

THE MOST IMPORTANT MAN ON THE PLANET



Discordianism, Paganism, and JFK Conspiracy Theories:
The troubled yet fascinating life of Kerry Thornley

by *Adam Gorightly*

Kerry Thornley was born on April 17th, 1938 in Whittier, California, the very same conservative bastion of Orange County blandness that bestowed upon us the honorable Richard M. Nixon, who some consider the physical embodiment of the Curse of Greyface.¹

In 1958 – as an apparent counterbalance to Nixon’s ascension into the office of Vice President – Thornley and his teenaged pal Greg Hill (while sipping coffee in a Whittier bowling alley) inadvertently invoked Eris, the Greek goddess of chaos and discord. In the aftermath of their caffeine-induced vision, Hill and Thornley founded the so-called spoof religion Discordianism, as well as its disorganizational branch, The Discordian Society.

Initially an in-joke between Hill and Thornley, by the late 1960s the Discordian Society began to attract a loose knit group of writers, artists and free spirits who often adopted comical Pope names. Thornley embraced the Discordian persona of Lord Omar Khayyam Ravenhurst while Greg Hill became known as Malaclypse the Younger.

Other Discordian Popes included Playboy editors Robert Anton Wilson (Mordecai the Foul) and Robert Shea (Josh the Dill), who in tandem co-authored the counterculture classic, *The Illuminatus Trilogy*, with the first book in the series dedicated to none other than Hill and Thornley. Throughout *Illuminatus* are numerous references to Discordian memes such as The Law of Fives, The Sacred Chao, and the John Dillinger Died For You Society.

Many Discordian activities concerned pranks designed to not only poke fun at organized religion and uptight people, but also as a means of illumination through the use of surreal and irreverent humor. In recent years, the Discordian Society has grown into a worldwide underground phenomenon, although the only thing that its Popes and Momes can generally agree upon is that tried and true Discordian maxim: “We Discordians must stick apart!” For further information/confusion refer to *Principia Discordia or How I Found Goddess And What I Did To Her When I Found Her*.

During Thornley’s junior year of high school in the spring of 1956, he enlisted in the Marine Corps Reserves, attending boot camp that summer, then returned to high school in the fall of 1957 for his senior year. The following year he attended the University of Southern California as a journalism major, but quickly lost interest in pursuing the academic life.

A budding writer intent on traveling the world, Thornley figured the most immediate way to do so was by fulfilling his two-year active duty in the Marines. Kerry enlisted in the spring of 1959, and his first stop was El Toro Marine Base, located near Irvine, California. It was here that his life was forever altered when his path crossed that of Lee Harvey Oswald.

THE PRANKSTER AND THE ASSASSIN

“At the moment I have every reason to believe I may get 20 years in a Louisiana prison for: 1) having gone to USC at the same time as Gordon Novel did; 2) having written a novel based on Oswald which re-inforced his apparent Marxist cover; 3) having been from that point out the victim of either the most fantastic chain of incriminating coincidences or the most satanically evil plot in history...

I was never very interested in the Kennedy assassination until lately. But goddamn and sweet Jesus do I want to see those bastards brought to justice now! Not out of revenge, but just simple self-preservation.

As I’ve been telling people, I’m up to my ass in a cheap spy novel. And right now that means I am in over my head.”

– Letter from Kerry Thornley to Greg Hill, dated February 17th, 1968

Kerry Thornley and Lee Harvey Oswald were stationed at El Toro over a three month period, and much of their interactions occurred either during off duty hours at the rec hall, or in between drills and field exercises when the two engaged in spirited discussions about Marxism, Atheism, George Orwell’s *1984* and other subjects that were a bit on the taboo side for most of the other God-fearing jarheads in their squadron.

At El Toro, Oswald exuded an aura of rebellion and discontent, suffering the stigma of demotion. Formerly a radar operator with a security clearance, he’d now been relegated to janitorial duties, having lost his clearance due to repeated run-ins with the brass while serving at Atsugi Air Base in Japan. Thornley later described Oswald as “the outfit eight ball,” earning this dubious distinction by subscribing to *Pravda*, cracking jokes with an exaggerated Russian accent and referring to his fellow Marines as “comrades.” It was common knowledge that Oswald was studying Russian, and because of this, had acquired the nickname “Oswaldskovitch.”

One curious thing about Oswald was that he was one of the few Marines to return stateside with the rank of private, which was unusual given the fact that most enlisted men, with as much service time, had been promoted to at least the rank of corporal. Apparently, Oswald's lowly status was due to an incident when he got drunk one night and poured a beer over a Staff Officer's head, permanently damaging any promotion potential.

In June 1959, Thornley was transferred to Atsugi Air Base in Japan where Oswald had previously been stationed. During this period, Atsugi was among the CIA's most critical installations from which the U-2 spy plane flights originated, and it was there that Thornley performed the same job as had Oswald, that of radar technician. According to researchers A.J. Weberman and Michael Canfield, Atsugi was devoted to grooming intelligence agents, one of whom they contended was Oswald, and it was at Atsugi that Oswald was taught Russian language as part of his intelligence training.²

During Oswald's stint at Atsugi, he spent many off-duty hours fraternizing with bar girls at a Tokyo nightclub, The Queen Bee, and there became acquainted with a mysterious Eurasian woman who helped him with his Russian-language studies, as well as sharing her many charms. It was later conjectured that Oswald's Queen Bee girlfriend was actually a Soviet spy who had ensnared the naive lad into a web of international intrigue, later setting the stage for his defection.³ This theory of Oswald-as-Spy was seconded by another former Marine, David Bucknell. According to Bucknell, the Queen Bee bargirls were trying to pump Oswald for information, and when he reported this to the brass, he was encouraged to bed down the girls and feed them disinformation. This may explain a citation discovered in Oswald's Marine medical records – as published in the Warren



Marine Kerry Thornley

Report – that indicated he was treated for gonorrhoea contracted “in line of duty, not due to own misconduct.”

