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## Will We Ever Get the Truth about JFK's Assassination?

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**Abstract.** Although the March 2025 declassification released some 77,000 pages of official documents relating to the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in November 1963, it produced no “smoking gun.” The recent eyewitness accounts – one a book and the other a documentary – do provide vital clues about what happened that day in Dallas, Texas, suggested that Kennedy was killed in a crossfire. The article details Mahoney’s own eleven-year search for evidence about the assassination which includes critical attention to the murder of prospective witnesses in the course of official investigations into the Kennedy murder as well as facts about an attempt on the president’s life on December 29, 1962 in Miami, Florida. He also discusses his discovery that Cuban counterintelligence, drawing on the reports of hundreds of its spies in south Florida during the early 1960s, spies who were shadowing Mafia and anti-Castro Cuban operatives endeavoring to assassinate Castro, may have tracked those who were plotting to kill President Kennedy.

**Keywords.** Crossfire; Autopsy, Witness murder, Mafia, CIA and Anti-Castro Cubans.

**JEL.** D72; D83; M31; P48; Z18.

### 1. Introduction

Pundits and scholars alike pretty much agree that the declassification this past March of 2,212 official documents (some 77,000 pages in total) from the National Archives relating to the assassination of President John F. Kennedy didn’t produce any smoking gun. But two startling eyewitness accounts – one a book and the other a documentary – do fill in vital clues as to what really happened during those six seconds in Dealey Plaza and their immediate aftermath at Parkland Memorial hospital. This article evaluates the probative veracity of those accounts and suggests that there is an as-yet untapped cache of top secret surveillance documents, ones that possibly tracked JFK’s killers in the weeks and months before the assassination.

The first eyewitness account is a memoir by former Special Secret Service agent Paul Landis entitled *The Final Witness: A Kennedy Secret Service Agent Breaks His Silence After 60 Years*. Landis’ narrative contains a heretofore unknown and explosive detail, one that would indicate that JFK was killed in a crossfire. The second set of eyewitness accounts is from a documentary released by Paramount+ entitled “What the Doctors Saw” – the recollections

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of seven emergency room physicians from Parkland Memorial Hospital as they tried to save the president's life in the minutes after the shooting.

### 2. "The Final Witness"

After 60 years of silence about what he experienced in Dallas, former Secret Service Special Agent Landis recounts in granular detail his memories from that day. Standing on the right running board of the Secret Service car codenamed "Halfback" that was following directly behind the presidential limo as it turned into Dealey Plaza, Landis reports that he was methodically scanning the scene when a shot rang out which he immediately recognized as a rifle report.<sup>1</sup> Turning first backward and then forward, Landis recounts seeing the seated president leaning to the left and raising up his arms, not realizing that JFK had been shot through the neck.

Landis then watched as fellow Secret Service agent Clint Hill jumped off Halfback and started sprinting toward the back of the president's limo, when a second shot rang out – one Landis thought was a miss. Seconds later, however, there was a third shot which blew apart Kennedy's head, showering Landis with "a pink spray of blood, flesh and brain matter."

Nothing about Landis's vivid reminiscence of what happened in those sequence of shots alters our more-or-less accepted understanding of how the assassination went down. But what he witnessed at the emergency entrance to Parkland Memorial Hospital certainly does -- provided you think it's credible.

Landis recounts that as he and other Secret Service agents hurried up to the parked presidential limo, they found Mrs. Kennedy, who was cradling what was left of her husband's head on her lap, unwilling to budge from her seat. Eventually, Agent Hill, having removed his coat to cover JFK's head and upper torso, convinced the First Lady to exit the car. It was at that instant, as sobbing presidential aide Dave Powers helped the Secret Service detail lift the president's body onto a waiting gurney, that Landis saw an extraordinary thing:

When Mrs. Kennedy finally stood up, I looked again at the seat and saw a bullet on top of the tufted black leather cushioning behind where she had been sitting. It was resting in a seam where the tufted leather padding ended against the car's metal body. It wasn't a bullet fragment (but) a completely intact bullet. It had been hidden behind Mrs. Kennedy all the time. No wonder I hadn't seen it sooner.

I picked it up and quickly examined it. It was approximately two inches long and in almost perfect condition. It was not distorted in any way and had rifle striations running lengthwise along its sides.

