

Still thinking about Dallas¹

Robin Ramsay

On the wonderful Mary Ferrell site² there is a list of some of the books on the Kennedy assassination that were published in 2017. Among them is a new edition of John Newman's *JFK and Vietnam*. I have both his *Oswald and the CIA* and *Where Angels Tread Lightly: the Assassination of President Kennedy, Volume 1*. I have read the *CIA* book but I have barely skimmed the *Angels* book. The *CIA* book reworks in extraordinary detail a number of the incidents in Oswald's career as a CIA agent? asset? – which isn't clear. The *Angels* book is about Cuba and the beginnings of the CIA's attempts to overthrow Fidel Castro. It has no bearing I can see on the Kennedy assassination. Dr. Newman represents one end of the assassination research spectrum. His is academic research, albeit of an extremely rarefied nature. The assassination *per se* barely figures in what I have read of his work.

Newman says on p. 320 of the *Angels* book that the assassination will be solved by ploughing through official paper in the National Archives.³ But what are the chances of there being anything significant in them? What are the chances of there being anything significant about the assassination on official US paper *anywhere*? Assuming, for the sake of argument, that somewhere within the US intelligence community there is institutional knowledge of whodunit,⁴ we may also assume that nothing will be left on paper which points towards the assassination conspiracy (if anything was put there in the first place). Therefore, fascinating though the official paper trail is at some level, it

¹ This essay reworks some of the material to be found in the essay of the same name in the previous issue of *Lobster* at <https://www.lobster-magazine.co.uk/free/lobster74/lob74-jfk-dallas.pdf>.

² https://www.maryferrell.org/pages/Main_Page.html

³ All the newly released documents are now available via the Mary Ferrell site. There are, apparently over 200,000 pages on JFK still unreleased. See <http://jfkfacts.org/correction-number-secret-jfk-files-may-less-previously-reported/>.

⁴ And there might not be; or it might be very limited. Former CIA officer Victor Marchetti, who was in the Agency in 1963, said in an interview in the mid-1980s: 'I don't think anybody was really sure in Washington who was behind the assassination.' <http://ncoic.com/cia.htm>

is never going to tell us about who was on Dealey Plaza. And that's what interests me: whodunit?

By the standards of serious researchers such as Dr Newman, I have a barely informed, generalist's interest in the story. My view of it changes. About 20 years ago I would have said that the Mafia probably did it: how else to explain the role of Jack Ruby? But though there have been a number of reports of mafiosi *claiming* to have done it, success has a thousand fathers and there is no actual evidence of Mafia involvement in the shooting.⁵ Despite all the evidence of the CIA's interest in, and manipulation of Oswald,⁶ I could never quite see the CIA *qua* institution doing the assassination. Had they wanted to rid themselves of Kennedy there were other, less drastic means available to them: Kennedy's sexual promiscuity left him wide open to a smear campaign. However no such campaign ever materialised at home (where it would have been difficult to do) or abroad (where it would have been easier). And would a CIA conspiracy have been so leaky? In *Lobster 2* I wrote this:

' . . . the assassination seems to have been widely known about in advance. What is striking about this is that for the most part the people who are known to have had such advance knowledge were low level "street people" – a stripper, a waitress, a small-time right-winger, a minor intelligence agent. The assassination conspiracy was leaky. And this suggests very strongly that we are dealing with something other than a professional job by the intelligence services or the Pentagon. It is hard to imagine the pros holding anything more closely than the assassination of a president.'

In the beginning

I now can't remember how I first came across the LBJ-dunit thesis. Perhaps it was the reference to it in Michael Milan's *The Squad: the US Government's Secret Alliance with Organized Crime*.⁷ The pseudonymous author of that book

⁵ I discount James Files' story. That, as Garrick Alder has shown, is an invention. See <<https://www.lobster-magazine.co.uk/free/lobster74/lob74-bullet-head.pdf>>.

Billie Sol Estes does say in one of his accounts that the Mob provided some of its people to be in Dallas that day, just to muddy the water for any investigation.

⁶ Leaving aside the problems created by John Armstrong's 'two Oswalds' thesis.