Thornley later speculated that Oswald may have been working for military intelligence to identify potential security risks at El Toro, such as those sympathetic to Marxism and other radical politics, using his supposed interest in Communism as a cover to gain the trust of those individuals targeted – one of whom, Kerry speculated, might have been himself. If this was true, that might explain why Oswald cultivated a relationship with Kerry, who was probably viewed by his superiors as somewhat of a free-thinking loose-cannon type.

On his trip to Japan in June 1959 aboard the U.S.S. Breckenridge (enroute to Atsugi), Thornley started work on *The Idle Warriors*, a novel about a young Marine's disillusionment during the Cold War era. The protagonist of this work-in-progress, Johnny Shellburn, was a composite character based on Thornley and other Marines he had known during this period, one of whom was Oswald.

In October 1959, Thornley was mind-blown when he read in *Stars and Stripes* that Oswald had defected to the Soviet Union, a revelation that caused an immediate shift in focus to *The Idle Warriors*, and from that point forward the lead character, Johnny Shellburn, became based primarily on Oswald. The fact that Thornley was writing a novel based on Oswald (three years before the JFK assassination!) would raise the curious eyebrows of many JFK assassination researchers, who later came to suspect that Thornley's association with Oswald was much more than mere coincidence.

WEIRD SCENES IN NEW ORLEANS

Thornley was discharged from the Marines in October 1960, and in February 1961 he and Greg Hill moved to the New Orleans French Quarter. Besides partying and chasing skirts, Kerry's main motivation for making the New Orleans move was to gather material for future

books he aspired to write, and to associate with the denizens of the French Quarter. Shortly after arriving, Kerry made the acquaintance of a couple of colorful characters – who were shady as all get out – named Slim Brooks and Gary Kirstein (aka “Brother-in-law”). Brooks and Kirstein were apparently involved in the New Orleans underworld and also claimed connections within the intelligence community embedded in New Orleans.

In the fall of 1962, Brooks and Kirstein engaged Kerry in a theoretical discussion about how to kill a President – and, in particular, JFK. Kerry suggested the use of a poison dart to blow the President’s stomach apart, as well as another scenario involving a remote control airplane carrying a bomb. After Kerry finished with his ideas, Kirstein added, “And next we’ll get Martin Luther King.” At the time, these conversations on how to kill a President seemed nothing more to Kerry than a morbid intellectual exercise. Later, these conversations would come back to haunt him.

On the fateful day of November 22, 1963, Thornley was waiting tables at Arnaud’s Restaurant in the French Quarter when news broke of JFK’s assassination. As there were no TVs or radios in the restaurant, Kerry and the rest of the staff got their news from a waiter who’d been outside taking a break. According to the waiter, news outlets were reporting that the Dallas police had picked up a suspect identified as a former Marine. Although the waiter couldn’t remember the suspect’s name, it was reported that he’d defected to Russia for a couple of years before returning to the U.S. When Kerry correctly guessed the suspect’s name as ‘Lee Oswald’ all hell broke loose among the serving staff. Someone even went so far as to ask Kerry if he’d had a hand in the assassination. “One cretinous individual,” Kerry remembered, “even began gossiping, behind my back, that I was in fact Lee Harvey Oswald’s brother.”

Unlike many of his friends and fellow workers, Thornley was not the least bit heart-broken over Kennedy’s death. In fact, Kerry had previously held JFK in contempt for his support of the NATO-



Nightclub owner Jack Ruby shooting Lee Harvey Oswald two days after the JFK assassination

sanctioned conflict in Katanga (Congo Republic) that had led to the massacre of many innocent victims. On the basis of this, Kerry felt that JFK deserved to be shot – and was not bashful in sharing his opinions at the French Quarter bars and coffee houses he frequented. Kerry – it should be noted – reveled in playing the role of agitator and yanking people’s chains, which is not to suggest that he wasn’t sincere in his disdain for the slain President. Granted, Kerry’s comments about shooting JFK were mere hyperbole delivered by a 23-year-old wet-behind-the-ears rabble rouser.

After finishing work at Arnaud’s that afternoon, Kerry and his pal Carlos Castillo wound up at the Bourbon House restaurant where they made tongue-in-cheek toasts to the Marine Corps drill instructor who had taught Oswald to fire his rifle. Although in bad taste, this was an example of Kerry’s irreverent sense of humor.

Not long after the assassination, Kerry was questioned by both the FBI and the Secret Service, who were most likely tipped off by someone at Arnaud’s that had overheard Kerry drop Oswald’s name – not to mention anyone who had witnessed the antics of he and his pal Carlos Castillo at the Bourbon House. Although the Feds seemed satisfied that he was innocent of any nefarious associations with Oswald, Kerry grew to suspect that – in the days following the assassination – he was being tailed around the French Quarter by men in dark suits.

