ASSASSINATION

MAJOR D. J. POWER, M.B., B.Ch., D.M.J., D.P.M., M.R.C.Psych., R.A.M.C. (V)

An assassin was originally regarded as a follower of the "Old Man of the Mountains" who was the leader of a Military and Religious Order which existed in Persia and Syria from the 11th to the 13th Century. The followers of the Order were notorious for secret murders.

Assassination by definition implies that the victim was taken by **surprise** and **treacherously** killed without legal process. It usually means **political homicide** although an individual may be assassinated by a professional killer who does not even dislike the victim but agrees to act as a "hit man" for money. Morbid jealousy may of course provide motivation for one person to treacherously kill another.

The childhoods of 12 assassins are reviewed with the object of attempting to find some common factors which might account for the development of their personalities in a certain way. Reference is also made to political issues which influenced the assassins. The conclusion deals with psychopathological and legal aspects of assassination.

The case histories concern individuals who personally killed their victims as opposed to those who counselled or planned the deaths of political opponents.

Political assassins are usually members of a political organisation. Those who murdered the Archduke Franz Ferdinand at Sarajevo on the 28th June 1914, were members of a Serbian Secret Society called the Union of Death or Black Hand. Remak (1959) indicated that membership of this type of Society involved the taking of an oath in the presence of a masked stranger. The initiate stood near a table which was covered with a black cloth upon which rested a dagger, a revolver and a crucifix. The oath read as follows:

"I . . . in joining the organisation "Union or Death" swear by the Sun that warms me, by the Earth that nourishes me, before God, by the blood of my ancestors, on my honour and on my life, that I will from this moment until my death be faithful to the laws of this organisation: and I will always be ready to make my sacrifice for it.

I swear before God, on my honour and on my life, that I will execute all missions and commands without question. I swear before God, on my honour and on my life, that I will take all the secrets of this organisation into my grave with me.

May God and my comrades in the organisation be my judges if, knowingly or not, I should ever violate this oath".

The three assassins of the Archduke were born in Bosnia which is part of present day Yugoslavia. They subsequently went to live at Belgrade the capital of Serbia, where they made contact with the appropriate terrorist organisation. They crossed the border into Bosnia (without passports) shortly before the Archduke and his wife started their goodwill tour. Two were aged nineteen years and the other was 20 years old. The Austrians believed that Turkey had designs on Bosnia. Consequently, Bosnia was annexed by Austria in 1908 and prospered under Austrian rule. The standard of living improved and transport systems were extended. Consequently, the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne was not assassinated because

the people of Bosnia were mistreated, but rather because the Serbs coveted Bosnia and wished the two countries united to form the nucleus of a new state for all Slavs. The assassins intended to commit suicide rather than risk capture after the deed but they were captured alive and a connection was established between the culprits and certain influential Serbs in Belgrade. The 1914-1918 War might have been prevented if the assassins had not survived the assassination. The assassins were Trifko Grabez, Nedjelko Cabrinovic and Gacilo Princip.

Case histories of twelve assassins

One

Grabez was the son of Serb-Orthodox priest and was very resentful of authority. He was expelled from school for striking a teacher. He joined the Black Hand organisation in Belgrade where he met others who held similar political opinions. He suffered from pulmonary tuberculosis.

Two

Cabrinovic's father was an Austrian Police spy who eventually committed suicide. Cabrinovic was very hostile to his father who allegedly mistreated him. He took up various apprenticeships after leaving school. He persistently quarrelled with his employers and eventually left Bosnia for Belgrade where he obtained a job with a printer who specialised in anarchist literature. His mother promptly burned some of these books which she found in his possession. He also developed pulmonary tuberculosis. He worked as a printer's assistant in Sarajevo the capital of Bosnia. He was expelled from the City after instigating a printers' strike in 1912. He "progressed" from an Anarchist to a Nationalist after joining the Black Hand and he was very concerned lest his fellow members should discover his father had been a Police informer for the Austrians.

Three

Princip was the son of a postman. He was one of 9 children and 6 died in infancy. He did not have a good relationship with his parents and he felt that they did not understand him. He was subsidised with monthly sums of money from his parents but he squandered this money giving loans to friends with little hope of repayment. He also joined the Black Hand.

They said at their trial that they had nothing against the Archduke personally but they resented what he represented. They expressed particular regret in regard to the death of the Archduchess. They died with fortitude and did not ask for clemency. They may have decided that death from a firing squad was no worse than an early death from tuberculosis which was virtually incurable at that time. They died with the added satisfaction that they had done what they believed to be a great service to their country.