*Man, oh man, oh man, I thought. What should I do?*

Worrying that souvenir hunters might get it and not knowing what else to do, Landis put the bullet in his lapel pocket and followed Mrs. Kennedy into Trauma Room 1 where doctors desperately set about to save the life of the president. Landis watched as the Dr. Malcolm Perry, the chief surgeon at Parkland, did a tracheotomy on the president, making a large incision into Kennedy's throat in order to insert a breathing device.

<sup>1</sup> Riding in the seated section of Halfback, about 50 feet behind the presidential limousine, were JFK's two closest aides, Dave Powers and Kenny O'Donnell.

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When one of the other physicians called out for people to clear the jampacked trauma room so that the doctors could do their work, Landis saw his chance. Taking the slug out of his pocket, he placed it on the stretcher next to Kennedy's feet. He remembered thinking: "This bullet is important evidence. A doctor will find it, and it might be helpful during the autopsy." In the hubbub, no one noticed what he had done. Some ten minutes later, after two priests had given the president the last rites, JFK was declared dead and his body was placed in a casket which was then wheeled out of Trauma Room 1. Then there was a key development.

Minutes before Mrs. Kennedy, Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson and the presidential detail departed Parkland to head for the airport for the trip home to Washington D.C., a maintenance man named Darrell Tomlinson made a surprise discovery while clearing a ground floor hallway in the hospital. As Tomlinson pushed a stretcher with bloody sheets on it back against the wall, he saw a bullet slug roll out from under the stretcher mat. He picked it up and gave it to Parkland's chief of security who, in turn, delivered it to an FBI agent about to accompany the new president back to Washington.

When autopsy doctors at Bethesda Naval Hospital first surveyed the body of the dead president later that evening, they found a bullet wound in his back about 5 and 1/2 inches below the top of his collar. Probing the wound, however, those pathologists found that they could insert no more than half a pinky finger into the hole. When the FBI informed the autopsy team that it had possession of a slug that had been found on a stretcher at Parkland, the Bethesda pathologists surmised that the bullet had fallen out the shallow wound in JFK's back, possibly as a result of the forceful heart massage administered on the dying president by Dr. Malcolm Perry at Parkland earlier that day.

But the journey of that slightly compressed slug, the one that Special Agent Landis had placed – or so he said 60 years later – on JFK's stretcher, was only beginning. Within days, as federal law enforcement confected its lone gunman theory about the assassination, the bullet would migrate, amazingly enough, to another stretcher, that of wounded Texas Governor John Connally. Ultimately, it would become the probative centerpiece of the Warren Commission's conclusion that Lee Harvey Oswald alone had killed President Kennedy.

The strange story about Commission Exhibit 399, as the Warren Commission labeled that recovered slug, began on the morning of November 23. When Dr. J. Thornton Boswell (one of the pathologists doing the autopsy on JFK at Bethesda Naval Hospital) called Dr. Perry at Parkland Memorial hospital, he learned something he didn't know -- that Dr. Perry's tracheotomy incision in Kennedy's throat had cut over a small, pencil-wide bullet hole that Perry and his fellow physicians at Parkland had identified as "an entrance wound." But this meant more than one assassin since that shot would have had to come from somewhere in front of Kennedy's car and not behind it where Oswald had been firing.

FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover immediately saw the problem, alerting the White House that, "We need to have something issued so we can convince the public that Oswald is the real assassin." The Bethesda pathologists then reversed the Parkland trauma team's provisional determination about the wound in Kennedy's neck. They posited that the pencil-wide aperture in Kennedy's throat was now an *exit* wound, not an *entrance* wound – thereby

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establishing that the shots, all supposedly by Oswald, had come from above and behind the motorcade.

To FBI agents Francis X. O'Neill and James Sibert, who were on hand to observe JFK's autopsy at Bethesda, this made no sense. "I do not see how the bullet that entered below the shoulder in the back could have come out the front of the throat," O'Neill later recalled. But there was more. Having tentatively concluded that only two of three shots Oswald had fired had actually struck the president, federal investigators now concocted a further canard regarding the recovered slug. That bullet, supposedly having first pierced JFK's back before somehow exiting his throat, had then struck Governor Connally in the back, ripping through his chest, shattering ribs and puncturing a lung before presumptively continuing on, smashing his right wrist bone at its thickest point and then penetrating Connally's left thigh at which point it had fallen out onto *his* stretcher almost perfectly intact. The "magic bullet" was born.

Half the members of the Warren Commission didn't buy the theory, nor did Governor Connally who insisted that he had been shot from another gun. Warren Commission board member Senator Richard Russell was so upset by the effort to railroad the lone-assassin thesis by Commission staff that he telephoned President Lyndon Johnson. "I don't believe that the same bullet that hit Kennedy hit Connally," Russell said in the taped phone call. LBJ replied, "I don't either."