Kerry later regretted his behavior following JFK’s assassination, which alienated him from many of his French Quarter friends who took offence at his provocative antics. This, along with a messy split up with his then girlfriend, Jeanne Hack, precipitated his move not long afterwards to Arlington, Virginia. The Arlington move was also motivated by its close proximity to Washington, D.C and a possible appearance before the Warren Commission which had convened in late November. To this end, Kerry figured that if he could wangle an appearance before the commission it might provide good pre-publicity for his novel-in-the-works, *The Idle Warriors*. This gambit

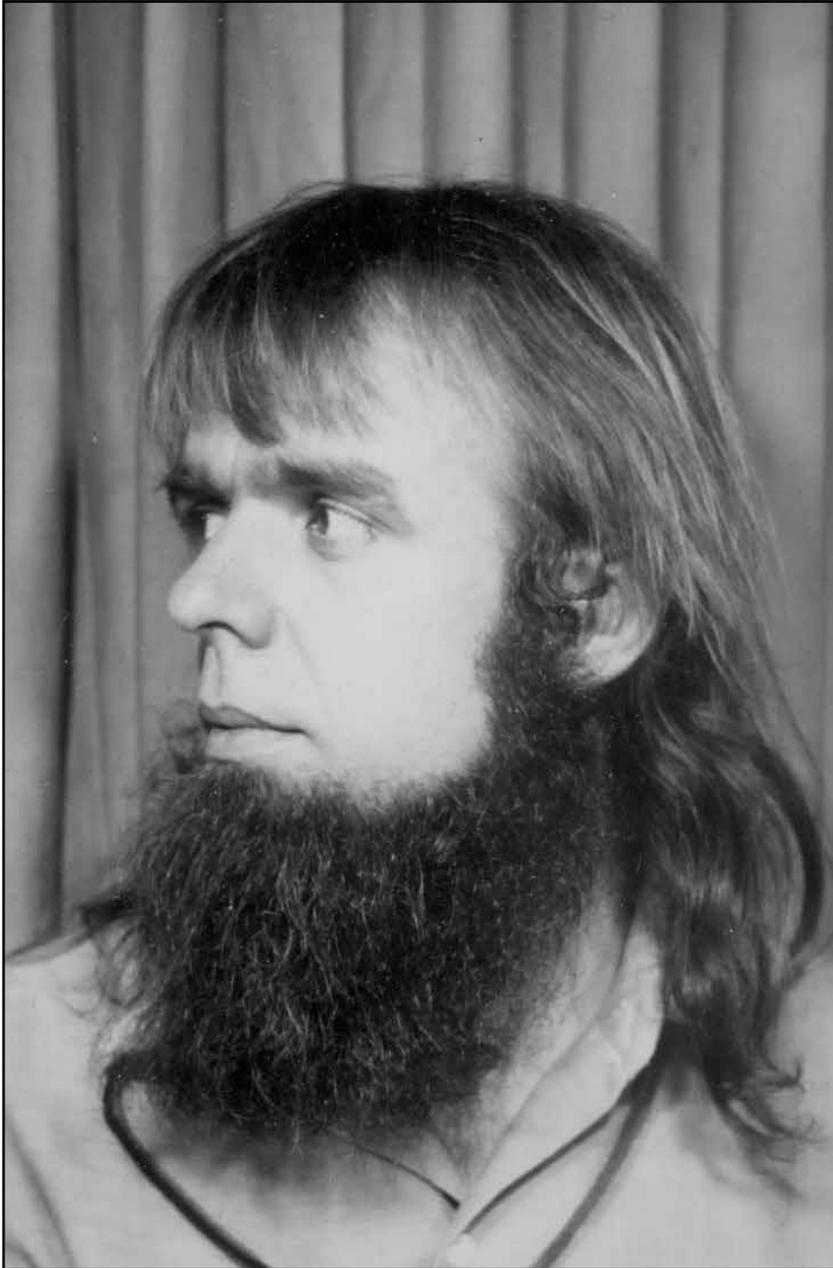
eventually paid off for Kerry when he was called in to testify before the Commission in the spring of 1964.

In 1965, Thornley returned to Southern California where he was editing a libertarian newsletter called *The Innovator*. In April of that year, New Classics Books released Thornley’s first published work, *Oswald*, which presented how an individual involved in radical politics could evolve into a political assassin, a theory that deeply offended many Warren Report critics, one of whom was David Lifton. As it so happened, Lifton – who would go on to author the best-selling *Best Evidence: Disguise and Deception in the Assassination of John F. Kennedy* – lived nearby and arranged a meeting at Kerry’s apartment in Culver City. For this meeting, Lifton brought along the entire twenty-six volumes of the Warren Report, which he proceeded to spread out over Kerry’s floor like mixed up puzzle pieces, using them to present his case for Oswald’s innocence.

Over the course of the evening, Lifton presented enough evidence to cause Kerry to do a 180-degree turn, coming to believe that Oswald was innocent and that there’d been a conspiracy behind the assassination. Afterwards, Kerry became a vocal Warren Commission critic and began speaking out against the Warren Report. These public denunciations appeared in a *Fact* magazine interview in December, and in an article Kerry wrote for *The Innovator* entitled “Oswald Revisited.” In addition, Kerry gave lectures at the Henry George Schools in San Diego and Los Angeles, as well as an interview on public radio in Los Angeles.