Four

Leo Trotsky was murdered with an ice-pick in Mexico City in 1940. He was assassinated in the orders of Stalin. Trotsky and Stalin helped to found the Bolshevik party before the revolution of 1919. They subsequently disagreed, enmity

developed and Trotsky was forced to leave Russia. He continued to denounce Stalin whom he regarded as crude and uncultured. The assassin Ramon Mercader (later known as Jacques Monard), was born in Barcelona in 1914. His parents separated when he was 11 years old. His mother a native of Cuba, was very domineering and made two suicidal attempts after quarrels with Mercader's father. She associated with known communists. He witnessed assassination attempts by anarchists in Catalonia, during his childhood. Mosley (1972) indicated that Mercader later fought against Franco and received training in sabotage and espionage in Spain and Moscow. He was sentenced to life imprisonment which he serves in comfort because he is apparently never short of money.

Swanson, Bohnert and Smith (1970) described the childhoods of the assassins of four United States Presidents and one Presidential candidate.

Five

John Wilkes Booth shot and killed Abraham Lincoln on 14th April 1865. Booth was the 9th of 10 children and he was overprotected by his mother. His father was a famous actor, a drunkard and a political agitator. He did not spend much time at home and died when his son was 14 years old. John was bad tempered, easily bored, resented authority and cruelly killed household animals. He later developed paranoid attitudes which probably stemmed from his alcoholic habits. He disliked Lincoln's policies and especially the President's justification for the American Civil War, based on the Bible quotation to the effect . . . "every Kingdom divided against itself is heading for ruin and a household divided against itself collapses" (Luke 11.v.17) . . . particularly when many countries much smaller than the Southern States of the Confederacy, were seen to be economically successful.

Booth was 26 years old when he was shot dead shortly after the murder. He felt that history should remember him with gratitude.

Six

Charles Guiteau shot and killed President James Garfield on 27th July 1881. Guiteau was the youngest of 3 children and quite unruly especially after his mother's death when he was 7 years old. His father was a religious fanatic.

Guiteau believed that Garfield was undermining the Republic because of his opposition to patronage. He was hanged protesting that . . . "God will avenge this outrage."

Seven

Leon Czolgosz shot and killed President William McKinley on 6th September 1901. Czolgosz's mother died when he was 12 years old and he had a poor relationship with his domineering father. He was a frightened insecure child and also solitary and quick-tempered. He believed that the President was receiving too much attention and veneration. Consequently, strong motivation was probably provided by morbid jealousy.

Five doctors stated at the trial that he suffered from delusional insanity but he died in the electric chair. The President's death was generally thought to be part

of an anarchist conspiracy and concentrated sulphuric acid was placed in Czolgosz's coffin by persons unknown.

Eight

Lee Harvey Oswald shot and killed President John F. Kennedy on 22nd November 1963. His father died before Lee was born. His mother had a paranoid personality and unrealistic ambitions. He spent some time in an orphanage and he was diagnosed as a schizoid personality at the age of 13 years. He enjoyed fantasies of killing people. At the age of 16 years he expressed a wish to murder President Eisenhower who was allegedly "exploiting the working classes". Oswald spent some time in the Army but resented discipline. He subsequently emigrated to the Soviet Union, married a Russian girl and attempted suicide when threatened with deportation. They eventually returned to the United States. Oswald treated his wife with contempt and would not even allow her to learn English.

He discharged a firearm at a United States General in the early part of 1963. The President's murder was motivated by hatred of Capitalism, envy of Presidential authority and a desire for notoriety. He was disturbed on learning that his wife was expecting their second child and he murdered Kennedy shortly after receiving this information.

Nine

A man called Jack Ruby assassinated Oswald shortly after the President's death. Ruby was the son of a Russian immigrant and one of 8 children. The family were poor and his parents quarrelled frequently. His father was a brutal drunkard who deserted his wife when Jack was 12 years old. He was cared for in various foster homes after his mother was admitted to a Mental Hospital. He had a chequered career after leaving school, working as a salesman, a stage manager and in various nightclubs. He was nicknamed "Sparky" because of his explosive temper.

Ruby said that he killed Oswald for the following reasons: a. To discourage would-be killers in Dallas and in this context he said that . . . "People do murder in Dallas and pay a ten dollar fine." b. Because he respected Kennedy and regarded Oswald as a cunning vicious communist who felt no remorse. c. To prove that Jewish people had courage.

