

Dominik Smyrgała, Ph.D.
Collegium Civitas, Warsaw

**NEW PIECES OF THE KENNEDY JIGSAW.
DISCUSSION WITH *PRL W DALLAS. RZECZ O ZACIERANIU ŚLADÓW ZAMACHU NA
PREZYDENTA KENNEDY’EGO***

Introduction

Investigating the secrets of the past can be compared with solving a jigsaw. However, we usually have only a few pieces, seldom connected to one another, and we do not even know how the final picture looks like. Moreover, sometimes we get some pieces from another set or are damaged so it’s difficult to find out where they fit. In effect, our imagination about the final result can be really different from the real picture. And from time to time we get a piece that we know it belongs to our set but it questions the authenticity of the some of the already used part. All of a sudden, we start to have new hypotheses about the real picture.

This metaphor really well describes the case of the John Fitzgerald Kennedy’s (henceforth: JFK) assassination in Dallas in November 1963. And this new piece of a jigsaw challenging some of our imaginations and other related theories is *PRL w Dallas. Rzecz o zacieranin śladów zamachu na prezydenta Kennedy’ego* by Antoni J. Wreğa published upon the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the attempt. It contains materials that can seriously puzzle the supporters of the *coup d’etat* theory or an internal American plot. Those who built their knowledge about the death of JFK upon the investigation conducted by Jim Garrison (Garrison 1991) and the *JFK* movie by Oliver Stone (Stone 1991) may be really surprised to learn where the bases for their views come from.

What is of great importance, Mr Wreğa is a former activist of the anti-Communist underground in Poland, a historian, and a long time diplomat and public servant with considerable experience in dealing with the Soviet-related political activities. His work benefits from all of it and he is able to bring in a fresh “Central-European” view on the matters.

1. Who are you, Mr Mohrenschildt?

The *leitmotif* of the book is the participation of the intelligence services of the People's Republic of Poland (henceforth: PRL, from the Polish *Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa*) intelligence services in the disinformation activities related to the JFK's assassination. Its main "antagonist" is George (Yuri/Jerzy) de (or rather *von*) Mohrenschildt (henceforth: GDM), the Russian White *émigré* of German origin. In the 1920s he ran away to Poland due to the communist terror and was its citizen until 1952. In the 1930s he moved to the West (Belgium, the United States). He became famous because of his very long testimonies before the Warren Commission after the JFK death's, as he was considered to be one of the closest friends of Lee Harvey Oswald (henceforth: LHO). In 1977 he committed suicide during the break in an interview about LHO and JFK's assassination.

These facts about GDM are commonly known. However, Mr. Wręga made a tremendous effort of searching both the American documents related to the case, as well as browsing the archives of the Institute of National Remembrance (henceforth: IPN, from the Polish *Instytut Pamięci Narodowej*) and these of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It turned out that GDM had some interesting private contacts in Poland and his case may be related to a mysterious death of a young Polish chemist in Paris in 1967. Moreover, between 1962 and 1965, he contacted frequently a Polish diplomat in Haiti that was for sure an informant of the Security Service (henceforth: SB, from the Polish *Służba Bezpieczeństwa*) that at some point might have even become an officer of it. The climax of that issue was reached when in 1965 the government of the PRL signed with GDM a very attractive contract of sisal purchase.

As mentioned above, the book focuses on disinformation related to GDM. Its opening chapter discusses an article in Polish daily newspaper "Dziennik Polski" titled *Śledztwo trwa* (meaning *the investigation continues*) commenting his death in 1977. Mr Wręga analyses the text from the perspective of the important information missing or being manipulated – and in this case, the journalists neither mentioned a single word on GDM's ties to Poland, nor wrote the truth about his testimonies to the Warren Commission. In order to elaborate on that point, the Author dedicated the next two chapters to the testimonies mentioned. He provides the reader with long excerpts from the official protocols, indicating both the questions to which GDM lied (as in turned out later on) as well as those to which he actually gave a different answer than the article in "Dziennik Polski" claimed.