THE SUMMER OF LOVE AND GARRISON

In late 1966, *The Innovator* published an article entitled “Postman Against the State” dealing with non-governmental postal systems throughout history that had functioned more effectively than government-operated systems. As the “Playboy Forum” was then



'Summer of Love'-era Kerry Thornley

receiving complaints from readers about snooping on the part of the U.S. Postal Service, Kerry sent a copy of the "Postman Against the State" issue to *Playboy*. Robert Anton Wilson – an associate editor at *Playboy* – received this issue and in turn responded to Kerry, which initiated a longstanding correspondence. As Wilson later described in *Cosmic Trigger*:

We began writing long letters to each other...astonished at how totally our political philosophies agreed – we were both opposed to every form of violence or coercion against individuals, whether practiced by governments or by people who claimed to be revolutionaries. We were equally disenchanted with the organized Right and the organized Left while still remaining Utopians, without a visible Utopia to believe in.

As the 1960s progressed, Thornley immersed himself in the burgeoning counterculture, along the way experimenting with psychedelics, helping to organize the Griffith Park Human Be-Ins and formulating his own philosophy called Zenarchy.

As part of Kerry's interest in sexual liberation, he joined "a sexually swinging psychedelic tribe" into mate-swapping known as Kerista. Kerry – calling himself "Young Omar" – wrote several articles for the *Kerista Swinger*, the official newsletter of the group, of which the following is an excerpt:

Kerista is a religion and the mood of Kerista is one of holiness. Do not, however, look for a profusion of rituals, dogmas, doctrines and scriptures. Kerista is too sacred for that. It is more akin to the religions of the East and, also, the so-called pagan religions of the pre-Christian West. Its fount of being is the religious experience and that action or word or thought which is not infused with ecstasy is not Kerista. And Kerista, like those religions of olden times, is life-affirming.

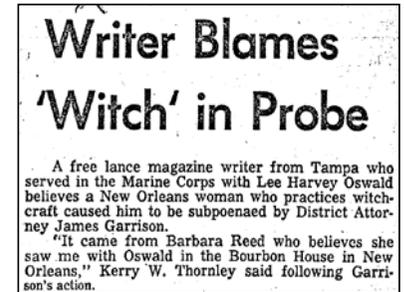
In *Drawing Down The Moon*, Margot Adler observed that Thornley's writings on Kerista signaled the true beginnings of the Neo-Pagan movement in contemporary culture, which since the mid-60s has expressed itself in myriad forms such as free love communes, Wicca practitioners, the back-to-nature movement, psychedelic experimenters and other groups dedicated to spiritual discovery. Adler cited Thornley as the first person to actually use the word *Pagan* to describe past and present nature religions.

At the same time that Thornley was embracing the 60s counterculture, New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison launched his now-famous investigation, which contended that a cabal of rogue intelligence agents had masterminded the JFK assassination, and that its base of operations was the Guy Banister Detective Agency in New Orleans. However, before Garrison was able to bring his case to trial, both Banister and David Ferrie – another suspect in the case – mysteriously died. At that point the key suspect in the case became Clay Shaw, director of the New Orleans Trade Mart and a former CIA asset.

In the spring of 1963, Lee Harvey Oswald had moved from Texas to New Orleans, and during this period became involved with different communist organizations, including the New Orleans branch of the Fair Play for Cuba Committee. Garrison claimed that Oswald had been directed in these activities by the Banister operation, working as an infiltrator to gather information on subversive organizations in New Orleans. Garrison further theorized that Banister and his crew set up Oswald as a fall guy by creating the cover story that he was a radicalized communist with an itchy trigger finger.

On February 21st, 1968, Garrison issued a press release stating that Kerry Thornley was a CIA agent who had participated in this assassination conspiracy with the likes of Banister, Ferrie and Shaw. Also listed among Garrison's suspects was Gordon Novel, who had attended USC with Kerry a decade earlier.

The principal witness against Thornley was a self-proclaimed “witch” and French Quarter scene maker named Barbara Reid, who claimed she had seen Oswald and Thornley together at the Bourbon House restaurant in September 1963. Thornley denied this allegation, insisting the last time he'd been in contact with Oswald was when the two served together in the Marines. Garrison charged Thornley with perjury, claiming he'd lied about this purported meeting with Oswald in New Orleans. Oddly enough, Barbara Reid was a friend of Thornley's, and also a member of the New Orleans branch of the Discordian Society. In fact, Reid even claimed, at one point, to be the incarnation of Eris.



Garrison further asserted that Thornley was part of the crew enlisted to set up Oswald prior to the assassination, and that his Warren Commission testimony – as well as his book, *Oswald* – were concocted to portray Oswald as a commie-influenced lone nutter. Garrison also suspected that Thornley had been intimate with Marina Oswald – all part of Thornley's supposed role as one of the notorious Oswald doubles running around New Orleans and Dallas (prior to the assassination) as part of a plot to paint Oswald commie red. It didn't help things that during his residence in New Orleans, Thornley had brief encounters with a number of Garrison's alleged conspirators, including Ferrie, Banister and Shaw. Thornley described these as brief and uneventful meetings, although Garrison suspected something far more sinister.

