

The Formation of the Clark Panel: More of the Secret Team at Work?

by Lisa Pease

The Clark Panel was the medical panel convened almost immediately after Ramsey Clark had been approved for his appointment as Attorney General in 1967. The panel was clearly convened to put to rest the growing doubts caused by the exposures of Mark Lane, Harold Weisberg, other researchers and even in late 1966, *LIFE* magazine itself. All of the above talked about the evidence of conspiracy, and the implication is that the medical evidence would either show conspiracy, or else, signs of tampering. What brought it to a crux was Jim Garrison's all-out investigation of the assassination, which, in 1967, was making official story proponents very nervous. One of the key questions raised by the New Orleans DA was this: Why hadn't the Warren Commission members examined the autopsy photographs and X-rays?

Political Agendas

To examine what had been brushed over by the Warren Commission, an official panel was created to conduct an inquiry into the medical evidence. The Panel convened in February of 1968 to examine the medical evidence in the case. In only two days of work, the Panel reached what surely seems to have been the preordained conclusion: the X-rays and autopsy photos revealed no evidence of conspiracy. The Report was held back in what can only be construed as a matter of strategic timing. The information was released in early 1969, just as the trial of Clay Shaw was finally getting underway after two years of delays. To call the timing of the release of the Panel's conclusions, delayed for 11 months, mere coincidence is stretching credulity past the breaking point.

If one goes under the assumption that the panel's conclusions were the desired result, how could such results be guaranteed? How were the panelists chosen?

Ramsey Clark went to four members of the academic community to get their recommendations on the doctors to use for the panel. Those people then nominated the actual panel participants. Close scrutiny of the nominators for the participants reveals a bevy of interesting characters.

Purely 100% Brazilian?

"I am particularly concerned with the part you may have played, if any, in encouraging, promoting, or causing that overthrow," the senator asked Lincoln Gordon, former Ambassador to Brazil, at his confirmation hearings for the office of assistant secretary of state for Inter-American affairs in 1966.

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"The answer to that, Senator, is simple. The movement which overthrew President Goulart was a purely, 100 percent—not 99.44—but 100% purely Brazilian movement. Neither the American Embassy nor I personally played any part in the process whatsoever."

Lincoln Gordon may have his own definition of "personal involvement." But to most, the events indicate that Gordon perjured himself before Congress. "Top Secret" communiqués from the Joint Chiefs of Staff told a different story. The Pentagon was relying on Gordon and his staff to direct the U.S.'s role in the coup. Ammunition was stashed and held, awaiting the okay from Gordon. A carrier task force complete with guided missiles, tanks, destroyers, and a helicopter sat offshore and waited on instructions from Gordon.

In 1964, Lincoln Gordon, together with the CIA station chief in Brazil, very much involved themselves in the plans for a coup against Brazilian President Goulart. The station chief, General Vernon Walters, would later become, if briefly, Deputy Director of the CIA under Nixon. The CIA had spread anywhere from \$5,000,000 (according to Gordon) to \$20,000,000 (according to Philip Agee) to foment a

military coup in Brazil against a popular President. Gordon's cables to Rusk were also cc'd to J. C. King, Nelson Rockefeller's great friend and CIA Division Chief of the Western Hemisphere. Gordon was both informing on the coup's progress as well as requisitioning support in case the CIA-sponsored 'native' coup attempt failed. As backup, the CIA and Pentagon put together "Operation Brother Sam," complete with aircraft carrier, guided missiles, tanks, destroyers, and 6 tons of ammunition to be used if needed. When it became evident that the military was having no trouble ousting Goulart, Operation Brother Sam was ordered to perform a pre-planned cover action instead.

Gordon's involvement did not end with the coup itself. Gordon cabled Washington that the coup had been "a great victory for the free world" but suggested "the avoidance of a jubilant posture." After a victory parade a few days later, Gordon noted that "the only unfortunate note was the obviously limited participation in the march by the lower classes." He then went on to encourage a popular politician, Juscelino Kubitschek, to persuade the Brazilian congress to give a legal stamp to the coup that had been effected.

A Question of Character

Evaluating the character of this Rhodes Scholar, Oxford graduate, Harvard professor, former Ambassador to Brazil, mentor to McGeorge Bundy and President of John Hopkins University is important, since he nominated a doctor to the Clark Panel. What sort of practioner would a man like this nominate? One that might reach a verdict that would shake the official story to its roots? Or one who had a more warped view of "patriotism" that would allow a cover-up to continue for the sake of a cause?

John Hannah and the CIA

John A. Hannah, another of the academics chosen by Ramsey Clark to nominate a doctor for the panel, has twice been on record having denied knowledge of CIA participation in two institutions he

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headed during the time of the involvement. In April of 1966, *Ramparts* magazine revealed that Michigan State University had been running a police training program for the CIA, a program which also provided cover for key CIA officers. Hannah, then President of Michigan State University, denied all knowledge of CIA involvement in the program. But the CIA's Inspector General, Lyman Kirkpatrick, said the university had signed the \$25,000,000 contract knowing full well that the program was the CIA's.

