Domestic Contact Service division (DCS) – discusses some 'poison pen' letters about Crisman that were apparently doing the rounds in Tacoma, Washington State. The scurrilous letters – facsimiles of which accompanied the memo – contain a large amount of information of dubious reliability. It is the memo itself, composed by Wayne Richardson, chief of the CIA's Seattle office, which is interesting. In discussing the anonymous letter-writer's assertion that Fred Crisman was a CIA 'disruption agent' Mr Richardson states:

'Mrs Virginia Thorne advises that Crisman is not now an employee of the Agency and never has been. There is apparently some record in the Agency of Mr Crisman in relation to the Garrison Case. She added that

¹⁸ Beckham is one of those intriguing but ropery bit-part players who briefly wandered through Garrison's investigation. Garrison devotee Joan Mellen thinks him significant but hasn't found out much about him. See <<http://tinyurl.com/y8a49uoa>> or <<http://joanmellen.com/wordpress/2015/10/20/my-investigation-of-the-garrison-investigation-new-orleans-louisiana-october-17-2015/>>.

¹⁹ See transcript of Crisman's Grand Jury testimony, 21 November 1968 at <<https://aarclibrary.org/publib/jfk/garr/grandjury/pdf/Crisman.pdf>>. Jack Martin appears on page 24; Sergio Arcacha-Smith on page 6. Intriguingly there is also mention of a 'Roswell Thompson' whose name Crisman inexplicably misremembers as 'Roswell Allen', a suggestive coincidence indeed.

²⁰ <<http://tinyurl.com/ybrlq8b7>> or <http://www.aarclibrary.org/publib/jfk/hsca/reportvols/vol10/html/HSCA_Vol10_0057b.htm>

Mr Crisman is also known as Dr Jon Gold.’²¹

The strange thing here is that Virginia Thorne worked in the Agency’s Domestic Contact Service division (DCS). So Mr Richardson, for some reason, had contacted Mrs Thorne in order to write a memo to Mrs Thorne’s own superior, the deputy director of the Domestic Contact Service. A ‘contact’, in this context, is an unpaid and voluntary informant (Clay Shaw himself was one of hundreds of businessmen who voluntarily gave information to the CIA via DCS). DCS also ‘rendered support’ for employees of other US intelligence bodies.²² So Mrs Thorne’s apparent non-sequitur about Crisman not being an Agency *employee* looks like it is an indirect way of confirming that Crisman was indeed an unpaid domestic contact for the Agency – or something more substantial for another body.

Mr Richardson’s memo to the deputy director of DCS concluded: ‘[I] do not anticipate doing anything further unless advised by you to do so.’ This gives the game away nicely. Why would the deputy director of DCS even consider lifting a finger to issue advice relating to Fred Crisman, unless Crisman was already a CIA informant, at the very least?

All this intrigue, however, is as nothing compared to the episode discussed in the next and final section of this essay.

3: Flight From Dallas

Published in 2006, *Flight From Dallas* (by lawyer James P Johnston and journalist John Roe)²³ is an investigation into the account of the experiences of US Air Force Sergeant Robert G Vinson. Sergeant Vinson went public because he felt that the establishment of the Assassination Records Review Board in 1993 had freed him from his obligation to keep silent.

The core of the story is that Sergeant Vinson was at Andrews Air Force Base, Maryland, on 22 November 1963, waiting to fly back to his home base at Colorado Springs. He was unexpectedly told to board a small unmarked aircraft, and, during the flight, learned that President Kennedy had been assassinated. The aircraft (says Sergeant Vinson) briefly touched down on what appeared to be a long stretch of land near an urban area. A pair of men – one Caucasian and one Latino – quickly embarked and the aircraft took off again. The plane then landed at a strange location, which Sergeant Vinson discovered was Roswell Air Force Base in New Mexico. To cap the entire thing, when Sergeant Vinson later saw television news coverage of the assassination,

²¹ At some stage, someone who read the memo drew a ring around the name Dr Jon Gold and wrote a large but seemingly redundant ‘AKA’ in the margin. See <http://www.maryferrell.org/showDoc.html?docId=103837#relPageId=3&tab=page>.

²² See Scott C. Monje, *The Central Intelligence Agency: A Documentary History* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2008).

²³ Trafford Publishing (publishing on demand) 2006.

he recognised that the Caucasian who had hurriedly joined his flight was Lee Harvey Oswald.

The first thing to say about this story is that it is, on the face of it, ludicrous. The second thing to say about it is that Sergeant Vinson is a very credible witness. He had high-level security clearance at the time of his experiences and continued in the Air Force until his retirement three years later. The basics of the Sergeant's tale, as documented by the authors of *Flight from Dallas*, have only been set out as far as Sergeant Vinson understood it – which is not very far at all. However, Sergeant Vinson's refusal to attempt to make sense of what he witnessed is wholly respectable, so we are left with the facts, to make of them what we will. And viewed through the prism of a possible UFO-related deception strategy, Sergeant Vinson's account suddenly starts to make a lot of sense.