Oswald, as the theory goes, was set up as an assassination fall guy by Banister's operation. Kerry later suspected that he, as well, may have been set up in a similar manner – as a secondary patsy – had the Oswald set up gone awry. So, taking this one step further, it could be conjectured that Kerry's apparent chance meetings with the likes

of Shaw, Banister and Ferrie were actually orchestrated to be later used against him. To Kerry, this seemed the only way to reconcile all the alarming coincidences that placed him in the company of Garrison's rogue gallery of suspects, as well as in proximity to Oswald's movements (or the movements of Oswald doubles) during August and September of 1963.

OPERATION MINDFUCK AND THE BAVARIAN ILLUMINATI

Among Jim Garrison's more colorful unofficial investigators (known as "The Dealey Plaza Irregulars") was one Allan Chapman, who subscribed to the theory that JFK's assassination had been orchestrated by the Bavarian Illuminati, that infamous secret society much ballyhooed in the annals of conspiracy lore. Chapman also claimed that the major television networks were controlled by the Illuminati.

After catching wind of Chapman's goofy Illuminati theory, Thornley – with the support of some of his fellow Discordian Society pranksters – initiated what became known as Operation Mindfuck (OM), a campaign designed to screw with Garrison's head by sending out spurious announcements suggesting that he (Kerry) was indeed an agent of the Ancient Illuminated Seers of Bavaria (AISB).

Under the auspices of "The Bavarian Illuminati", Kerry invented a Do-It-Yourself Conspiracy Kit, which included stationery containing dubious letterheads. Among the culprits who helped perpetrate OM was none other than Robert Anton Wilson. As Kerry later noted:

Wilson and I founded the Anarchist Bavarian Illuminati to give Jim Garrison a hard time, one of whose supporters believed that the Illuminati owned all the major TV networks, the Conspiring Bavarian Seers (CBS), the Ancient Bavarian Conspiracy (ABC) and the Nefarious Bavarian Conspirators (NBC).⁴

ADVERTISEMENT

Bavarian Illuminati
 Founded by Hassan i Sabbah, 1090 A.D. (5090 A.L., 4850 A.M.)
 Reformed by Adam Weishaupt, 1776 A.D. (3776 A.L., 5556 A.M.)

△ THE ANCIENT ILLUMINATED SEERS OF BAVARIA △
 invite YOU to join

The World's Oldest And Most Successful Conspiracy

Have you ever SECRETLY WONDERED WHY
 The GREAT PYRAMID has FIVE sides
 (counting the bottom)?

WHAT IS the TRUE secret SINISTER
 REALITY lying behind the ANCIENT
 Aztec Legend of QUETZLCOATL?

WHO IS the MAN in ZURICH
 that some SWEAR is LEE
 HARVEY OSWALD?

IS there an ESOTERIC ALLEGORY concealed in the apparently innocent legend of Snow White and The Seven Dwarfs?

WHY do scholarly anthropologists TURN PALE with terror at the very MENTION of the FORBIDDEN name YOG-SOTHOTH?

WHAT REALLY DID HAPPEN TO ANDROSE BIERCE?

If your I.Q. is over 150, and you have \$3,125.00 (plus handling), you might be eligible for a trial membership in the A.I.S.B. If you think you qualify, put the money in a cigar box and bury it in your backyard. One of our Underground Agents will contact you shortly.

I DARE YOU!
 TELL NO ONE! ACCIDENTS HAVE A STRANGE WAY OF HAPPENING TO PEOPLE WHO TALK TOO MUCH ABOUT
 △ THE BAVARIAN ILLUMINATI! △

May we warn you against imitations! Ours is the original and genuine

"NOTHING IS TRUE EVERYTHING IS PERMISSIBLE"
 —Hassan i Sabbah

Nil Carborundum Illegitimo

DEATH TO ALL FANATICS!

'Bavarian Illuminati' advertisement

These OM communiqués led Garrison to suspect that the Discordian Society had operated as a CIA front organization involved in the JFK assassination. As Wilson observed in *Cosmic Trigger*:

Try to picture a jury keeping a straight face when examining a conspiracy that worshipped the Goddess of Confusion, honored Emperor Norton as a saint, had a Holy Book called “How I Found Goddess and What I Did to Her After I Found Her,” and featured personnel who called themselves Malaclypse the Younger, Ho Chi Zen, Mordecai the Foul, Lady L, F.A.B., Fang the Unwashed, Harold Lord Randomfactor, Onrak the Backwards, et al...

Amazingly, the first edition of *The Principia Discordia* – of which only five copies were produced – is said to have been printed using a mimeograph machine in, of all people, Jim Garrison’s office...two years before the Kennedy assassination took place! The clandestine

Tampan Subpoenaed by Garrison

By THOM WILKERSON
Tribune Staff Writer

A Tampa free lance writer yesterday was subpoenaed by Dist. Atty. James Garrison of New Orleans in connection with Garrison's probe of the assassination of President Kennedy.

Kerry Wendell Thornley, 29, of 726 51st St. S., said at his home here that he has nothing new to tell Garrison but said he would appear in New Orleans Feb. 24 "if I'm legally required to do so."

Garrison, in announcing the subpoena, said Thornley hadn't told the Warren Commission everything about his association with Lee Harvey Oswald, described by Garrison and the Commission as a Marine Corps buddy of Thornley's.