⁷ Prion/Multimedia, London 1989. Read it at <<https://tinyurl.com/y8ogopmx>> or <https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=EzRysIeBNgYC&pg=PA1&lpg=PA1&dq=Who+is+Michael+Milan?&source=bl&ots=ri_j0W2jC4&sig=PbQqf6no7szxTwcitt155E--GiM&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjlsory4aXZAhWFJVAKHUxUC3k4ChDoAQhNMAY#v=onepage&q=Who%20is%20Michael%20Milan%3F&f=false>.

claims to have been part of a group of gangsters recruited by J. Edgar Hoover after WW2 to do violence in the national interest at Hoover's behest. He wrote that, after the Kennedy assassination. Hoover said to him: 'I'll just say: Johnson. No doubt. We stand away.'⁸ Many years later I saw The Men on the 6th Floor website⁹ which advocates the LBJ-dunit thesis and I borrowed Anthony Frewin's copy of the book which the site was promoting. I was immediately taken with it, but not because the authors had much evidence. What was striking about the book was how *little* the authors knew about the extant assassination literature¹⁰ and how *little* their informant, Native American Lawrence 'Loy' Factor, knew and told them. All Factor said was that he had been recruited by a man he knew only as 'Wallace' and paid in advance to fire his rifle at someone. That someone turned out to be Kennedy. The book centrally describes the authors' attempts to identify 'Wallace'. This was Malcolm 'Mac' Wallace, they discovered, one of LBJ's entourage. He was identified for them by LBJ's former mistress, Madeleine Brown, who lived in Dallas and had independently concluded that Wallace was involved in the dirty deed (although she had no evidence).

There was one little detail in the Factor story which resonated with me. On Factor's account, after leaving the Texas Book Depository, he was dropped at the bus station to get a bus back to where he lived. Of course: a poor Native American wouldn't have a car. The only people I have seen hitch-hiking in America were Native Americans.

Such minor details should have no influence on how one assesses a proposition; but they do. Another little detail looms larger than perhaps it should: the fact that Robert Caro chose to omit Billie Sol Estes entirely from his account of LBJ in the 1960s. Caro's quartet of books about LBJ are a monument – perhaps *the* monument – in American political biography. Caro is unflinching in presenting LBJ's bizarre, obnoxious personality, how he got rich by what used to be called influence-peddling and how, long after his death, some people were still afraid to talk about him. Billie Sol Estes was one of the biggest crooks exposed in sixties America – big enough to be the cover of an issue of *Time* magazine. He talked repeatedly about funding LBJ and later about LBJ's role in the assassination, yet he is not mentioned by Caro.

⁸ pp. 209/210. This page citation refers to the hardback. The pagination of the version on-line is apparently different. I have no idea if the book is an invention and no means of assessing it.

⁹ <<http://home.earthlink.net/~sixthfloor/>>

¹⁰ Ironically, their ignorance of the literature meant they did not dismiss the claims of Loy Factor at the outset.

For what we might call serious JFK researchers – the kind of people who *will* be examining the National Archives JFK collections – Loy Factor, Billie Sol Estes and Madeleine Brown are all unreliable sources. But since we are not going to get official paper to explain Dealey Plaza to us, we have to make do with what we have; and the hypothesis with the best evidence to support it at present is that, while the CIA were undoubtedly running Oswald, LBJ's gang organised the shooting.

Agency voices

The testimony of two other ignored or discredited figures, Chauncey Holt and E. Howard Hunt, is also relevant. Holt said that *after the assassination* he realised that the CIA had been setting Oswald up to carry the can for a fake assassination attempt on JFK (for which Holt provided unwitting technical support). Towards the end of his life Hunt identified LBJ and some senior CIA people as behind the assassination proper. You might think that the stories of a CIA contract agent (Holt) and a senior CIA officer (Hunt) would be received with enthusiasm. The CIA is at the top of the list of potential culprits for most researchers and here is what had previously been missing: CIA personnel confessing to knowledge of the event. But they were received with indifference or suspicion.

If they were aware of Chauncey Holt at all, most JFK researchers seem to have dismissed him soon after he appeared in the early 1990s. Holt claimed to have been one of the 'tramps' photographed on Dealey Plaza. This claim seemed to have been disproven by the release of Dallas Police records of the tramps' arrests and Holt wasn't one of them. In actual fact, two sets of 'tramps' were arrested, one very soon after the assassination. This is the trio whose police records were released. The second group was apprehended nearly two hours later. Holt was in this second group, who had documentation giving them cover as agents of the ATF.¹¹ They were photographed being *escorted* to the police station but were not arrested and thus generated no official paper.¹² Few seem to have read Holt's posthumous book.¹³

Hunt's confession was almost universally dismissed. This, for example, is the (anonymous) comment on the Mary Ferrell site:

¹¹ Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives: ATF Home Page <<https://www.atf.gov/>>

¹² Details at <www.lobster-magazine.co.uk/free/lobster71/lob71-jfk-three-tramps.pdf>.