Mr Wreęga continues with the biography of GDM. He projects it against the GDMs testimonies before the Warren Commission, paying a special attention to some very surprising events in his life, like his acquaintance and friendship with the Bouvier family – the very parents of Jacqueline Kennedy-Onassis. He also tries to present the GDM's ties to Poland – both in the interwar period, the war, and later on. The friendship with the Achmatowicz family becomes a focal point there. They were the family of the Polish-Tatar origin, very prominent in the field of science, and at certain moments – political life. Both in the pre-war Poland, as well as in the PRL. Mr Wreęga's hypotheses suggest that this acquaintance became a certain threat to GDM and his testimonies before the Warren Commission. But even more compromising become his contacts with the SB, already stated above.

The most intriguing part of the book claims are the Author's great risk. Mr Wreęga suggests that a sudden death of one of the Achmatowicz family members in Paris in 1967 might actually be a result of that threat mentioned in the paragraph above. And although Justyn Strumillo's death was presumed an accident, there exist circumstances which question it. Mr Wreęga shows how it could possibly be related to the JFK case. It is possible that GDM's testimonies could have been falsified and shed some new light upon the Dallas assassination.

To supports his evidence, Mr Wreęga presents in this place a chapter on the theoretical bases of the Soviet deception and disinformation, frequently referring to the known cases such as the Golitsyn-Nosenko controversy, activities of Josif Grygulevich, and more. Once the KGB *modus operandi* is identified, he returns to the Strumillo's death and applies it there. Reconsidering the article mentioned in the beginning of the book, he is able to draw a convincing picture of GDM being an important actor in the JFK murder, although it is possible that he was not aware of his role. Supposedly, GDM was also a part of a cover story the Dallas assassination that was supposed to draw away the attention from the real perpetrators. Important enough to encourage the KGB and SB to distort the perception of his involvement with disinformation operations as late as 14 years after the death of the American president. There are also many other interesting details but discovering them should be left to the reader.

All of this, of course, remains based upon some hypotheses that should be verified. The most important one is that of Justyn Strumillo's death. Thus, one might say that the story of *PRL w Dallas* is based upon weak foundations. However, we must remember that there were many works on the topic that already have been falsified and the evidence presented in them overthrown. On the other hand, the amount of

information brought in by Mr Wreęa explains a lot about the circumstances of the JFK assassination. And even if he is wrong in case of Strumillo, still the book contains a lot of intriguing evidence on the Polish connection to it.

2. Wrong men in the wrong place at the wrong time

All of these new traces seriously challenge some of the existing theories about Dallas. Moreover, Mr Wreęa also cites some other publications tackling the issue, e.g. books by Patricia Lambert and Ion Mihai Paçepa, the highest-ranking defector from the former Eastern Bloc intelligence services. The Lambert's one, *False Witness: The Real Story of Jim Garrison's Investigation and Oliver Stone's Film JFK* (Lambert 2000) attempts at showing the mistakes or abuses in the investigation conducted by Jim Garrison. It is very important, as with time they became a foundation for the coup d'état theory, so vividly presented in Oliver Stone's *JFK*.

On the other hand, Paçepa's *Programmed to Kill: Lee Harvey Oswald, the Soviet KGB, and the Kennedy Assassination* (Paçepa 2007) claims that LHO was probably to conduct some special mission in the USA that had been prepared for it for a very long time. Paçepa suggests that this mission was to be the JFK assassination and he bases his theory upon the KGB methods familiar to him. He also claims that LHO's order may have been recalled but he conducted it anyway.

Regardless of whether the former Romanian general is right or wrong, his book brings one more important suggestion which became one of the crucial assumption for Mr Wreęa. LHO's diary, in which he supposedly described his life in the Soviet Union, may have been forged. The linguistic and graphologic analysis strongly suggest that the entire diary was actually written in two sessions with a short break between them. What is more, it is very little probable that LHO would use the expressions used in it. Thus, Paçepa concludes that the diary was either a part of some disinformation or a kind of a "crib sheet" used by an agent to create his cover story. Mr Wreęa assumes that Paçepa is right here. But then the question arises: why was the diary created in the first place and what Oswald was actually doing in the USSR after his discharge from the Marines in 1959?

