

CHAPTER VIII

The O'Reilly Invention

I was recently bemused to see that Bill O'Reilly, the Fox reporter, had managed in 2012 to parachute himself back in time to March 29th, 1977 such as to make himself a witness to the gunshot that killed George de Mohrenschildt. De Mohrenschildt had been a well-connected Russian émigré in Dallas in 1963. He became a figure of interest in the JFK mystery because he had befriended Lee Harvey Oswald, the alleged assassin of President John F. Kennedy. How does O'Reilly get into the act? In his 2012 best-selling book *Killing Kennedy: The End of Camelot*, he writes himself as a 29-year old reporter into the de Mohrenschildt death scene, stating on p.300: "As the reporter knocked on the door of de Mohrenschildt's daughter's home, he heard the shotgun blast that marked the suicide of the Russian, assuring that his relationship with Lee Harvey Oswald would never be fully understood," O'Reilly added, "By the way, that reporter's name is Bill O'Reilly."

But Bill O'Reilly's insertion of himself suffers from a reality deficiency disorder. How do I know? I was the actual— and only— reporter interviewing de Mohrenschildt on the last day of his life in 1977. I was meeting him at the Breakers Hotel in Palm Beach because I was writing a biography of Oswald (*Legend: the Secret World of Lee Harvey Oswald*.) Since de Mohrenschildt could help clarify Oswald's putative connections with the CIA, FBI and other intelligence services, I paid him \$4,000 for an exclusive four-day interview. I also rented a blue Ford LTD sedan for de Mohrenschildt so that he could travel during those days between my suite at the Breakers Hotel in Palm Beach, the venue for the interview, and the home of C. E. Tilton in the nearby town of Manalapan, where he was staying as a house guest. During the interview on March 29th, de Mohrenschildt asked me to get him a photograph from his Dallas lawyer Pat Russell to confirm part of his story. Then, at around 1 PM, we broke for an hour for lunch. De Mohrenschildt drove back to Manalapan. As he departed, he told with a wry smile that Manalapan was best known for the mysterious disappearance and murder of Judge Curtis Chillingworth in 1955.

Less than two hours later, de Mohrenschildt himself was found shot to death in his bedroom on the second floor of the Tilton home. The West Palm Beach Deputy Sheriff then arrived at my hotel and questioned me and my research assistant, Nancy Lanoue, who was taking notes during the de Mohrenschildt interview. We both were taken to the country courthouse, where I was interviewed by States Attorney David Blutworth. The next day, two FBI agents questioned me further and told me of the circumstances of the death. Subsequently, Blutworth gave me the investigative file to allay my suspicions that it might have been murder. Afterwards, I spoke to de Mohrenschildt's daughter, 33- year- old Alexandra, and other family members. From what I learned, O'Reilly's story does not fit the factual events.

For one thing, O'Reilly put himself at the wrong house. He writes he was on the steps of the home of de Mohrenschildt's *daughter* when he heard the shot. But de Mohrenschildt was not at his daughter's home (which was located at 158 Villa Lagine in Mexico City, Mexico); he was at C.E. Tilton's home in Manalapan, Florida.

Another minor problem is O'Reilly's claims to have been an ear witness to the death. He wrote in the 2013 version of his book for younger readers: "As I knocked on the door, I heard a shotgun blast. He had killed himself." According to the police report, however, no one inside or outside the house heard the shot (which was fired in a second-floor hallway alcove outside

Mrs. Nancy Tilton's bedroom.) One maid, Anna Vitsula, had been in Mrs. Tilton's room a few minutes before to turn on a tape recorder. But she did not hear a shot. Nor did five other people on the staff hear the report of the shotgun. When I asked State Attorney Bludworth why no one in the house heard the shot, he said it was probably because the blast was partly absorbed by the body and carpeting. In any case, because no one heard a shot, the body was not discovered until some fifteen minutes after the shooting.

The exact time of the shot was established as 2:21:03, by a tape of the television show "The Doctors" which was being recorded from a TV via an external tape recorder in the room of Mrs. Nancy Tilton. On the tape, the shot from de Mohrenshilt's nearby room could be heard as well as the sound of the shotgun falling on the floor. Police investigators could also determine the exact time that the downstairs doors were opened because they were connected to a Rawlins Alarm System that beeped anytime the doors were opened. These beeps were recorded on the same "The Doctors" tape so the time of each beep could be matched to the accounts given by staff members of when they entered and left the house. For example, Lillian Romani, the Tilton's cook had been outside sunbathing at the time of the shooting and re-entered the house at 2:23 PM, just two minutes after it. Meanwhile, Coley Wimbley, the Tilton gardener, was watering the plants outside the house at the time of the shooting and Dianne and Laurie Tisdale, who were working at the Tilton home, were getting ready to drive to West Palm Beach. None of these people saw a stranger arrive at or leave the property, or stand on the doorstep. About 10 minutes after the shot was fired, Alexandra de Mohrenschildt returned by car from a shopping trip in Boynton Beach. She was, like her father and her friend Katherine Loomis, a house guest. When she went to her father's room to give him a gift, she found his body. When Alexandra later visited me in New York, she told me that there were so many people outside the house that afternoon, it was not possible that a stranger could have arrived at the house, or left it, without being noticed.

O'Reilly's phantom-like presence at the crime scene is odd for another reason. If he had heard the gunshot, as he claims, he must have realized that he was an ear witness to a possible murder of an important figure in the JFK assassination. It would stretch credibility to believe that a reporter as earnest as O'Reilly would flee the crime scene, which itself may be a crime in Florida, without reporting to anyone for 35 years what he had witnessed.

One possible reason for O'Reilly's invisibility to everyone else at the Tilton home that day was that he actually was in Dallas, Texas, where he worked at the local TV station, WFAA. As it turns out, there are tape recordings of O'Reilly on the telephone in his Dallas office on March 29, 1977, the very day he claimed to be on the doorstep of Alexandra de Mohrenschildt's home. They were unearthed by the intrepid enterprise of researcher and author Jefferson Morley. According to these tapes, O'Reilly made several long distance calls to Gaeton Fonzi, an investigator for the House Select Committee on Assassinations, in Palm Beach in the late afternoon and evening of March 29th. He can be heard on the scratchy recordings asking Fonzi about the veracity of rumors that De Mohrenschildt had been killed earlier that day. These recordings, which were made by Fonzi, appear to put O'Reilly 1,200 miles away from the death scene at the Tilton home in Florida.

How could O'Reilly be in two places at the same time, one may ask? In his 2012 account, the inventive O'Reilly may have been emulating the time traveling investigator Jake Epping who went back in time to solve the JFK assassination in Stephen King's 2011 best-selling book *11/22/63*. Epping in that book used time travel to drop in on George de Mohrenschildt before he killed himself. But of course Epping's feat was in the realm of pure fiction. If O'Reilly found the

Time Travel app for non-fiction reporting, it is an app that could save a great deal of legwork for investigative journalists.