

Still thinking about Dallas

Robin Ramsay

Among the most recently declassified CIA documents about the Kennedy assassination are some in which CIA officers wondered if Oswald hadn't done the deed for Castro, or out of sympathy for Castro's Cuba. In a piece for Politico.com¹ journalist Philip Shenon and historian Larry Sabato discussed both the documents and how such speculation was suppressed in favour of the Warren Commission's 'lone nutter' verdict. WhoWhatWhy.com responded to Shenon/Sabato on 8 August pointing out:

'The authors are careful to preclude the possibility that anyone other than Oswald could have shot the president, while leaving the door open to the possibility that the Russians and/or Cubans were involved.'²

The authors of the piece – anonymously credited as being 'WhoWhatWhy staff' – declare that the Politico story is disinformation. In doing this they quote the Webster's dictionary definition of 'disinformation': 'false information deliberately and often covertly spread (as by the planting of rumors) in order to influence public opinion or obscure the truth.'

This characterisation is rejected by Jefferson Morley on his site JFKfacts.org where he writes:

'The word "disinformation" suggests that the authors, former *New York Times* reporter Phil Shenon and Virginia professor Larry Sabato, are deliberately making assertions they know to be false. I know Shenon and Sabato. Both are very knowledgeable about the JFK story I have no reason to believe they are making assertions they know to be false.'

In a way there is no dispute here. Shenon and Sabato discussed the newly available CIA documents. No false assertions were made or necessary; no false information was presented. It's what they *omitted* from the story which is significant. To discuss Oswald-Cuba-CIA without referring to all the information we now have showing that Oswald was working for US intelligence agencies

¹ 'How the CIA came to doubt the official story of JFK's murder' at <<http://tinyurl.com/yagu877h>> or <<http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/08/03/jfk-assassination-lone-gunman-cia-new-files-215449>>.

² <<https://whowhatwhy.org/2017/08/08/politicos-challenge-jfk-orthodoxy-isnt/>>

looks like deception by omission – disinformation by omission.³

But the omission is only deliberate *if* Shenon and Sabato know the material linking Oswald to US intelligence agencies; and it is possible that they dismiss all that kind of information as ‘conspiracy theories’ not worth their attention and are simply unaware of it. Even if they are familiar with it, Shenon is a former *New York Times* journalist and knows there is no point in trying to include this ‘other’ Oswald material: the major media – and Politico.com is part of that these days – simply won’t publish it; and Sabato is a history professor whose career and professional standing would be damaged by deviating from the received version. Both have written books about the assassination (which I haven’t read) endorsing the Warren Commission verdict.⁴

How powerful is the taboo around the Kennedy assassination? Here are a history professor and a senior journalist who have endorsed a 54 year-old, official *political* report, done in a hurry to get it out before the 1964 presidential election, which some of the Warren Commission’s own members didn’t believe,⁵ and whose key claims an undergraduate could falsify, from scratch, with a few hours work on the Internet.

Many JFK researchers are waiting for the disclosure of all the remaining CIA documents, apparently hoping they will show something significant. They won’t: no collection of official papers will have been more carefully ‘weeded’. We are probably stuck with what we have. There may be some further revelations in memoirs and confessions, but on past performance JFK researchers will ignore or trash them as they did the accounts of Chauncey Holt and E. Howard Hunt.

It was in the early 90s that Holt first publicly claimed that he was one of the three ‘tramps’ photographed while under police escort on Dealey Plaza after the assassination. His testimony is almost universally ignored these days, however, having apparently been discredited. But as I have shown,⁶ Holt’s critics got that wrong. The trashing of the confession of Hunt has been no

³ John Newman’s very dry, analytical work on CIA documents, for example, in his *Oswald and the CIA*. At another level Chauncey Holt’s account of Oswald at <<http://www.assassinationresearch.com/v3n2/v3n2holt.pdf>>.

⁴ Shenon’s, *A Cruel and Shocking Act*, was shredded by Anthony Frewin in *Lobster* 68 at <<https://www.lobster-magazine.co.uk/free/lobster68/lob68-cruel-shocking-act.pdf>>.

⁵ See, for example, <http://digitalcommons.law.uga.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1136&context=fac_pm>.