The book also brings in some other very interesting plots. The two most important ones are the case of the Polish TV reporter Krystian Barcz who by sheer coincidence was present in Dallas at the time of the assassination, and even by a sheerer one – briefly met Jack Ruby, LHO's killer to be. Upon his arrival to Poland he hoped that the

coverage he gave to the assassination in the media would be a start-up of a brilliant career. It turned out otherwise. Though now he is recognized as an icon of Polish journalism (Mr Barcz died on May 17 this year), after some time from his return from Dallas he was fired from the Polish TV and had serious problems finding employment. The other example is the case of Albert Osborne who travelled together with LHO to Mexico City prior to Dallas. His mysterious behavior later on also alerts those who investigate the JFK case.

3. ...some shortcomings

However, the book is not free from some errors. In some places, the same paragraphs reoccur twice, sometimes in the body text, sometimes as comments in footnotes. There are details repeated a few times, and the reader may learn at least on five occasions that Ion Mihai Paçepa was the highest-ranking defector from the Soviet bloc. Occasionally, the personal comments of the Author (1st person narration) are found right in the middle of longer passages written in the 3rd person narration. At times it becomes annoying.

The other problem is related to references and bibliography. Mr Wręga claims in the very beginning that he removed a big part of them because otherwise the book would have grown significantly. To a point, this can be understood, as the work was published by a commercial publisher. There are still many references, especially to archival records. The book has a more popular character and it is addressed to a broad audience. Yet, sometimes the feeling arises that there could be more sources cited, especially when presenting some biographic details. Also the character of the sources has more “popular” character, e.g. there is some information cited from the Wikipedia which supposedly should help the reader find a quick reference. On a few occasions, Mr Wręga fails to separate his personal views about the Soviet Union from presenting evidence, as well as draws conclusions that may be too far-going. But probably these are the consequences of a mass character of the work.

From the academic point of view, also the structure of the work leaves somewhat to be desired. The “theoretical” chapter on disinformation is not the first one, as a scholar would expect that but in fact it begins in the last third of the book. Dividing the part dedicated to Strumillo into two and separating it with this theoretical frame maybe interesting for some readers who lack the knowledge of the case but as such is not very

convincing. Also the chapter dedicated to Osborne's trip placed in the middle of the book interrupts the so-far continuous narration.

4. Definitely worth reading

Yet, these weaknesses do not disqualify the book. It is still interesting, intriguing and brings a lot of new knowledge. Even if it is not directly related to Dallas, it helps to understand better some of the important aspects of JFK assassination. However, with so many hypothetical answers and some of the new questions arising, it should be but a starting point for further investigations related to JFK, LHO and GDM.

It is also worth-reading by those who have a general interest in the Cold War history, especially regarding the intelligence operations and the CIA-KGB rivalry. And for all dealing with information security it is an excellent case study on how one can deceive the public on an important issue for many decades.

References

- Garrison J. (1988): *On the Trail of the Assassins. My Investigation and Prosecution of the Murder of President Kennedy*, Sheridan Square, New York
- Lambert P. (2000): *False Witness: The Real Story of Jim Garrison's Investigation and Oliver Stone's Film JFK*, M. Evans & Co., Lanham
- Paçepa I. (2007): *Programmed to Kill: Lee Harvey Oswald, the Soviet KGB, and the Kennedy Assassination*. Ivan R. Dee Publisher, Lanham
- Stone O., dir., (1991): *JFK*. Warner Bros
- Wręga A.J. (2014): *PRL w Dallas. Rzecz o zacieraniu śladów zamachu na prezydenta Kennedy'ego*, LTW, Warszawa

Dominik Smyrgała

**New pieces of the Kennedy jigsaw.
Discussion with *PRL w Dallas. Rzecz o zacieraniu śladów
zamachu na prezydenta Kennedy'ego***

Abstract

The article presents the discussion with the book by Antoni J. Wręga *PRL w Dallas. Rzecz o zacieraniu śladów zamachu na prezydenta Kennedy'ego* which brings some new information and interesting (though sometimes risky) hypotheses on the circumstances of the assassination and possible conspiracy. It focuses around the role of George de Mohrenschildt in the affair, covering tracks, as well as clear clues of his ties with the intelligence of the communist Poland (SB) and possibly the Soviet Union.

Keywords: *Dallas, Kennedy, assassination, George de Mohrenschildt, SB*