"I've been half expecting this," said Thornley, who has lived at the 51st Street address with his wife, Clara, since last October.

"I'm very, very skeptical that Oswald killed Kennedy or had anything to do with it. The last time I saw him was



—Staff Photo by Mark Foley

Thornley Expresses Mild Surprise
... says he has nothing new to tell Garrison

in June 1959. I never saw him in New Orleans. I told the Warren Commission in April, 1964 in Washington all I knew."

Thornley said Garrison's action was prompted by information supplied by Barbara Reid, a New Orleans practitioner of witchcraft. He said he knew Oswald at El Toro, Calif., in 1959.

The Tampan is the author of, "Oswald," a book on the accused assassin published in 1965 by New Classics House, Chicago.

"I don't think Oswald had any best buddies," said Thornley. "I was a close acquaintance. One time, I remember, we had an argument about waiting on a parade and I told him, 'Well, comrade, comes the revolution and you'll change all that.' Everybody in the outfit (Marine Air Control Squadron 3) put him down as an atheist and communist."

He said Oswald didn't appear to be insane but was "a little bit of an oddball."

Thornley said his and Os-

(Continued on Page 11, Col. 1)

after-hours copying operation was allegedly perpetrated by a typist in Garrison’s office named Lane Caplinger, who was friends with Thornley and Hill.

While it’s a given that Thornley and Hill were both in possession of this first edition of *The Principia Discordia*, what is not commonly known is that Slim Brooks – another member of the New Orleans Discordian Society – also received a copy of this rare first edition. It can also be assumed that other recipients of *The Principia Discordia* first edition included Barbara Reid and Roger Lovin, both New Orleans Discordian Society members. Lovin – known in the Discordian Society as “Fang the Unwashed” – was identified by Garrison witness Bernard Goldsmith as being connected to Oswald in New Orleans.

Thornley later wrote that “Slim Brooks was an active participant in exchanging Discordian declarations and documents and Gary Kirstein would therefore have known about this network and may have used it as cover at some point or other. In 1968 Roger Lovin told me that Jim Garrison was investigating the possibility that the Discordian Society was some kind of CIA front – which, at that time, I thought was very funny and completely absurd of Garrison. Roger Lovin was another active Discordian in New Orleans...Roger was also a close friend of Slim Brooks and in 1968 when he fell under suspicion with Garrison’s office much as I did...I believe it is very possible that Roger was unwittingly or somehow semi-wittingly involved in the assassination.”

GARRISON THROWS IN THE TOWEL

In early 1970, Jim Garrison undertook a legal maneuver to try Kerry Thornley’s case. At the time, this came as a surprise to Kerry who had assumed that the perjury charges against him had been dropped following Clay Shaw’s acquittal in 1969.

Garrison came after me one last time in 1970 just for harassment purposes because I had put an advertisement in a Libertarian magazine that said, ‘Good looking, young District Attorney will do anything for, or to, anyone for a chance to jack off to the John Kennedy autopsy photos.’ (Laughs) This was just to prove I wasn’t afraid of him...It was just my way of saying, ‘Look, you fucker, you’re not going to push me around...’⁵

Anyhow, the lawyer I wound up with in this anti-climactic episode, who happened also to be Garrison’s brother-in-law, told me in no uncertain terms to stop writing things about Jim. So I stopped, and never heard from the lawyer again, much less from Garrison...⁶

THE GHOSTS OF NEW ORLEANS

In the early 70s, new JFK assassination revelations appeared in the book *Coup d’Etat in America*, an acronym for the CIA’s alleged complicity in the assassination. The authors, A.J. Weberman and Michael Canfield, presented the theory that the three mystery tramps picked up by police in Dealey Plaza (and released shortly after) were actually “spies in disguise” acting as an assassination hit team.

Weberman and Canfield presented photographic evidence indicating that one of the tramps, known as the “old man tramp,” was actually E. Howard Hunt, a renowned CIA agent who had been involved in a number of covert capers including the Watergate burglary and the failed Bay of Pigs invasion. When Thornley came across this evidence, he immediately recognized Hunt as the shadowy character he’d met in New Orleans over a decade earlier named Gary Kirstein, a.k.a. “Brother-in-law.” It should be noted that Hunt – during the course of a checkered covert career – was a renowned master of disguise who used a variety of aliases to conceal his activities.⁷



The ‘three tramps’ picked up by Dallas police in Dealey Plaza.

Thornley’s “Brother-in-Law” revelations soon opened up a floodgate of associated memories as he began to suspect that he’d been set up as a substitute patsy in the assassination, and that Gary Kirstein (aka E. Howard Hunt) – or whoever he *actually* was – had been one of his “handlers.”

One disturbing memory involved the theft of a typewriter from Kerry’s French Quarter apartment following Memorial Day 1961. During this period, Kirstein commissioned Kerry to conduct research for a book project titled “Hitler Was a Good Guy.” While working on the project at the New Orleans public library, Kerry had written “Hitler Was a Good Guy” on the top of each page – along with his own name – then turned the notes over to Kirstein.