What further impelled incredulity about the Warren Commission's conclusion that Oswald had acted alone was the 26.6-second Zapruder film of the assassination. As noted forensic pathologist, Cyril H. Wecht M.D., J.D., recalled after viewing the 8-millimeter film: "If the same bullet struck both Kennedy and Connally, then why did the film show the president reacting immediately upon impact but the governor taking approximately 1.5 seconds before he reacted to being hit?" Wecht called the single bullet theory "sheer unadulterated nonsense."

So, if Kennedy and Connally were, in fact, hit by different bullets, how did the slug found by Special Agent Landis come to rest on the back seat of the presidential limousine? Presidential historian James Robenalt, who worked with Landis on his book, reminds us about the shallow wound in Kennedy's back, the one into which three of the Bethesda pathologists had only managed to insert no more than half their pinky fingers. Robenalt ventures a plausible answer -- that "an undercharged bullet had shallowly penetrated Kennedy's back before being dislodged by possibly the fatal blast that knocked him backwards and prone to the left."

Although **Final Witness** steers clear about any overall judgment as to who killed JFK, the evidentiary import of the slug Landis says he found leaves only one conclusion: more than one assassin.

### 3. "What the Doctors Saw"

The Paramount+ documentary, "What the Doctors Saw," also released in the fall of 2023, casts additionally doubt about the lone assassin thesis. Interviewed both individually and collectively, seven of the physicians who treated the mortally-wounded president at Parkland Memorial Hospital (two were then medical students) repeat the very same conclusions that they had made and memorialized in notes and drawings on November 22, 1963: first,

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that the wound in Kennedy's throat was an entrance wound; and second, that the gaping wound in the right side of the back of his head was an exit wound – i.e. the collective result of multiple shooters. They also explain how their expert determinations were either dismissed or repressed by federal law enforcement and the Warren Commission.

That cover-up began within hours of Kennedy's killing. On the afternoon of November 22, after together reviewing their notes and drawings, four of the doctors who had treated JFK met with the press in Parkland hospital. At the conclusion of that encounter, a Secret Service agent approached the lead physician, Dr. Malcolm Perry, warning him: "You must never, ever, again say that that was an entrance wound if you know what's good for you."

The last half of the Barbara Shearer-directed documentary deals with JFK's autopsy at the Bethesda Naval Hospital. The standard critique of that event has been that it was "botched," but one eyewitness who assisted in the post-mortem examination of Kennedy's cadaver insists that the body was surgically altered in advance of the autopsy and the evidence of the fatal shot to Kennedy's head deliberately concealed. 21 year-old Navy corpsman and trained medical technologist James Jenkins reports that JFK's brain "practically fell out" of its cranial cavity at the start of the autopsy because the brain stem had been surgically severed in advance of the procedure, a contention affirmed by the contemporaneous memorandum of record done by the two FBI agents observing the autopsy. Jenkins recalls also observing a small bullet hole in the right side of Kennedy's head "slightly above and forward of the ear just above the hairline" which he took to be an entrance wound given its size. This wound was neither analyzed during the autopsy nor mentioned in the final autopsy report.

But the most extreme alteration, at least in the view of the Parkland doctors and three of those assisting in the autopsy at Bethesda, relates to the gaping wound in the back of JFK's head. The fatal head shot had blown out a substantial part of Kennedy's brain into the car and out onto the street. Mrs. Kennedy, having recovered a chunk of it from on the trunk of the limo as it accelerated out of Dealey Plaza, handed it over to the first doctor she had seen as she entered the hospital. Three of the Parkland doctors and the treating nurse Audrey Bell all recall seeing the massive wound in the back of the president's head and what remained of his cerebellum protruding out of it. Standing at the head of the operating table in Trauma Room 1, Dr. Robert McClelland reports seeing brain matter drop out onto the table itself.

At Bethesda, however, there was a deliberate effort to cover up that wound. Toward the end of the autopsy, as medical technologist James Jenkins recounts in his memoir, a man walked into the autopsy theatre with a zip-tied bag filled with bone fragments. At that point, the pathologists began placing those fragments into the hole in the back of Kennedy's head but "there weren't enough bone pieces to complete the defect to the skull." Accordingly, Jenkins writes, "they took a flap of scalp that was at the back of the head and stretched it back to see if it could be used to cover the still open wound in the skull."