¹³ On Holt's story, start with the long interview with him at <<http://jfkcountercoup.blogspot.co.uk/2009/12/chauncey-holts-execution-of-oswald.html>>.

'Hunt's story has been challenged due to its lack of corroboration, its internal inconsistencies and Hunt's failure to provide any details from his activities in 1963 which would support it. Some will accept Hunt's confession as the truth.

For others, Hunt's naming of LBJ at the top of the plot will be seen as a bit of "spin" to present the assassination as a "rogue operation", deflecting attention from higher-level sponsors within the government. For that matter, Hunt was not necessarily in a position to know the ultimate authors of the conspiracy.

For others, the confession will be dismissed, seen as a parting gift to a ne'er-do-well son or perhaps a "last laugh" on America from a man who hated Kennedy with a passion.¹⁴

What a contrast there is between the reception given to Hunt and the claims of Philip Agee, Frank Snepp and John Stockwell, CIA officers who wrote memoirs in the 1970s. But that trio were writing about the CIA from a critical or left perspective – whence most of the JFK researchers are coming – and Hunt was a right-wing cold warrior.

Hunt's naming of LBJ to his son was prefigured in his 2007 memoir, *American Spy: My Secret History in the CIA, Watergate, and Beyond*, written before his 'confession', which contained this paragraph:

'Having Kennedy liquidated, thus elevating himself to the presidency without having to work for it himself, could have been a very tempting and logical move on Johnson's part. . . LBJ had the money and the connections to manipulate the scenario in Dallas and is on record as having convinced JFK to make the appearance in the first place. He further tried unsuccessfully to engineer the passengers of each vehicle, trying to get his good buddy, Gov. (John) Connolly, to ride with him instead of in JFK's car – where. . . . he would have been out of danger.'¹⁵

Hunt gave his son, St John, a written account of his knowledge of the plot. The version reported in *Rolling Stone* begins:

'It starts out with LBJ again, connecting him to Cord Meyer, then goes on: "Cord Meyer discusses a plot with [David Atlee] Phillips who brings in Wm.

¹⁴ <https://www.maryferrell.org/pages/Confession_of_Howard_Hunt.html> This entry has been edited since I first read it. The original version was even more critical. See also Jefferson Morley's similar comments at <<http://jfkfacts.org/deathbed-confession-howard-hunt/#more-23876>>.

¹⁵ I haven't read this book but this quotation is cited by John Simkin, who is entirely reliable, at <<http://spartacus-educational.com/USAjohnsonLB.htm>>.

Harvey and Antonio Veciana. He meets with Oswald in Mexico City. . . . Then Veciana meets w/ Frank Sturgis in Miami and enlists David Morales in anticipation of killing JFK there. But LBJ changes itinerary to Dallas, citing personal reasons.”¹⁶

By the time Hunt’s confession appeared after his death in 2007, Phillips, Veciana, Sturgis and Morales were already being discussed by the Kennedy assassination researchers. They were some of the usual suspects. Described as a CIA hit-man, Morales was the subject of a chapter in Larry Hancock’s excellent *Someone Would Have Talked* the year before;¹⁷ and, while drunk, is reliably reported to have said of Kennedy, ‘We took care of that son of a bitch, didn’t we?’¹⁸ Veciana and Phillips had been identified – initially by Anthony Summers, I think – as being involved in manipulating Oswald; and (the apparently not very reliable) Marita Lorenz said she was in Dallas with Frank Sturgis, some Cubans (including Orlando Bosch) and ‘Ossie’ (Oswald) the day before the shooting.¹⁹

In 1978 a magazine article by former CIA officer Victor Marchetti claimed that the CIA were prepared, if necessary, to do a ‘limited hang-out’ on the assassination at hearings of the House Select Committee on Assassinations, then taking place. This process, Marchetti said, would have meant the blame being put on some ‘renegade’ CIA people – including Frank Sturgis and E. Howard Hunt (both of whom were alleged to have been in Dallas on the day of the assassination).²⁰ But Bill Kelly shows with official documents that Sturgis was apparently not CIA but military.²¹ Hunt eventually sued the publisher of

¹⁶ Erik Hedegaard, ‘The Last Confession of E. Howard Hunt’, *Rolling Stone* (March, 2007) at <<https://tinyurl.com/ybrl9pm4>> or <<https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/features/the-last-confession-of-e-howard-hunt-20070405>>. The handwritten original can be read – albeit with difficulty – at the rear of St John’s book at <<https://cryptome.org/2012/07/bond-hunt.pdf>>.