⁶ <<https://www.lobster-magazine.co.uk/free/lobster71/lob71-jfk-three-tramps.pdf>>

more rational.⁷ I find this strange. You might think that the researchers would welcome such insider memoirs/confessions, especially when both accounts refer to the CIA, the solution to the assassination favoured by most of them; and Holt's posthumous memoir confirms the picture of the Agency which had been pieced together over the last half century by the researchers: it was working with the Mob and illegally operating within the USA.

Chauncey Holt reported that he was sent to Dallas by his CIA contact to take part in an anti-Castro event being run by the then head of the CIA's Cuba desk, Desmond Fitzgerald; and while he was there saw other CIA contract agents like himself.

'The area of Dealey Plaza was swarming with contract agents of the CIA, dissident Latins and terrorists, right-wingers and many organised crime figures.'⁸

Holt implied, rather than stated, that the Agency was behind the assassination but believed that the real authors of the conspiracy – which he thought was a brilliant operation – would never be identified.⁹

E. Howard Hunt was the first CIA *officer* to say that the CIA was responsible for the assassination and identify those involved – some of the usual suspects, with the addition of one new name, Cord Meyer.¹⁰ And Meyer is significant, for at that point he was a senior figure in the Directorate of Plans,¹¹

⁷ See <<http://tinyurl.com/j6zolb4>> or <<http://www.rollingstone.com/culture/features/the-last-confession-of-e-howard-hunt-20070405>>. Those who dismissed the story said that Hunt was old, ill and under pressure from his son, St. John Hunt, and said something to please him, inventing a story about the single most controversial topic in American history. Really?

In one of the odder connections, St John Hunt has teamed up with Republican pol Roger Stone. See <<https://stonecoldtruth.com/trump-and-intelligence-threat/>>.

⁸ Chauncey Holt, *Self-portrait of a Scoundrel* (Waterville (OR): Trine Day, 2013) p. 182. I discussed this book briefly at the end of 'JFK, Chauncey Holt and the three "tramps" redux' in *Lobster* 71 at <www.lobster-magazine.co.uk/free/lobster71/lob71-jfk-three-tramps.pdf>. Suffice to say here that Holt was ill-served by Wim Dankbaar who assembled the book, and Trine Day, who published it. Neither seem to have thought that editing and proof-reading was necessary.

⁹ He suspected that he and the two other 'tramps' – Harrelson and the other man he knew as Montoya – were in position to act as back-up fall-guys in the event that the framing of Oswald went wrong.

¹⁰ See note 7. Hunt named LBJ, David Morales, Frank Sturgis, David Attlee Phillips, William Harvey and Antonio Veciana, all of whom have cropped up in the research. The new name was Cord Meyer who had never, to my knowledge, been linked to the assassination before.

¹¹ Though precisely how senior isn't quite clear. Accounts vary and there is nothing official to check them against. He was maybe no. 2 in the Directorate of Plans. Holt described him as Chief of Foreign Operations.

the covert action branch of the Agency. If anyone had the authority and the bureaucratic reach to organise an event as complex as a public presidential assassination, he did.

Cord Meyer was also named by Holt as being part of the senior group, with Fitzgerald, which was organising the anti-Castro event.

'So, late in 1963 we, in California, were among a group that, without the consent of the higher-ups in the agency, including the director or the president of the United States, were working with the Cubans to "remove" Castro by any means possible, including assassination.

Our responsibility was limited to furnishing the weaponry needed, the recruiting of personnel and providing necessary documents, some of which were in the name of Lee Harvey Oswald.'¹²

But E. Howard Hunt also named Lyndon Johnson as part of the plot and that put Hunt beyond the pale for most of the research community, for whom the LBJ-dunnit thesis *a priori* is ridiculous.

These stories of CIA involvement are a problem for those of us who think the LBJ thesis the most plausible theory so far. None of the extant sources of the LBJ theory mention the CIA and they all present the assassination as a local-grown, Texas conspiracy. Is there a way of reconciling the two accounts? There might be; but at this point we are way off into speculation.

One of the central questions in this is why they – whoever they were – decided to build the entire scheme on a Mannlicher-Carcano rifle, a cheap, unreliable weapon. The answer must be that it happened this way because Oswald owned a Mannlicher-Carcano; and as recent analysis seems to have confirmed, the photographs of him posing with the rifle and American left newspapers, both Trotskyist and Communist, were authentic (despite his claim that they had been faked).¹³

In his memoir Chauncey Holt tells us that, in the months before the assassination, the weapons workshop he ran for the CIA was investigating the Mannlicher-Carcano rifle. It was also experimenting with re-firing a bullet, previously fired by a Mannlicher-Carcano but unmarked,¹⁴ through another, better rifle, a Weatherby .263, which had been rebored to remove its lands and

¹² Holt (see note 8), p. 156.