When the Parkland doctors received the official autopsy photos, they were aghast at what they saw. In the documentary, the physicians variously denounce the photos as "doctored," "manipulated" and "tampered with." Dr. Michael Baden, the chair of the Forensic Pathology Panel of the House Select Committee on Assassinations, however, takes the opposite view in his interview for the documentary. He staunchly insists that the autopsy showed

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that JFK's cerebrum was "completely intact" and that the huge wound five doctors and the treating nurse had observed at Parkland was instead "a normal half-inch bullet wound to the back of the head."

What role – if any -- Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, who was huddled with Mrs. Jacqueline Kennedy and other family members on the seventeenth floor of the Bethesda Naval Hospital during the autopsy, may have played in the systematic alteration of his brother's body remains murky. We know that Dr. George Burkley, President Kennedy's personal physician, went back and forth from the autopsy theatre to the suite to brief the Kennedys about what was transpiring below. At Jackie Kennedy's side during much of that long night was her dead husband's best friend, Dave Powers, who had witnessed the assassination from his seat in the car directly behind the president's. It was Powers who, many years later, would insistently pull me into the mystery of who killed John F. Kennedy.

As they sat together at the naval hospital that night, both Powers and Kenny O'Donnell told RFK that their distinct memory was that the fatal shot that had shattered President Kennedy's skull had come from somewhere in front and to the side, an area that later would be known as the grassy knoll.

"And what was RFK's reaction?" I asked in my exchange with Powers on November 10, 1986.

"He didn't want to hear it," Powers replied.

"But why did O'Donnell tell the Warren Commission otherwise – that the shots had come from behind the car?"

Powers said nothing before putting his hands over his face.\*

\*O'Donnell later informed House Speaker Tip O'Neill that he thought "two shots had come from behind the fence" (namely on the grassy knoll). When O'Neill asked O'Donnell why he had told the Warren Commission otherwise, he replied: "The family – everybody wanted this thing behind them."

### 4. "Clean-up"

I had first met Dave Powers in March 1975 at the run-down World War II-vintage federal records center (then housing some 15 million documents and manuscripts from the Kennedy administration as well as assorted memorabilia) in Waltham, Massachusetts. At the time, Jacqueline Kennedy and her brother-in-law Senator Edward M. Kennedy were searching for a permanent site for the Kennedy Library somewhere in the greater Boston area. In the interim, Dave, with the official title of Library curator, served as the keeper of the Kennedy flame, ebulliently recounting cherished stories and anecdotes from his dramatic days as JFK's irrepressible sidekick.

In October 1979, when the Kennedy papers were moved to their towering, permanent home on Colombia Point overlooking Dorchester Bay in south Boston, Powers went with them. Among the first things a visitor would see in Dave's new office was a framed dedication awarded to him by JFK at a surprise birthday party in March 1962: "Presented to David F. Powers on his 50th Birthday. In recognition of your athletic ability in hiking to my icebox to drink my Heineken."

If there was a darker side to Camelot – and of course there was -- you certainly wouldn't find it at the I.M. Pei-designed monument to the glamor, brilliance and high ideals of the Kennedy brothers. Nor did anyone at the Library, least of all Dave Powers, permit, much less countenance, discussion

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about the continuing controversy over who killed John F. Kennedy. Or so I thought.

In my first years as a Kennedy Library researcher (which resulted in a book about JFK and Africa), Powers proved to be unusually generous in opening doors for me and making all manner of suggestions about who to see and why. He was particularly adept at imparting “the Charlestown treatment” (as he called the rough-and-ready style he had honed as a street kid in that gritty Irish neighborhood on the Boston waterfront) to any ex-Kennedy potentate who dared rebuff my request for an oral history interview. One such was the haughty Boston Brahmin, McGeorge Bundy, former dean of the Harvard faculty, who had gone on to serve as JFK’s national security adviser. No sooner did Powers get through to the then-president of the Ford Foundation than Bundy himself put in a call to me at the Library research room graciously offering to sit down with me at *my* earliest convenience.

In 1986, thanks to Dave singlehandedly short-circuiting what was supposed to have been a national search for the selection of the first John F. Kennedy Scholar at the Library and the University of Massachusetts, I got the appointment. Summoning me to his office, Powers lost no time in setting forth, what certainly sounded like, marching orders – namely, “a book that explains why the assassination happened.”

I couldn’t quite believe what I was hearing and made no response.