¹⁷ Southlake, Texas: JFK Lancer Production and publications, 2006.

¹⁸ The account of Morales’ drunken outburst is in David Talbot’s account of Morales is at <<https://tinyurl.com/y6vw6nwl>> or <https://www.salon.com/2015/11/22/inside_the_plot_to_kill_jfk_the_secret_story_of_the_cia_and_what_really_happened_in_dallas/>.

¹⁹ See for example <<http://www.jfk-online.com/lorenz.html>> and <<http://spartacus-educational.com/JFKlorenzM.htm>>. Thinking of John Armstrong’s two Oswalds thesis, if we take her seriously, the ‘Ossie’ with her was Lee, not Harvey Oswald.

²⁰ Marchetti’s article can be read at <<https://tinyurl.com/y8c7sj49>> or <<https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP81M00980R000600230023-6.pdf>>.

²¹ See <<https://tinyurl.com/y8gq7uyb>> or <<http://jfkcountercoup2.blogspot.co.uk/2013/04/frank-sturgis-run-by-us-military-not-cia.htm>>

the newspaper but he lost (after a retrial and appeal) because he couldn't prove where he had been on 22 November 1963.²²

Was the CIA really prepared to do this? Marchetti heard this from sources of his within the Agency and they might have been misinforming him to mislead the Committee. Nor is it clear what this meant. Were his Agency sources telling Marchetti that Hunt and Sturgis *had* been involved at Dallas? Or were they merely telling him that the Agency were prepared to use them as sacrificial lambs?

The 'unusual' suspect was Cord Meyer, about whom there is little on record and nothing at all linking him to Dallas. It is reported that he had an antipathy to JFK originating in 1945 when the priapic Kennedy tried to pull Meyer's wife, Mary²³ If this is true, the fact that the by then divorced Mary Meyer became one of JFK's sexual partners in the 1960s, may have increased Meyer's animus.²⁴ Despite having ended WW2 as a liberal internationalist, Meyer became an obsessive, even paranoid anti-communist and may have persuaded himself that JFK was a threat to the Republic.²⁵ In his hand-written sketch of the conspiracy E. Howard Hunt began it with: '1962 LBJ *recruits* Cord Meyer'. (emphasis added)²⁶

The fake assassination attempt

Chauncey Holt thought he was part of the plan by Desmond Fitzgerald, the head of the CIA's anti-Castro operations, to run a fake assassination attempt on JFK and blame the (publicly) pro-Castro Oswald. But, given the virtually unlimited resources available to Fitzgerald, would he have tried to organise merely one such attempt? Surely not: things go wrong; the patsy might not be in the right place on the day. And the patsy is the key, for both a fake or real attempt. Shooting an American president from long range wasn't that difficult then. (It would be much more difficult now.) The tricky part was providing an account of the event which would satisfy the inquiry which followed it. It had to be assassination (real or phoney) *plus* explanation. Therefore let us assume

²² This is described by Mark Lane, who was lawyer for the publication, in his *Plausible Denial* (London: Plexus, 1992). Davis Talbot discusses this in the essay cited in note 17.

²³ Once again we owe this to the incredibly assiduous John Simkin. See <<http://educationforum.ipbhost.com/topic/3625-cord-meyer-and-the-assassination-of-jfk/>>

²⁴ And this may also explain (a) Mary Meyer's murder and (b) the intense interest of James Angleton in her diary, which he found and suppressed.

²⁵ On Meyer's anti-communism see <<http://spartacus-educational.com/JFKmeyerC.htm>>.

²⁶ <<https://cryptome.org/2012/07/bond-hunt.pdf>> p. 124

that Fitzgerald had more than one such plan.

Paul Bleau is the author of a very interesting essay²⁷ about the various patsies we know about associated with apparent assassination conspiracies. There were five. Oswald, of course, in Dallas. For an attempt in Los Angeles in June 1963, Vaughn Marlowe.²⁸ A Korean war vet, Marlowe was a member of Los Angeles chapter of the Fair Play for Cuba Committee (FPCC) and Congress of Racial Equality, with links to the American Civil Liberties Union and Socialist Workers Party. Marlowe also travelled to Mexico on behalf of the FPCC in 1962, visited the Mexico City Cuban embassy to try and get a visa to travel to Cuba and met with Mexican communists while there.²⁹ This political CV is strikingly similar to Oswald's.