Kerry suspected that these research notes – as well as the theft of his typewriter – had been orchestrated by Kirstein as a means to produce a manuscript, under Kerry’s name, which could be used at a later date to trace him back to this typewriter and incriminate him in JFK’s assassination.⁸ A convoluted theory, yes, but not out of the realm of speculation, especially if Kirstein *was* E. Howard

Hunt, a man with a long history of falsifying documents. During the Vietnam War, Nixon aides enlisted Hunt to forge incriminating correspondence linking President Kennedy to the assassination of Vietnam Prime Minister Diem. Conspiracy theorists have also linked Hunt to the allegedly doctored diaries of Lee Oswald and Arthur Bremer, the fellow who attempted to assassinate Presidential candidate George Wallace in 1972. It's also of interest to note that Kirstein fancied himself an aspiring writer. E. Howard Hunt – it so happens – went on to author over 40 novels, many of these using a pseudonym.

So if Hunt was Kirstein, then who exactly was Slim Brooks? Kerry later suspected that the true identity of “Slim” was that of Jerry Milton Brooks, a former Guy Banister employee and member of the Minutemen, a far-right militia organization active during the 1960s. According to former Minutemen national spokesman, R.N. Taylor:

The fellow mentioned as Slim Brooks, I think he was either Jerry Milton Brooks, or Jerry's brother...If it was Jerry, that was one the most bizarre individuals I have ever encountered. One of a kind. For better and worse. I know he spent some time down there with Banister and that crowd in the sixties. He was a walking card reference file of names, addresses, phone numbers, etc. Had a very photographic mind, quite amazing at times. Never knew really what side he was on. He will forever remain an enigma to me.⁹

According to Fred Turner in *The Garrison Commission*:

Shortly after news of Garrison's investigation broke, I went to 531 Lafayette Place, an address given me by Minuteman defector Jerry Milton Brooks as the office of W. Guy Banister, a former FBI official who ran a detective agency.

According to Brooks, who had been a trusted Minuteman aide, Banister was a member of the Minutemen and head of the Anti-Communist League of the Caribbean, assertedly an intermediary between the CIA and Caribbean insurgency movements. Brooks said he had worked for Banister on 'anti-Communist' research in 1961-1962, and had known David Ferrie as a frequent visitor to Banister's office.¹⁰

American actress Grace Zabriskie – well-known for her role as Laura Palmer's mother in the cult television series *Twin Peaks* – was familiar with many of Kerry's French Quarter circle of friends, and had this to say about Slim Brooks:

I met Slim several times, didn't really feel I knew him. All the things Kerry writes about Slim don't tally with anything I was privy to in him. All I ever saw was the laconic, sort of “country” affect he cultivated. . . I THINK I may have heard about Brother-in-Law back then, but it's possible I only heard about him later, in letters from Kerry. You know, though, it's also a fact that the mention of Brother-in-Law gives me a dark feeling, the kind it's hard to imagine I got without ever setting eyes on him. It's possible we were introduced at the Bourbon House, or somewhere around the Quarter.¹¹

GERMAN BREEDING EXPERIMENTS AND MK-ULTRA

As the 70s progressed, Thornley became increasingly paranoid and began to suspect that everyone he'd ever known, even his closest friends and family, had some role in the ever-escalating conspiracy he perceived swirling around him, as demonstrated in correspondence from the period.

Robert Anton Wilson was the recipient of many of Thornley's rambling letters, which wove together a vast conspiratorial web

featuring Kerry at center stage battling the very same shadowy spectres that had eliminated JFK, RFK and MLK.

At one point, Wilson received a letter from Thornley stating: “I am the most important man on the planet – I am the only one who knows all about the Kennedy assassination!” Due to this dangerous knowledge, Kerry insisted that his life was threatened by this sinister cabal who wanted him silenced. Wilson tried to rationalize the situation, reminding Kerry that there was a distinct difference between “theory” and “proof.” Much to Wilson’s shock, Kerry came to suspect him of being involved with an “assassination conspiracy team” and, furthermore, that Wilson was Kerry’s CIA baby-sitter.

In one letter, Kerry related a particularly mind-blowing acid trip he’d taken where memories of his involvement in the assassination bubbled to the surface of his conscious mind, thus revealing his participation as an unwitting dupe – all part of a mind control experiment perpetrated by the Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI).

Kerry had previously suspected ONI of monitoring his activities during the time he was writing *The Idle Warriors*, and that both he and Oswald had been under surveillance. Later, Kerry filed a Freedom of Information request with ONI to get to the bottom of all this. When ONI finally responded, they claimed there were no references to either Thornley or Oswald in their files. In this regard, Kerry suspected that someone at ONI had either stolen or destroyed the files in question.

At one point, Thornley visited a hypnotherapist to help him uncover what had actually gone on during his service in the Marines, and if indeed ONI had brainwashed him to be some kind of sleeper agent. The hypnotist was unable to discover if there was any validity to this theory, which left Kerry only more uncertain. In 2002, Kerry’s friend Robert Newport shared the following:

There was a fella, and I don’t remember his name – I think the only part of his name I ever heard was Gary – who came to see

Greg Hill in the early to mid 80s, and told Greg that he had been in ONI, and had known about the (LSD) experimentation on Kerry... That was provocative and intriguing, but I never did have the fella’s last name – I didn’t hear anything more. And Greg didn’t seem to have much more than what I just told you, and he never had the ability or the interest – I don’t know which – to follow that any more deeper.