Powers then pulled open the top drawer to his desk and took out a document, handing it to me. It was a sworn affidavit dated May 18, 1964 in which Powers had recounted what he had seen in Dealey Plaza while riding in “Halfback” (the Secret Service car), some 50 feet behind the presidential limousine.

As I began to read it, Dave said, “The FBI tried to interview me but I told them to fuck off. Same with any testimony before the Warren Commission.”

Toward the end of the statement, Powers had written:

My first impression was that the shots came from the right and overhead (the locus of the grassy knoll), but I also had a fleeting impression that the noise appeared to come the front in the area of the triple overpass (adjacent to the grassy knoll). This may have resulted from my feeling when I looked forward toward the overpass, that we, might have ridden into an ambush.

“Dave. I ‘m not the guy to do this,” I said.

“Yes, you are.” Gone was the warm bravura, replaced now by an edgy insistence: “I’ll help you,” he said. As I sat there in silence, Powers went to work.

“The first call I would make,” he said as he thumbed through his Rolodex, “would be to Walter Sheridan.” I knew something about Sheridan, the former FBI agent who had also done a stint at the National Security Agency before teaming up with Robert F. Kennedy in 1958 as his chief investigator into the Mafia. Later, while working at CBS News in the mid-1960s, Sheridan had produced an authoritative documentary about the investigation of New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison into the Kennedy assassination. He was someone in the know in every sense.

As I listened, Powers let Sheridan know why he was calling – to follow up on something Senator Robert F. Kennedy had said in December 1966 to former JFK speechwriter Richard Goodwin about the assassination: “I never thought it was the Cubans. If anyone was involved, it was organized crime. But there’s

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nothing I can do about it.” I remember wondering whether this was just RFK’s hunch, or something darker -- something he dared not reveal.

Powers then put Sheridan on speaker phone, introducing me in the sort of glowing language presumably reserved for someone getting the Charlestown treatment. I told Sheridan that I had no background on the Kennedy assassination, asking him where I might start. “Take a look at the cleanup,” he replied. He promised to send me his files on David Ferrie and Eladio del Valle -- two individuals who had been targeted in the first months of the Kennedy assassination investigation launched by New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison in 1966.

Ferrie, I remembered, was a former Eastern Airlines pilot who had been fired for “crimes against nature.” In the early 1960s, he had participated in anti-Castro gunrunning into Cuba and later was reported to have flown Louisiana Mafia boss Carlos Marcello back from Guatemala where he had been unceremoniously deported by the Kennedy Justice Department. The day after JFK’s assassination in Dallas, the Secret Service and the FBI, acting on a tip that Ferrie had been in Dallas on November 22<sup>nd</sup> and was to have piloted Lee Harvey Oswald as part of a getaway scheme, went looking for him in the greater New Orleans area. On November 25, 1963, Ferrie was questioned by agents, admitting that he had been in Texas on the 22<sup>nd</sup>, but in Houston, not Dallas, where he had driven six hours to go ice-skating, he said. Ferrie denied ever having met Lee Harvey Oswald.

The file Sheridan sent me certainly suggested otherwise. In addition to a photograph of both Ferrie and Oswald at a Civil Air Patrol picnic in 1955 in New Orleans, Garrison’s investigation had turned up eyewitnesses who reported seeing the two men together in the summer of 1963. On February 21, 1967, the New Orleans DA, after having secretly interrogated him for a period of days, released Ferrie from protective custody. The next morning the 48 year-old was found dead in his apartment. New Orleans coroner Nicholas Chetta subsequently concluded that Ferrie had died from a cerebral hemorrhage though in his shabby little apartment authorities found two unsigned suicide notes. On the bottom of his copy of the coroner’s report, Sheridan had penned his own conclusion: “Murdered.”

‘Clean-up’ in the case of another Kennedy assassination suspect, Eladio del Valle, was more definitive. Del Valle was an anti-Castro Cuban émigré with close criminal ties to Florida Mafia leader, Santos Trafficante. Cuban counterintelligence characterized him as a *sicario* (hitman). Within a few hours of Ferrie’s death, as two of Garrison’s investigators were working with Miami-Dade police to track him down and bring him in for questioning, del Valle’s body was found in a Miami parking lot. He had been tortured, his head split open with an ax, and shot through the heart for added demonstrative measure. This was *omerta* the old-country way.