The plot about which most is known was in Chicago, on 2 November, 1963. Here the patsy was apparently going to be Thomas Vallee, like Oswald a former Marine, but with no Cuban connections. But the apparent would-be shooters were detected before the event.³⁰

In Tampa, Florida, on the morning of 18 November, the apparent patsy for an attempt was a Cuban exile named Gilbert Policarpo Lopez, who also had many similarities with Oswald: links with the Fair Play for Cuba Committee (FPCC) and the Soviet Union, and a trip to Mexico City.³¹ In Miami, later the same day, the designated patsy was Santiago Garriga, who, like Oswald, also had Cuban links and had started a branch of the FPCC.

Bleau presents this collection of patsies as being part of assassination plots. But given the striking similarities between the back-stories of Oswald, Lopez, Garriga and Marlowe, it is much more likely they were all part of Fitzgerald's plan to pin a phoney assassination attempt on the Castro supporters in the US and, by extension, on Cuba. And four patsies and four apparent assassination attempts implies a very large operation indeed. The

²⁷ Paul Bleau, 'The Three Failed Plots to Kill JFK: The Historians' Guide on how to Research his Assassination – with an addendum' at <<https://tinyurl.com/yczypwr4>> or <<https://kennedysandking.com/john-f-kennedy-articles/the-three-failed-plots-to-kill-jfk-the-historians-guide-on-how-to-research-his-assassination>>.

²⁸ See note 27.

²⁹ See note 27.

³⁰ An introduction to the subject is at <<https://riversong.wordpress.com/jfk-assassination-plan-a/>>. The best account is in chapter 5 of James W. Douglas, *JFK and the Unspeakable* (New York: Orbis, 2008).

³¹ See William Kelly, 'The Tampa Plot in Retrospect' at <<http://jfkcountercoup.blogspot.co.uk/2012/07/tampa-plot-in-retrospect.html>>.

only one of the known patsies who doesn't fit this profile is Vallee in Chicago. I think that only the Chicago event was an assassination attempt proper; and from the sketchy details we have of it, like the Dallas shooting, it was not a professional intelligence operation.³²

Who needed to know?

The shooting in Dallas blew Desmond Fitzgerald's operation to blame a phoney attempt on Oswald. How well insulated was the plan? On the need-to-know basis, who needed to know? Not the Director of the CIA, apparently, who telephoned the new president Johnson the next day to tell him that the Agency had information linking Oswald to an 'international conspiracy'.³³ This was quickly squashed. The Cuban link to Oswald might have been appropriate for a fake attempt, but was far too dangerous with a dead president, especially with a live patsy who would talk. (Killing Oswald must have been part of the original plan.) To my knowledge there is no information on how 'the line' was handed down, and by whom, within the national security establishment. We do know that a CIA media asset, journalist Joe Alsop, was given the task of persuading new president Johnson to abandon his proposed Texas inquiry into the shooting and create a much grander national inquiry to establish the 'lone assassin' story.³⁴ Reading the transcript of that conversation it is impossible to work out the subtexts of the two men. But LBJ knew whom Alsop represented and didn't take a lot of persuading.

Oswald alive and in custody was an acute problem for the sections of the CIA which had been monitoring or manipulating him – Angleton's counter-intelligence people and Fitzgerald's Cuba section – and for the Johnson gang. Jack Ruby, the only member of the conspiracy who was visible on the ground after the event – at Parkland Hospital³⁵ and at the press conference called by the Dallas District Attorney – was persuaded/instructed by persons unknown to kill Oswald. Whatever happened in Dallas that day, Ruby was part of it. Before

³² A decent summary is at <<http://22november1963.org.uk/jfk-assassination-plot-chicago>>. The plot was blown when a landlady found rifles in a room she had let.

³³ Discussed in detail by Peter Dale Scott at <https://www.history-matters.com/pds/DP3_Overview.htm>.

³⁴ The transcript of that telephone call can be read at <<http://22november1963.org.uk/lyndon-johnson-phone-call-joe-alsop>>.

³⁵ Dallas Police Files, Box 1, Folder 3, item 9, is a report about Wilma Tice who said she saw Ruby at Parkland and subsequently received a threatening phone call warning her not talk about it. <<http://jfk.ci.dallas.tx.us/box1.htm>> Ruby was also seen there by journalist Seth Kantor. See <<http://mcadams.posc.mu.edu/russ/testimony/kantor.htm>>.

his death, in an interview and in a letter, Ruby suggested that LBJ was the culprit.³⁶

It is one of the minor mysteries of the case that Ruby's steer towards LBJ was never taken seriously by the Kennedy researchers.

³⁶ <<http://www.jfkmurdersolved.com/ruby.htm>>