A 1983 *Rolling Stone* exposé revealed that during the late 50s and early 60s the CIA conducted MK-ULTRA experiments at Atsugi Air Base, where both Oswald and Thornley had been stationed. Atsugi – it should be noted – was just one of two locations outside of the U.S. where the CIA stored LSD. The other storage facility was Manila, where – it so happens – Thornley was also stationed during his overseas duty. Curiously enough, E. Howard Hunt (according to his biography) was also stationed at Atsugi during the same time period as Oswald and Thornley.

By the mid 70s, Kerry suspected that he’d been implanted with a mind control device during his service in the Marines. Later, Kerry came to believe that this insidious mind zap had started much earlier, perhaps even before birth, and that he was a product of a “German breeding experiment” that presumably used both he and Oswald as human guinea pigs. Thornley even grew to suspect his own parents were Axis spies who had cut a deal with Nazi occultists conducting eugenics experiments, the ultimate purpose of which was to create Manchurian Candidates.

Some have suggested that Kerry pretended to be a victim of MK-ULTRA or mental illness as a means to conceal his true role in the JFK assassination. Jonathan Vankin wonders, in *Conspiracies, Coverups and Crimes*:

Is Thornley’s intricately conspiratorial autobiography an elaborate mind-game he plays with himself and anyone who’ll join in? Or is

he really an intelligence agent, with a macabre cover story for his role in the John F. Kennedy conspiracy? Or ... is Kerry Thornley a helpless pawn in a game beyond anyone's comprehension, who somehow figured out what has been happening to him?¹²

KERRY IN LITTLE FIVE POINTS

During the last decade of his life, Thornley lived in the Little Five Points (L5P) district of Atlanta, Georgia, a bohemian enclave where he gained a reputation as a beloved and colorful character.

In December 1989, Frank Reiss opened A Capella Books in L5P and not long after encountered an “odd seeming character” – with intense eyes and a long beard – posting curious flyers around town concerning unfathomable conspiracies. As time went by – and Frank began to learn more about the L5P scene – he discovered that this fellow, Kerry Thornley, was a living legend around town, with a reputation as a “wild man.” A couple years later – following the publication of *The Idle Warriors* and *Zenarchy* by IllumiNet Press – Frank approached Kerry and asked him if he'd be interested in doing a book signing. Much to Frank's surprise, he found this alleged madman to be “disarmingly charming.” Without reservation, Kerry agreed to the book signing, and eventually Kerry ended up working at A Capella.

On his off time, Kerry could often be found selling his books and flowers at a stand in front of A Capella, where he spoke to passersby about his life following the Kennedy assassination, of being under CIA surveillance, and how the KGB had given him a disease after he'd been seduced by a comely Russian agent.

As Frank Reiss became more aware of the conspiratorial legends surrounding Kerry, he began to hear tales that everywhere Kerry had worked around L5P, mysterious strangers in dark suits would invariably show up. Frank never took any of these stories seriously

until one Christmas when he treated all of the A Capella employees (including Kerry) to dinner at the Star Bar in L5P.

Sometime during the course of festivities, the bartender came over and passed around drinks to everyone, compliments of a gentleman seated at another table. In due course, Frank's wife, Cynthia, went over and thanked the fellow – a conservative-appearing middle-aged man – and invited him over to their table. After exchanging pleasantries, the fellow informed the group that he was a veterinarian, and spoke with – what Frank considered – an obviously phony Scottish accent.

As the evening wore on, the guy with the phony Scottish accent engaged Frank's table in conversation about one topic or another. However, after Kerry left, the conversation wound up being exclusively about him. As Frank recalled:

It was so strange....clearly this guy wasn't who he said he was, and one way or another the conversation got around to Kerry and Oswald and all this other stuff...and that wasn't the only time...

Within a couple of months of this incident, my wife and I were out for dinner in the neighborhood, and again – this has never happened before to us, and it has never happened since – we're sitting in a restaurant, and once again the waiter comes up and says, “This couple over here wants to buy ya'all a bottle of wine,” and we accept and we invite them over to the table, and this time it's this young couple...And we start talking about everything in the world and before it's all over, we start talking about Kerry Thornley, and him working for me and what I knew about him... And those two incidents – whenever I end up talking to anybody about Kerry Thornley...there's something there...that stuff just wasn't out of the blue, and I told Kerry about it and it didn't faze him at all. He said, “Oh yeah, that stuff happens all the time – they're all over the place...”

(These incidents) fit the same description as what I had heard from other people who knew Kerry before me and would say: “Oh yeah, when (Kerry) used to work at The Pub there were always these men in dark suits.”

In the early 90s, Kerry contracted a rare kidney disease called Wegner’s granulomatosis, which in the coming years would cause a number of related maladies that ultimately led to his death on November 28, 1998. Up until the very end, he believed that this rare disease was the result of the very same conspiracy that bedeviled him for most of his troubled, yet fascinating life.

Adam Gorightly has been chronicling fringe culture and conspiracy politics in an illuminating manner for more than two decades. He has authored a number of books, including *Historia Discordia: The Origins of the Discordian Society*, *The Shadow Over Santa Susana: Black Magic, Mind Control and the Manson Family Mythos*, and *Happy Trails to High Weirdness: A Conspiracy Theorist’s Tour Guide*. His most recent book is *Caught In The Crossfire: Kerry Thornley, Oswald and the Garrison Investigation*. You can visit his website at: www.adamgorightly.com.