### 5. Clean-up: Part Two

With Sheridan’s help, I began tracking the “clean-up” – if that’s, in fact, what it was – occasioned by successive congressional investigations into the Kennedy murder. The Church Committee (1975-76) had plumbed the CIA’s partnership with the Mafia in their joint effort to assassinate Cuban premier Fidel Castro in the early 1960s. In the course of doing so, they had come upon murky links between that conspiracy and the Kennedy assassination. One of

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those subpoenaed to testify on both those counts was Salvatore “Sam” Giancana, the one-time godfather of the Chicago “Outfit.” Shortly before he was to fly to Washington in June 1975 to be interrogated, he was executed in his home in Hyde Park. The FBI later traced the .22 caliber murder weapon to the Tamiami Gun Shop on SW 8<sup>th</sup> Street in Miami – a favored weapons entrepot for anti-Castro Cubans and their CIA and Mafia handlers.

My research at the Chicago Crime Commission into Giancana’s killing revealed some intriguing, though hardly dispositive, clues. There were tape recordings of Giancana and his lieutenants swearing vengeance against the Kennedys for having used every means, legal and illegal, to expose and destroy them while secretly contracting with some of the same mobsters in the government’s venture to kill Castro.

At the center of that grim enterprise was “Handsome Johnny” Rosselli, who had once golfed with Kennedy patriarch, Joseph P. Kennedy. In February 1960, Frank Sinatra, Rosselli’s protégé, introduced Senator Jack Kennedy to Johnny’s former girlfriend, Judy Campbell, at a party in Las Vegas. Fast forward to March 22, 1962 when FBI director J. Edgar Hoover arrived at the White House to confront President Kennedy about some 70 wiretapped calls from JFK to Miss Campbell at Rosselli’s apartment phone number in Brentwood. By that time, “Colonel” Rosselli was in south Florida pressing forward with the CIA’s plot to murder Castro. Among his operational assets was a sniper training base hacked out of a mangrove forest on Point Mary, Key Largo.

What role Rosselli may have played in the Kennedy assassination remains inconclusive. (On November 22, 1963, he was staying at the New Frontier hotel in Las Vegas, having taken a flight from Phoenix, Arizona four days prior.) But the 54 year-old mafioso’s movements and associations were being actively surveilled throughout this period by Cuban counterintelligence agents working *sub rosa* in the U.S.

In December 1966, “Handsome Johnny” was able to mount a false flag operation of devastating effectiveness to impel the CIA, the FBI and the Johnson administration, wittingly or otherwise, to slow down New Orleans DA Jim Garrison’s investigation into the Kennedy murder. Through Edward P. Morgan, a well-connected D.C. attorney who had once represented Meyer Lansky, Rosselli seeded his version of the conspiracy: that Robert F. Kennedy had approved an assassination plot that backfired, resulting in the assassination of his brother. A sniper team sent to Havana in 1963 to kill Castro had supposedly been captured, tortured and redeployed back into the U.S. to assassinate President Kennedy. Rosselli called it, “the turnaround.” Clean-up indeed.

President Johnson, anxious to wreak payback on RFK for having dared to criticize his policy in Vietnam, demanded that the FBI and the CIA drop everything and investigate the claim. The Kennedys, LBJ said to more than one reporter, had been running “a damn Murder Incorporated in the Caribbean.” LBJ summoned Bobby Kennedy to the Oval Office, railing at him for having “blood on your hands.”

Stung to silence, RFK, steadfastly refused to countenance mounting calls to reconsider the verdict of the Warren Commission. There was simply too much to hide. The cunning Rosselli, with the FBI and the CIA surveilling his every move, now went to work on the New Orleans DA Jim Garrison. He first lured him into a private meeting in Las Vegas before then leaking to the press via Morgan that the mob was picking up the prosecutor’s gambling debts. In a

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top-secret internal memo, the CIA worried that it was the next to be fingered: “The Rosselli-Garrison contact in Las Vegas is particularly disturbing. It lends substance to reports that Castro had something to do with the Kennedy assassination in retaliation for American’s attempts on Castro’s life. We do *not* know that Castro actually tried to retaliate, but we do know that there were plots against Castro. Unhappily, it now appears that Garrison may also know this” (emphasis in the original).

In the end, Rosselli’s false flag stymied Garrison’s investigation into the Mafia, diverting the DA into a wild goose chase of absurd indictments that ultimately went nowhere. The ancillary effect, however, was to enable the CIA and the FBI to maintain their rank mendacity in covering up what they knew about the Kennedy murder. But a decade later, the 70 year-old Rosselli was back before the Senate Intelligence Committee re-brandishing his false flag about “the turnaround.” But not for long.

