

## Mitchell WerBel



Mitchell WerBell, the son of a former Czarist cavalry officer, was born in Philadelphia in 1918.

During the Second World War WerBell joined the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) and saw action in Burma and China. According to Gaeton Fonzi, this enabled WerBell to join "the superspy fraternity" that included Allen W. Dulles, William Casey, Richard Helms and E. Howard Hunt.

After the war, WerBell lived outside of Atlanta. He also worked as an arms dealer. WerBell ran a series of weapon manufacturing and marketing firms including Military Armament Corporation, Defense Services and Quantum Ordnance Bankers. WerBell distributed advanced weaponry to selective foreign groups.

In 1959 WerBell did covert work for Fulgencio Batista in Cuba. During this period he became friends with Gerry P. Hemming, Bernardo De Torres and Gordon Novel. Hemming and Torres were both representatives of WerBell in his arms sales business. WerBell was also rumoured to be involved in the assassination of John F. Kennedy. Roy Hargraves told Noel Twyman that WerBell supplied silencers used by the gunmen in Dallas. Another source said that WerBell was involved with Jack Ruby.

WerBell was interviewed by Gaeton Fonzi while carrying out research for his book, The Last Investigation (1993): "There's a helluva lot I ain't said yet, and there's a helluva lot I ain't gonna say yet... I've been in so many places, so many countries, so many revolutions, it's beginning to get all mixed up in my mind... We don't play with people like that (Jack Ruby). I mean, it's as simple as that. This guy Ruby, he called, I didn't know who the hell he was, but that was years ago."

WerBell also did covert work in the Dominican Republic, and Vietnam. In 1966 WerBell served as adviser on Project Nassau, a planned invasion of Haiti by Cuban and Haitian exiles to oust the dictator Francois "Papa Doc" Duvalier.

In 1967 WerBell formed a partnership with Gordon Ingram. Together they distributed the Ingram M-11, a hand-held, quiet machine gun. Six years later WerBell and his arms company, Defense Services, were indicted for allegedly trying to sell some of these Ingram submachine guns to a federal undercover agent. He was also indicted for proposing to sell 2,000 of these weapons to Robert Vesco in Costa Rica. Later, both these charges were dropped.

Mitchell Livingston WerBell III died of cancer in 1983.

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## Primary Sources

### **(1) Gaeton Fonzi, *The Last Investigation* (1993)**

When Conein set up his Special Operations branch of the DEA, he recruited at least a dozen field operatives from the CIA and set them up in a safe house, an office suite in the La Salle Building on Connecticut Avenue in Washington. The reason for operating outside of DEA headquarters was because the branch was developing a very special plan, which included assassinating the key drug suppliers in Mexico. The question has been raised by syndicated columnist Jack Anderson, among others, of whether or not the White House Plumbers group was at some point developing an assassination capability not as a foreign policy weapon but for domestic political reasons. (Anderson claimed that a contract was put out on him at one time.) At any rate, the Connecticut Avenue office was funded not by the DEA but by the CIA. Mitch WerBell has admitted that he was in business there with two former CIA men manufacturing ultrasophisticated assassination devices.

So there was much to discuss (or try to), in my meeting with Mitch WerBell that long Georgia day in his gun-filled den, although it turned out to be a verbal *paso doble* with a drunk-or a man who acted drunk. By the time I got to him, WerBell was coming off a long bout with the booze, the result of being caught between the pressures of a few Congressional investigating committees probing his intelligence, arms and drug connections and the even tougher squeeze by Federal agencies he worked for who wanted him to keep his mouth shut. So although we spent several hours talking, WerBell was determined to dance drunkenly around my key areas of interest.

"There's a helluva lot I ain't said yet," he blathered at one point, "and there's a helluva lot I ain't gonna say yet!" At times he claimed loss of memory: "I've been in so many places, so many countries, so many revolutions, it's beginning to get all mixed up in my mind."

Yet the transcript of the tape I made during that session with WerBell reveals, despite the staccato verbal ellipses he drunkenly affected, some interesting responses. He admitted his involvement with some Castro assassination attempts ("I was sittin' in Miami with a goddamned million dollars in cash for the guy who was gonna take Fidel out"), but disclaimed any knowledge of the Kennedy murder. "Now I didn't like Jack Kennedy," he said. "I thought he was a shit to begin with. But I was certain not to be involved in the assassination of an American president, for Christsakes!"

