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DID HE KNOW JFK TO DIE?

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A south Georgian named Joseph Milteer, now dead, represents a second possible Georgia connection to the assassination of President Kennedy. According to FBI documents published by the noted assassinations expert Harold Weisberg in this book Frame-Up in 1971, Joseph Adams Milteer was born in Quitman, Ga., on Feb. 26, 1902. Thus, at the time of the assassination, Milteer was 61 years old. In 1963 he apparently lived in both Quitman and Valdosta. Like many of the persons who were eyewitnesses to Kennedy's death, or who have been suspected of involvement in the Kennedy assassination, Milteer apparently died a violent and unnatural death. According to Robert Groden, a photographic expert who worked for the House Select Committee on Assassinations, Milteer died of burns in 1974 at the age of 72 after a Coleman heating stove exploded.

Information concerning Milteer and his possible connection to the JFK assassination is not new. Milteer's possible connection was first divulged (although his name was not mentioned) in a Miami newspaper in an article by a reporter named Bill Barry as far back as Feb. 2, 1967. The FBI presented information on Milteer to the Warren Commission, although Milteer is not mentioned in the Warren Commission Report or in the 26 volumes published by the Commission.

Who was Joseph Milteer? On this question there is general agreement. Miller was a segregationist and arch-conservative on the far right. In his co-authored book The Plot to Kill the President (1981), G. Robert Blakey, who served as counsel for the House Assassinations Committee, describes Milteer as "a right-wing extremist." Anthony Summers, in his 1980 book Conspiracy, uses similar language ("a known right-wing extremist") to describe Milteer, as does Henry Hurt ("an ultra-right wing Georgia business man" in his Reasonable Doubt, published in 1985, and the best single book on the assassination, Michael Kurtz's Crime of the Century (1982), calls Milteer "a well-known right-wing extremist."

The House Assassinations Committee referred to Milteer variously as "a militant conservative," "a militant right-wing organizer," and "a right-wing extremist." Milteer was apparently associated with the National States Rights Party and the White Citizens Council and actively opposed to integration and social justice.

On the morning of Nov. 9, 1963, two weeks before the Kennedy assassination, Milteer engaged in a conversation in a Miami hotel room with a man named Willie Somerset. Apparently unknown to Milteer, Somerset (who died in 1970), was an informer for the police who surreptitiously tape-recorded the conversation. The tape was promptly turned over to local Miami police, who then forwarded it to federal authorities. The taped conversation was revealed for the first time publicly in the Miami News in February 1967, although Milteer's name was not mentioned. The Miami News article was quoted at length (again without mentioning Milteer's name) in Harold Weisberg's Oswald in New Orleans, also published in 1967. In 1971 in Frame-Up Weisberg published a transcript of the taped conversation, together with various FBI documents relating to Milteer. This time Milteer's name was given. In 1979 the House Assassinations Committee included information on Milteer in several of its published volumes, and quoted verbatim an excerpt from the transcript of his Nov. 9, 1963 conversation with Somerset.

According to the House Committee transcript, Milteer told Somerset that the killing of Kennedy "was in the working," that the president could be killed "[f]rom an office building with a high-powered rifle," that the rifle could be "disassembled" to get it into the building, and that "[t]hey will pick up somebody within hours afterward, if anything like that would happen just to throw the public off." He also mentioned "the Cubans."

When Miami police turned the tape-recorded conversation over to the Secret Service and FBI, there was a flurry of activity and extra security precautions were taken to protect the president on his trip to Miami, which took place on Nov. 18, the Monday before the Friday assassination. However, information about the Milteer remarks apparently was not passed on to Secret Service officials responsible for the trip to Dallas.

Here, then, is a second possible Georgia connection to the JFK assassination: less than two weeks before the president's death, a Georgia political extremist on the far right was recorded saying things that indicate--at least in retrospect--that he knew not only of a plot to kill the president but also some of the details of the plot. Milteer's statements, as noted, were taken seriously by federal authorities; and the Secret Service's Miami office file on Milteer was entitled "Alleged Possible Threat Against the President."

However, the recorded conversation of Nov. 9, 1963 is not the only evidence of the possibility of a Georgia connection through Joseph Milteer to the JFK killing. According to FBI documents published by Harold Weisberg, Milteer told an informer (presumably Somerset) in an unrecorded conversation in Jacksonville, Fla., on the afternoon of the assassination: "Everything ran true to form. I guess you thought I was kidding you when I said he [Kennedy] would be killed from a window with a high-powered rifle."

Milteer was also reported by the FBI to have been "very jubilant" on Nov. 23 and to have said on that same day that he had previously visited several cities, including Houston, Ft. Worth, and Dallas. Furthermore, an informer--apparently Somerset--said that Milteer had called a friend from Dallas on the morning of Nov. 22, 1963.

Milteer may even have been present among the motorcade spectators when the president was slain. He may even have been fortuitously photographed seconds before the burst of gunfire. This will be explained in the next article on Milteer.