Lured aboard a private boat somewhere near Miami on July 28, 1976 by operatives from the Trafficante crime family, Rosselli was asphyxiated to death before being chopped up in pieces and placed in an empty oil drum that was lashed with heavy iron chains and sunk into Dumbfoundling Bay off Miami Beach. 10 days later, fishermen found the drum beached on a sandbar. His one-time protégé, Chicago hitman Charles Nicoletti, was thereafter subpoenaed by the House Select Committee on Assassinations but he too was executed with three bullets into the back of his head before he ever got to Washington.

Unsure why Nicoletti had been subpoenaed in the Kennedy probe in the first place, I called the HSCA’s most aggressive investigator, Gaeton Fonzi, who bluntly informed me, “Because Blakey (Robert Blakey, the committee’s chief counsel) wanted to ask him what he was doing in Dealey Plaza on November 22, 1963.”

### 6. “Almost 100% Metaphysical Certitude”

Among the leads Fonzi shared with me was his list of 231 prospective witnesses, nearly all anti-Castro Cuban immigrants in south Florida (<https://www.archives.gov/jfk/docid-32262517>). It was a list that he had compiled in the course of his investigation on behalf the HSCA. Before heading to Miami in February 1987, I called Walter Sheridan who added several more names. As always, I also checked in with Dave Powers who advised me, “It’s the Wild West down there so watch your step.”

It was then that I asked Powers about a document I had come across at the JFK assassination collection at the National Archives dated January 3, 1963. It stated that Secret Service Agent John Marshall had asked the Miami Police Department Intelligence Unit for help in tracking down a suspect, “a Cuban male, 25 yrs., 5’4”, 135-155 lbs., strong muscular build known only as Chino.” But a suspect for what?

Powers replied that he remembered the Secret Service following up on a Miami-Dade police report that somebody had reportedly brought a high-powered rifle to an anti-Castro rally in the Orange Bowl on December 29, 1962, one in which President Kennedy had attended to welcome home liberated Bay of Pigs POWs from Castro’s prisons. In the week before JFK’s appearance at the Orange Bowl, presidential aide Kenny O’Donnell had done everything in his power to block the president’s attendance there, arguing that it was “extremely dangerous.” But Attorney General Robert Kennedy, who was close

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to many of the anti-Castro leaders in Miami, had prevailed on his older brother to go anyway.

When O'Donnell got the Miami-Dade police report about the suspect at the Orange Bowl the week following JFK's visit there, he shared it with Powers, suggesting that "maybe you can talk to the president about this." Powers recalled that he did alert the president about the suspect at the Orange Bowl but that JFK had merely shrugged and changed the subject.

Through two interviews with anti-Castro Cubans, I was able to confirm that the presence of a would-be assassin at the Orange Bowl during that rally but was never able to get Chino's real name much less who, if anyone, had sent him there. And what, of course, did any of this have to do with the crossfire in Dealey Plaza that killed the president some eleven months later? Retired FBI Special Agent William P. Kelly suggested a tantalizing lead in which I might find the answer.

Preternaturally self-assured and fluent in Spanish, Kelly, a former high honors graduate of Georgetown Law School, had worked in the bureau's Miami office doing surveillance of anti-Castro groups during much of the 1960s. He described the hothouse of anti-Castro plotting in south Florida in which Mafia killers like Dave Yaras and Charles Nicoletti were handling anti-Castro Cuban hitmen like Eladio del Valle and Herminio Diaz García, both linked to the Trafficante crime family. At least in terms of their multiple missions to kill Castro, the mob and their Cuban henchmen had failed to eliminate the Cuban leader for one reason in Kelly's view: "Castro had hundreds of spies in south Florida. They were everywhere and they knew everything." Later asked by noted trial attorney Vincent Bugliosi whether Fidel Castro would have known if any of the anti-Castro groups had conspired to assassinate President Kennedy, the retired Special Agent replied, "With the level of infiltration he had, I can say he would have known with almost 100 percent metaphysical certitude."

Kelly went on to describe Castro's "G-2" spy agency, as he called it, (more properly the *Dirección General de Inteligencia*), as "disciplined and relentless in method." Kelly then made a suggestion: "If you could ever get to their records, you'd hit a gold mine."