¹³ See <<http://www.cs.dartmouth.edu/farid/downloads/publications/tr10.pdf>>.

¹⁴ 'The master reloader, working for us, theorised the these bullets had been fired in what is called "a cold shot"; that is fired using only a very strong primer, without power.' Holt (see note 8) p. 160.

grooves. Thus the bullet fired from the Weatherby would appear to have been fired from a Mannlicher-Carcano. The absence of lands and grooves, however, reduces the round's velocity and accuracy considerably. Holt thinks that it was one such round which made the shallow wound on JFK's back and then fell out (no bullet was found in the wound by the Parkland Hospital doctors). Holt's suggestion is that this was the famous 'magic bullet', CE399, found on a stretcher at Parkland Hospital, whose presence and virtually pristine condition forced the Warren Commission lawyers trying to establish the 'lone gunman' scenario to argue – with straight faces – that an unmarked bullet. . .

' . . . has gone through 15 layers of clothing, a necktie knot, 7 layers of skin, and 15 inches of tissue, shattering 4 inches of rib and a wrist bone.'¹⁵

In the scenario based on Holt's surmise, a bullet fired through a modified Weatherby .263, but apparently from a Mannlicher-Carcano, whose ownership could be traced to Oswald, hit JFK in the back. This wound was non-fatal and part of a fake assassination attempt set-up by the CIA. This would be attributed to Oswald, the defector, socialist and member of the Fair Play for Cuba Committee; and thus indirectly to Castro himself. Holt says he had been told that the 'anti-Castro event' being planned for Dallas by the CIA aimed to end the threatened *rapprochement* between Castro and Kennedy.

But if Holt's speculation about the Weatherby-fired round and CE399 is correct¹⁶ – and chances are we will never know – why a low velocity round amidst a volley of high velocity rifle fire? Assuming the low velocity round and the others came from the same people, then presumably it was used because the CIA wanted a round which would survive intact enough to be identifiable as having been fired from Oswald's gun. That plus the photographs of him posing in his backyard with gun and lefty newspapers, plus the various reports of 'Oswald' talking of killing Kennedy in the months before the event¹⁷ – the perfect frame (so long as Oswald was dead and couldn't talk about his

¹⁵ <<http://tinyurl.com/y94zc5bk>> or <<https://www.gunsamerica.com/blog/lee-harvey-oswalds-carcano-rifle-shooting-it-today/>>. If you want more details see – one of many – <<http://tinyurl.com/y9xlm7d7>> or <<https://www.history-matters.com/essays/frameup/EvenMoreMagical/EvenMoreMagical.htm>>.

¹⁶ Most of the researchers assume the bullet was planted – presumably at the hospital – to provide the link to Oswald's rifle. But would you plant a pristine round?

¹⁷ One such is discussed by Garrick Alder in his 'Deception and distraction strategies relating to the John F Kennedy Assassination' in this issue. Another is the famous 'Odio incident'. On which see <<http://www.jfk-online.com/odiohsca.html>>.

intelligence links).¹⁸ In this scenario people like Holt were duped – the word he uses – into taking part in an assassination proper.

On the other hand, if we do not assume that the fake assassination attempt and the real thing were the same people, the phoney attempt provided the context for, and concealment of, a real assassination. A patsy was in place; the CIA's role in the fake attempt meant no serious investigation would take place: concealing the CIA's bogus attempt meant concealing the real thing. Did the assassination conspirators piggy-back on the phoney attempt? Here the presence of Cord Meyer in Holt's memoir as part of the anti-Castro event and in E. Howard Hunt's account as a member of the CIA assassination plot he was invited to join is suggestive.

On the other hand, perhaps we can merge the two theories, LBJ and the CIA. Having created the perfect context for an assassination attempt, did the CIA conspirators – perhaps the crew named by E. Howard Hunt – give the nod to Vice President Johnson and his gang in Dallas and thus got Kennedy killed without having to risk doing the dirty deed themselves?

¹⁸ Presumably he was meant to be killed 'while resisting arrest'. No fool, our Lee was shouting 'I am not resisting arrest' when the Dallas Police confronted him in the cinema.