True to form, in the 70's, Hannah was once again denying knowledge of CIA involvement, this time from his post as Director of the Agency for International Development (AID). Publicly, he denied the CIA had used AID for cover anywhere other than in Laos. In fact AID was providing cover at that time to CIA in Thailand. AID was later exposed to have collaborated with the CIA in many other countries as well.

Twice Hannah claimed ignorance of the CIA's involvement with an institution he headed. Again, one must wonder what sort of doctor Hannah would suggest to head a panel whose conclusions, given honestly, might open a path directly to those he had protected in the past.

More Cold Warriors

Another Cold War advocate among the nominators was J. Wallace Sterling. Sterling was so rabidly anti-Communist that he went so far as to say that communists should not be allowed to teach in schools since it was inconceivable that they could be operating independent of the direct control of the Communist Party. This disturbing statement came from a President of one of the country's most esteemed educational establishments, Stanford University. Sterling's name also shows up in Asia Foundation financial records. The Asia Foundation has long been acknowledged to have provided a conduit for CIA funds for covert activities.

The Chief Counsel of the Clark Panel and the man who collaborated in the preparation of the Report, Bruce Bromley, was an employee of the Dulles brothers' infamous law firm of Sullivan and Cromwell.

The Justice Department had tried to remove Sullivan and Cromwell from defending the oil companies in an anti-trust

suit brought against them by the Justice Department because of a variety of questionable activities. The attempt was unsuccessful, thanks in part to the efforts of the newly hired Bruce Bromley.

It's clear that the people mentioned so far have a record of integrity that is, to put it generously, questionable. But what of the doctors they chose? No one appears to have dug into their respective backgrounds to see what might come out. At least one of the doctors has a very questionable incident in his past.

The Curious Death of John Paisley

Russell S. Fisher, M.D., was both a professor of Forensic Pathology at the University of Maryland, as well as the Chief Medical Examiner of the State of Maryland. In the latter position he ruled on the controversial death of a high-level CIA officer named John Paisley. For the fullest account of the curious life and death of John Paisley, see *Widows* by William Corson, Susan B. Trento and Joseph J. Trento (New York: Crown, 1989.) A short but well-written summary appears as an appendix in Jim Hougan's excellent book *Secret Agenda* (New York: Random House, 1984.)

Paisley was a high ranking CIA officer with nearly unprecedented freedom within the Agency. Officially reported at the time of his death to be "a low-level analyst," insiders report he was a high-level counter-intelligence operative. Tad Szulc once reported that Paisley was one of Angleton's recruits, but Angleton vehemently and repeatedly denied ever having met Paisley. In 1976, Paisley was the executive director of "Team B". At the time of Watergate, Paisley was the liaison between the Office of Security and the infamous Nixon White House "Plumbers." According to Hougan's sources, Paisley had been approached at one point by the KGB, reported this to CIA, and was told to work with the Soviets as a double agent, feeding them disinformation and reporting back to the CIA. Paisley had extensive radio broadcasting equipment on his boat and frequently took to sea for long trips alone. What he did there we can only speculate about.

Paisley was also involved with an individual well known to students of the JFK assassination: Yuri Nosenko. Paisley's death came on the heels of CIA officer John Hart's testimony championing Nosenko and his bona fides to the House Select Committee on Assassinations. In the words

of his wife, Paisley played a role in the "indescribable debriefing" of Nosenko.

The facts of Paisley's death are curious. Paisley was found floating in Chesapeake Bay a few days after he had mysteriously disappeared. He had last been seen taking his boat out to sea. His last radio call to a friend had been calm, with no hint of anything sinister to come. The County Coroner who conducted the autopsy, Dr. George Weems, found that Paisley's death had been caused by a gunshot wound to the head, behind the left ear. Paisley was right-handed, which makes suicide extremely implausible. In addition, Dr. Weems told reporters that the body had marks on the neck which seemed to indicate a rope had been around it or the neck had been squeezed in some other fashion. The body was also weighted with two straps of diving belts. As one investigator into the case pointed out, shooting oneself *and* putting on the diving belts is a case of serious overkill, pardon the expression. No evidence of blood, brain tissue or cartridges from a gun were found on the boat, indicating that the gun may have been shot at a different location and the body dumped from there into the sea. To make matters even more muddled, the body was four inches too short to be Paisley, was devoid of features with which he could be positively identified, and his wife was convinced that the body found was not that of her husband's.

Incredibly, Dr. Russell Fisher, the Clark Panelist, ruled the death a suicide. The only reasonable justification for such a ruling seems to be that to rule Paisley's death a murder instead of a suicide would open a can of worms that could necessitate an inquiry into who killed him and why. Or, worse, if it wasn't really Paisley who was it, and where was Paisley? These areas would have proved highly sensitive and potentially embarrassing to the CIA, which was spared such an inquiry by Fisher's extraordinary ruling.

Knowledge of the background of men like Fisher, Gordon, Hannah, Sterling and Bromley make it increasingly difficult to swallow the comment from the Clark Panel's report that "each has acted with complete and unbiased independence, free of preconceived views as to the correctness of the medical conclusions reached in the 1963 Autopsy Report and Supplementary Report." More believable is the conclusion that we experienced yet another manifestation of the Secret Team at work. ♣