His boarding of the flight that morning was clearly pre-arranged. He was told that no other aircraft were available, and specifically directed to the unmarked aircraft. When he boarded, no-one asked who he was, demanded ID, or even looked at him. This simply does not happen in commercial aviation, let alone in military flights. At the termination of his journey, the rest of the passengers and crew disembarked without a word or a backward glance, leaving him all alone on a grounded aeroplane at a military base. No ground crew appeared to carry out the usual post-landing procedures. After a little while, Sergeant Vinson disembarked and looked around to discern where he was. Not another person could be seen anywhere.

At this point, with the night drawing in, he spotted a single lit window across the deserted runway. The window was a security checkpoint, manned by a single Air Policeman, who had apparently not been at all fazed by the sight of a lone stranger wandering around but had sat and waited for Sergeant Vinson to make a beeline toward the lighted window. This officer didn't demand ID and casually informed Sergeant Vinson that he was at Roswell Air Force Base. Not only that but the officer told him that the base was 'under high alert' and nobody could leave or enter. Understandably, Sergeant Vinson found this hard to reconcile with the circumstances surrounding his unexpected arrival.²⁴ When the alert was lifted some considerable time later, Sergeant Vinson had to make his way home to Colorado by public transport, which took the best part of 12 hours.

There's a lot more to Sergeant Vinson's career history that could be relevant here, but the upshot of it all is clear: Sergeant Vinson – precisely because of his immediate respectability and credibility – was selected to witness the post-assassination appearance of someone who looked very like Lee Harvey Oswald. This could later be demonstrated to be 'impossible' because Oswald was in custody at the time. And for good measure, Sergeant Vinson would be honour-bound to relate how the Oswald lookalike disembarked and disappeared into an Air Force base that had been publicly

²⁴ *Flight From Dallas*, pp. 26-28.

linked to rumoured UFO cover-ups since 1947. In all, Sergeant Vinson's experience looks, walks, and quacks like a classic but customised episode of flying saucer-related deception and distraction.²⁵

In this light – a self-discrediting encounter with a 'Second Oswald' – another incident bears re-appraisal. This is the ordeal of Ralph Yates, a Dallas resident who maintained, in the teeth of ferocious hostility during repeated FBI interviews, that he had given a car ride to a young man hitching a lift from Oak Cliff, south-west Dallas, the suburb where Lee Harvey Oswald was living at the time. During their journey toward the heart of the city, the young man (who was carrying a long slim package wrapped in brown paper, which he said contained 'curtain rods'), chatted excitedly about President Kennedy's impending trip to Dallas and tried to engage a reluctant Yates in conversation about the feasibility of assassinating Kennedy during his visit. The hitch-hiker said his farewells on Elm Street and disappeared in the general direction of the nearby Texas School Book Depository.

As soon as Lee Oswald was identified on TV as the suspected assassin, Yates understood the importance of his encounter and went straight to the FBI. But there was a big problem. Yates's encounter took place two days before the assassination, and Oswald's 'curtain rods' line was also told to his colleague Wesley Frazier on their way to work on 22 November.²⁶

James Douglass, author of *JFK And the Unspeakable*, provides the awful conclusion to Yates's repeated attempts to get his story believed by the FBI:

'During his final, January 4 trip to the FBI office, Ralph Yates was accompanied by his wife, Dorothy. He had asked her to come with him. In an interview forty-two years later, she told me what happened next to her husband. After he completed his (inconclusive) lie-detector test, she said, the FBI told him he needed to go immediately to Woodlawn Hospital, the Dallas hospital for the mentally ill. He drove there with Dorothy. He was admitted that evening as a psychiatric patient. From that point on, he spent the remaining eleven years of his life as a patient in and out of mental health hospitals.'²⁷

Here, again, we meet a witness to the comings and goings of an Oswald lookalike, whose experiences of that lookalike seem explicitly designed to discredit the witness. If Ralph Yates was delusional, then it was a *folie à deux* worthy of its own medical paper – because Yates' colleague Dempsey Jones told the FBI that he had discussed the ominous hitch-hiker with an understandably anxious Yates the day after it happened, and so 24 hours

²⁵ Robert G Vinson died in 2009, aged 80. See obituary at <<http://www.legacy.com/obituaries/nwfdailynews/obituary.aspx?pid=132124177>>.

²⁶ Whatever was in the long, slim, package Oswald took to work on the morning of the assassination, it wasn't curtain rods as he claimed. No such curtain rods were found when the School Book Depository was searched by police after the murder.

²⁷ James W. Douglass, *JFK And the Unspeakable* (Orbis, New York, 2008) p. 350 et seq.

before the assassination took place.

This tips the balance decisively in favour of Yates' lucidity and the corollary is that an Oswald 'ringer' was being sent out to attract attention to himself in advance of the assassination in order to muddy the waters for later investigators. In other words, it was a deception and distraction operation. And if it had become public, it would have eventually led investigators to Sergeant Vinson and his encounter with an Oswald lookalike fleeing by plane.

Some years after his encounter with the Oswald 'ringer', Sergeant Vinson identified the impromptu landing strip where the lookalike boarded the flight to Roswell. It was a 4,463-metre stretch of the Trinity River flood plain, just to the east of Oak Cliff, the Dallas suburb where the genuine Lee Oswald lived.