

Guides To The JFK/RFK Kill Zones

By J. Bruce Campbell
11-26-6

The rhetorical questions I asked in the response to Carmichael's RFK piece got me to thinking. I studied reports of that night in the Ambassador Hotel, which I'd seen live on television, thinking at the time that Bobby was probably going to get it anytime. When it actually happened a few minutes later, it was of course disconcerting.

Personally, I didn't like the Kennedys. But this was natural, I guess, for a cowboy who would have nothing in common with a bunch of Boston dudes. So I'm not going to get maudlin about our nouveau-royalty that was foisted on us in 1960. The problem was, the super-rats who had them killed were a hundred times worse.

It is obvious that the Kennedy brothers were betrayed by their guards. Jack was driven into his kill zone by a guy named Bill Greer. The astonishing thing about the Dealey Plaza hit was that Greer drove down the Elm Street hill and came almost to a dead stop seconds after the shooting started. Secret Service procedure is to gas it at the first hint of a discouraging word or a loud noise. Greer came to a virtual halt, so as to give the shooters a nice easy target. It probably never occurred to him that an old geezer with a Bell & Howell 8mm would be cranking away right next to him. He came to a stop and looked back at Kennedy until the massive head shot was made. Clint Hill was riding on the car behind and he was able to hop off that one, run forward and jump on the rear step of the Lincoln death car, just in time to keep Jackie from scrambling the hell away from where all the bullets were converging. She was going to bail but Hill got her back next to the corpse. Greer's work was done and then he gassed it, as if he remembered to follow procedure all of a sudden. It's pretty obvious, when you watch it a few times. Pay no attention to the nonsense about him pulling a nickel-plated .45 and shooting Kennedy. All he had to do was come to a virtual halt and let the pros nail him in the head. He turned and watched carefully until it was time to go.

In 1968 I was living in Reno. I knew a guy there, an FBI agent named Doug Burau. I knew him pretty well. We were shooting buddies. Doug was involved in what the Bureau called "Security." Security had to do with counter-espionage. Maybe it still does. One time I asked him what he thought of the Lee Oswald legend? All of a sudden, he wasn't so friendly. I said, but it doesn't make any sense. He angrily cut off all discussion by insisting that Oswald was the one and the only one. So I saw right there

what the FBI party line was. I never brought it up again because it was like a religious belief to him. I should have made the connection that Hoover, being involved, naturally gave orders that allowed no discussion of the assassination among his agents. Doug was a true believer in old J. Edgar, as he called him.

But Doug did tell me something that just came back to me as I began to study the Bobby Kennedy killing. He said that his old friend, a former FBI agent named Bill Barry, was Bobby's head security man. He told me that Barry really didn't like Bobby. He hadn't cared for his brother, either, and Doug related the lurid reports by Barry of the wild sex parties in the JFK White House, when the brothers would bring in uninhibited women for the enjoyment of themselves and their buddies, when Jackie was not present. Doug told me these things in the four or five months after I'd met him, before the June assassination. I thought it strange that Bobby's chief bodyguard really didn't like him, however considering Hoover's hatred of all three brothers, it was more understandable. And I forgot about it for all these years, until I read something today. Then it hit me like a ton of bricks.

Bobby's friend and part-time bodyguard, LA Rams lineman Roosevelt Grier, told the police that the plan had been to take Bobby and Ethel to meet the press in another ball room downstairs, I believe. And there was a set way they were going to get there. But at the last minute, Grier said, Bill Barry, the chief of security, changed the route. They'd be going through the kitchen instead, supposedly to avoid the big crowd. And Barry led the way off the podium, down some stairs to the pantry. But once they got in the narrow pantry, Grier said that Barry fell behind. Grier and Rafer Johnson were then leading the way, with the maitre'd, Karl Uecker, taking Bobby by his right wrist and leading him through the tight passageway. A rent-a-cop named Gene Cesar was behind Kennedy's right shoulder and in fact had his left hand on Bobby's right shoulder. Kennedy stopped to shake hands with a busboy and a waiter, hovered over protectively by Uecker, when Sirhan came forward with his Iver Johnson 8-shot .22 revolver. He cursed Kennedy and opened up, managing to get off two shots before Uecker let go of Kennedy and grabbed Sirhan's gun hand and began twisting and banging it on a serving table, quickly joined by the athletes and others. Sirhan kept pulling the trigger, hitting five bystanders but missing Kennedy. Simultaneously, Kennedy fell over backwards, shot in the mastoid region behind his right ear and then twice more up through his right armpit. A fourth shot went through the shoulder pad of his coat. At least twelve shots were fired in all.

One man saw the whole thing and immediately reported it to the police and to his television news team. Donald Schulman, of KNXT Television in Los Angeles, reported to his anchorman, Jerry Dunphy, that he had seen the Ace Security Company's part-time rent-a-cop named Thane Eugene Cesar, pull his revolver and fire it as he fell down with Kennedy. Cesar later admitted that he had pulled his gun from its holster but he "wasn't sure" that he'd fired it. But he was exactly where you'd have to be to put those three holes in Kennedy.

He also admitted some other things, such as the fact that he detested the Kennedy brothers, who'd "sold out the country." What kind of a gun was he carrying? A .38 special. Did he have a .22, like Sirhan's? Well, yes, he did, but he wasn't carrying it that night. He said he'd sold it to a guy in Arkansas the previous February. This was June. It turned out that he still had it and sold it to the guy a few months later. The cops never asked him about either gun. He said he'd rather not talk to the grand jury and the cops said, "Okay." The .22 was a 9-shot Iver Johnson, almost identical to Sirhan's. Ted Chirach finally found it in an Arkansas pond years later. Chirach's the dogged reporter who nailed Cesar as the real killer, but no one would do anything about it because Kennedy was supposed to die.

There's a lot more to the Gene Cesar story, but you get the idea. All he had to do was get behind Bobby and wait for some nut with a gun to start shooting. Almost nobody would notice him in the excitement.

But Don Schulman did notice and stuck to his story, even insisting that Bobby had been hit three times when the cops were saying twice. Then even his own television colleagues betrayed him, insisting that he'd never said anything about seeing Cesar draw and fire.

Years later, former LAPD Chief Daryl Gates had a radio show on KFI Radio in Los Angeles. He made some crack about "assault weapons needing to be banned" so I called in and objected to a guy who was a public servant violating the Bill of Rights. He tried to laugh me off but then I accused him of sending his captains and lieutenants off to Ventura County the day the Rodney King jury was due to come back and of trying to blame some poor underling for letting the riot get out of control. That knocked him off balance because he wouldn't allow any talk about the L.A. Riot on his show. Then I said, "But you're also the guy who destroyed all the evidence from the Ambassador Hotel kitchen. You had all the ceiling panels and door frames with the bullet holes in them destroyed. You did this, Chief, because you've been an asset of the CIA for your whole career as a Los Angeles policeman, haven't you?" He was flabbergasted. The next day, he was fired from KFI. It was so easy!

The main thing in all these assassinations, starting with Lincoln, is the complicity or negligence of the bodyguards combined with fake investigations and destruction of evidence by the police. It's always the same. The more important the murder, the more mundane the murderer, the more prosaic the weapon.

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