WerBell also denied any gun smuggling or business dealings with Jack Ruby, but half admitted a contact. First he said he had no connection, then added: "And the reason we didn't . . . I think we may have had an incoming . . . but we don't play with people like that. I mean, it's as simple as that. This guy Ruby, he called, I didn't know who the hell he was, but that was years ago. ..." WerBell then lapsed into a drunken mumble.

Later, when I was with the House Assassinations Committee, I thought it might have been fruitful if the Committee, with its subpoena power and power to grant immunity, had called WerBell for formal questioning. But Mitchell Livingston WerBell III was just another one of the characters who didn't fit into the game plan.

### **(2) Ron Ecker, *Our Man in Powder Springs: Mitch WerBell* (24th November, 2004)**

In 1967 WerBell went into business with Gordon Ingram, designer of a small submachine gun, slightly larger than a conventional pistol, on which WerBell suppressors were mounted, for a quiet and compact weapon with military contracts in mind. (11) In 1973 WerBell's arms company Defense Services, Inc. and his son Mitchell IV were indicted for allegedly trying to sell some of the silenced Ingram submachine guns to a federal undercover agent. The case was eventually thrown out of court, but the indictments happened to coincide with WerBell being subpoenaed by a Senate committee that was investigating Robert Vesco, a fugitive financier living in Costa Rica. Vesco had sought through an intermediary to purchase 2,000 silenced Ingrams from WerBell, with the intent, some suspected, of taking over Costa Rica. (Also temporarily residing in Costa Rica at this time were Mafia don Santo Trafficante and anti-Castro Cuban terrorist Orlando Bosch.) The indictments prevented WerBell from testifying before the Senate committee, and WerBell himself believed that the indictments were a gag order to keep him from talking about Vesco. "From now on, call me Mitch the Fifth," WerBell said after the indictments were dropped. Bitter that his family had been dragged into the affair, WerBell soon got out of the arms sales business, concentrating instead on security work and counter-terrorism. (12)

In 1976 WerBell was in trouble again. He and four other men were tried in Florida on charges of conspiring to import marijuana from Colombia for a profit of \$100,000 each. WerBell's lawyer Edwin Marger said that WerBell would never get involved in a conspiracy to import marijuana. "Guns, revolutions, maybe even assassinations," Marger said, "but he's not being tried for that." (13)

### **(3) Ron Ecker, *Our Man in Powder Springs: Mitch WerBell* (24th November, 2004)**

The late Roy Hargraves told researcher Noel Twyman in a 2001 interview that WerBell supplied silencers used in the JFK assassination. Hargraves was an explosives expert and member of Hemming's Interpen group. Hargraves said that he was in Dallas on November 22, 1963 as part of a four-man support team led by anti-Castro activist Felipe Vidal Santiago. (Vidal was

captured on a mission into Cuba in 1964 and executed.) The team, according to Hargraves, was ordered to Dallas by CIA operative William Bishop, whose instructions likely came from someone at the CIA's JM/WAVE headquarters in Miami. (41) JM/WAVE's chief of operations was David Sanchez Morales, who reported to station chief Theodore Shackley. One night in 1973 Morales got drunk on scotch and told three friends, after ranting about JFK, "Well, we took care of that son of a bitch, didn't we?"

Many of the earwitnesses in Dealey Plaza (74% of the 178 considered by the HSCA) said they heard three shots (the official Warren Commission number), but others said they heard more, ranging from four shots (reported, for example, by railroad supervisor S.M. Holland, who was on the triple underpass, from which he also saw a puff of smoke from the trees on the grassy knoll), to eight shots (reported in a signed sheriff's office statement by construction worker A.J. Millican, who subsequently received a terrifying phone threat and was not called to testify by the Warren Commission). The echoes that are produced by gunfire in a man-made canyon like Dealey Plaza also made it difficult for people to tell where all the shots came from. In addition, while a silencer suppresses a rifle's muzzle blast, the sonic boom created by the supersonic bullet is heard only as the bullet is moving past an earwitness, who might therefore think that the shot came from a direction opposite from the actual shooter. The overall confusion and ballistic evidence suggest that more than one weapon was used, and that one or more shots were suppressed, in addition to an unsilenced shot or shots from the Texas School Book Depository Building to draw attention and thus implicate Lee Harvey Oswald.