My effort to somehow get to those DGI archives brought me back in touch with Stanley Sheinbaum, Los Angeles' great liberal lion who was known to be in good graces in Castro's Cuba. Sheinbaum, however, thought that there was a better intermediary to get to the high command in Havana -- film director Oliver Stone. After a 45-minute exchange in his office in Santa Monica, one in which Stone fairly vivisected my research on the Kennedys, the film director did send a letter to Fidel Castro via FAX. A few days later, the *comandante* sent back a favorable reply under his unmistakably ornate signature welcoming me to visit Cuba and directing me to contact Cuba's third-in-command, Ricardo Alarcón. I immediately filled out the required application to the U.S. Department of Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) for permission to visit Cuba for "professional research." I necessarily included Castro's letter of invitation, wondering how this might be received at OFAC's minor citadel of national security. Not very well, as it turned out.

I also wondered whether going to Cuba was worth it in any case. I had zero interest in any interview with Fidel himself, a longwinded propagandist known neither to admit nor reveal much of anything. My first phone conversation with President Alarcón, however, regarding my requested access to the spy

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agency's top-secret files from the early 1960s seemed promising. No sooner had Alarcón forwarded me an email than the phone at my home in Phoenix began ringing. At the other end was Alarcón's aide, Major Alejandro Arévalo, who said he was ready to assist in whatever way possible.

I asked Major Arévalo whether he could find "un índice" (an index) to the intelligence records from DGI agents in Florida who had been tracking and surveilling certain anti-Castro operatives and their CIA and Mafia handlers in the early 1960s. Ideally, the index would be cross-referenced, I said, with other summary or analytical documents from the DGI itself. He promised to look, and two days later called again to tell me he had found an index.

My pulse now pounding, I asked him if he could check whether or not it included the names of the following people, spelling their names out for good measure: Eladio del Valle, John Rosselli, David Ferrie, Rolando Masferrer, Herminio Diaz García and Dave Yaras. Arévalo said he would get back to me as soon as he took a look and did so the next day: "*Sí, cado uno de ellos.*" (yes, every one of them). Where, I asked, would I find this index when I came to Cuba? The major replied, "In the president's (meaning Alarcón) personal office in Vedado" (near downtown Havana).

At that point, I petitioned and otherwise pressured OFAC for a response to my request to go to Cuba but never got one. By that time, my entire attention had shifted away from Jack Kennedy to research about his indispensable brother, Bobby. This was, after all, a biography about the brothers, not an assassination book. As I tried to finish what was now an eleven-year marathon, Dave Powers, then in his mid-80s, continued to prove ever so handy, promptly editing and Fed-Exing back my successive drafts while continuing to hit up anyone who eluded my requests for interview. One such was Los Angeles coroner, Dr. Thomas Noguchi, who had performed the autopsy of RFK in the wake of his assassination in June 1968. When I informed Powers by phone that his Charlestown treatment had again done the trick, this time with Noguchi, he said he wanted a report about my conclusions regarding RFK's murder. In person, he added. At the Library.

When I got there on September 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1997, I came upon Dave standing at the entrance to the palatial building. Gone was the burly, beaming man of yesteryear, but a gaunt and peaked version of his former self. But Powers' bright, blue eyes were still flashing as we walked down the stairs of the massive glass-enclosed vault that looked out over Dorchester Bay. I handed my draft pages about RFK's final moments which ended as follows:

According to eyewitnesses, the muzzle of Sirhan's .22 caliber gun was never less than two feet from Kennedy. The fatal bullet, according to Los Angeles County coroner Thomas Noguchi, was fired "less than one inch from his (Kennedy's) head" and from behind the senator. The precise manner of his death would never be firmly established.

Kennedy was visibly conscious for a period of seconds, as he lay face up on the gummy pantry floor, blood pooling around his head. "I'm hurt," he whispered. "I'm hurt." And then, "No, no, no." As several men rushed to subdue Sirhan, Juan Romero, the busboy whose hand Kennedy had earlier shaken, knelt next to him and looked up pleadingly. Someone put some rosary beads in Bobby's hands. He gripped them tightly. As Ethel struggled to get through the crowd

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to him, a friend saw his lips moving, leaned down next to him, and heard him say, "Jack. Jack."

Powers handed the pages back to me and then looked away, out through the glass to the sea's edge where they had mounted JFK's sailboat, the *Victura*, on a white pedestal. When he turned back, his eyes were filled with tears. We walked back up the stairs in silence to the Library entrance where he seemed about to say something to me but then didn't. I watched him push through the door and walk away.

Powers died the following year and my book – in many ways *our* book -- entitled *Sons and Brothers: The Days of Jack and Bobby Kennedy* was released thereafter.

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