Having multiple shooters in Dallas - with silencers used to mask certain positions - was not only necessary to ensure a successful kill, but was consistent with an intent, evident by the continuous efforts to get Castro and by the pre-assassination creation of Oswald's pro-Castro legend, to paint the assassination as a Castro plot, carried out by a hit team, thus hopefully precipitating a vengeful invasion of Cuba. According to this theory, the lone nut scenario - Oswald implausibly did it all by himself with three shots - was concocted out of panic when Oswald, who had supposedly been destined for elimination either immediately or outside of the country, was taken alive by the Dallas police.

#### **(4) Warren Hinckle & William Turner, *Deadly Secrets: The CIA-Mafia War Against Castro and the Assassination of JFK* (1992)**

Mitch WerBell was a charter member of the intelligence Old Boy Network. He had been a secret agent with the OSS during World War II; thereafter he was always on the spot on the griddle where the Cold War was heating up. He was a player in the CIA's secret cross-border war against China in the 1950s through the 1960s; he went to Vietnam as a weapons adviser with the simulated rank of Brigadier General; and he did the prep work for the 1965 invasion of the Dominican Republic. He frequently worked with the CIA and infrequently worked against them. While the agency was fumbling the ball on its attempts to assassinate Fidel Castro, the ever gung-ho WerBell initiated his own assassination plots. His wild nocturnal speedboat rides to Cuba were scenes out of some paramilitary Strangelove movie-Mitch playing the pipes under a moonless Caribbean sky, the Confederate flag flapping from the rear of the boat. (Sometime later, the U.S. government hypocritically indicted WerBell for his anti-Castro plots while ignoring its own.)

The last decade of WerBell's life was filled with sufficient adventures and misadventures for the lifetimes of ten men. In 1973 WerBell began a "New Country Project" for a group of capitalist revolutionaries on Abaco Island in the Bahamas who wanted to shed the bondage of Nassau. The secessionists believed that the black population of the tourist islands was turning whites off and that sparsely settled Abaco, with a lower profile of blacks, could become a haven for investment money in gambling casinos, resorts, and housing restricted to the wealthy. The new currency would be called the rand, not in emulation of South Africa's medium of exchange but in honor of Ayn Rand, the dowager empress of rugged egoism.

WerBell sounded out his contacts in the high Arctic of the CIA and the State Department. He got the word that there would be no great American objection, provided there was no violence. WerBell was confident there would not be. He proceeded to sign up Soldier of Fortune-supreme Robert K. Brown to recruit a dozen Vietnam vets as the nucleus of an Abacoan standing army strong enough to dissuade Bahamian Premier Lyndon Pindling from invading with his own puny armed services. The date for secession was set for New Year's Day 1975.

However, three months before liberty day WerBell was indicted in Atlanta, and the plan had to be canceled. That indictment, later dropped, stemmed from his aggressive marketing of his silencer equipped Ingram machine gun, which starred in the movie *Killer Force*. (There are some interesting connections here. WerBell was manufacturing the Ingram under the name Defense Services, Inc., and marketing it through an outfit called Parabellum, which was headed by Anselmo Alliegro, Jr., an heir to the shadowy Ansan millions. Parabellum employed Gerry Hemming and Rolandito Masferrer, nephew of the dreaded El Tigre Rolando Masferrer. When Anastasio Somoza's dictatorship in Nicaragua was collapsing in 1979, Cuban veterans of the Secret War rallied to his cause. Some engaged in combat against the insurgent Sandinista guerrillas; others acted as instructors with the elite National Guard, which had enabled the Somoza family to remain in power over the decades. One of the instructors was WerBell's partner in arms dealing, Anselmo Alliegro, Jr. In September 1980 Somoza, in exile in Paraguay, met a violent end. There were many flowers but few tears at his funeral.)

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