Psychiatric opinion at the trial indicated that Ruby suffered from paranoid psychosis and psychomotor epilepsy. The Jury decided that he could distinguish between right and wrong. He was sentenced to detention for an indefinite period in a mental hospital under conditions of maximum security.

Bromberg (1965) summed up Ruby by indicating that he had lived and worked in a "dog eat dog" competitive atmosphere and suffered from a psychotic divorce from reality. He also lacked social adjustment in the sense that aggression was not tempered by restraint.

Ten

Sirhan Sirhan shot and killed Presidential candidate Robert Kennedy on 5th June 1968. He was born in Jordan. His father was described as a harsh paranoid

individual who deserted the family when his son was 13 years old. Sirhan showed little interest in women.

Sirhan was tested after the assassination, with the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory. The test was repeated after 5 months. The results were analysed by computer. The results of the first tests indicated that he was suffering from paranoid schizophrenia, psychotic depression and hysteria.

The long-term prognosis was considered to be "not good". The result of the second test revealed that he was less hostile and bitter, depression was replaced by hypomania and there was no evidence of hysteria.

Finny et al (1973) stated that computer-standardised interpretation of psychiatric evidence would eliminate subjective bias on the part of expert witnesses especially when there was strong public feeling against the accused.

Eleven

George Grivas was responsible for a number of deaths in Cyprus. He would be regarded as a patriot by his fellow Greek Cypriots and as an assassin by the British Authorities who ruled Cyprus at the time of the killings. Purcell (1969) indicated that Grivas claimed to have taken part personally in attacks on the British Security Forces and he believed Divine Providence ensured that his decisions (during the Cyprus struggle) were consistently right. A single Cypriot execution group was responsible for more than 20 killings in a particular area between August 1956 and January 1957.

Grivas was born in Cyprus in 1898. He was one of six children, and his only brother became a doctor. His father was a prosperous grain merchant. George and his father were initially pro-British. There was no family history of mental disorder. He had good rapport with his parents and wife until she left him during the Cyprus struggle.

George proved a good athlete and scholar. He took part in the ill-fated Anatolian expedition to Turkey towards the end of the 1914-1918 war. He helped to defeat the Italians who invaded Greece in 1940 and in this instance the Greek cause was assisted by the Royal Air Force. He devised counter assassination techniques against the Communists who tried to take over Greece in 1943-1944 and executed 8,752 hostages in Athens and the Peloponnese alone, in the process.

Perhaps an element of incongruity was indicated by the fact that he expelled members of E.O.K.A. for defaulting on payments to grocers yet thought nothing of killing members of the Security Forces.

Twelve

Nathuram Godse shot and killed Mohandas Gandhi on 30th January 1948. He resented the fact that Gandhi had reluctantly agreed to the separation of Pakistan from India and he bitterly resented Gandhi's expression of sympathy for Muslims who died as a result of Communal riots in which his (Godse's) relatives suffered. Godse was born of Hindu parents with whom he enjoyed good rapport. There was no family history of mental disorder. His intelligence was within average limits but he was unable to settle in any type of work until he became a newspaper editor in Poona. He joined a quasi-fascist movement with the object of bringing about a great Hindu empire. Members of this movement took an oath . . . "To the Mother-

Table I indicates the result of matching 12 assassins again 12 "normal" controls of average individuals acting as controls. Signs + or - were awarded where particular characteristics were reasonably well substantiated.

This study indicates that the following factors were most commonly associated with the 12 assassins described:

It is arguable as to whether these factors would be equally applicable to assassins in general. The assassins and controls shared only factor c with any degree of frequency.

a. When the victim was a habitual criminal and the national law could not be involved to protect the people of the particular village concerned. Traditional law in Laos is village law and the village leader acts as referee. Consequently, assassination was socially approved when a member of the village disturbed the majority of its inhabitants in non-criminal contexts such as suspicion of witchcraft, selfishness or unreliability.

Westermeyer compared assassination in Laos with political homicide in the United States and concluded that the latter "resembled in many respects the classic 19th Century Vigilantism of the American frontier where the group had to be protected from the individual in the absence of effective law-enforcing agencies". Assassins are not necessarily underprivileged and their victims are not necessarily tyrannical. Tsar Alexander II was murdered in 1881 after emancipating the Serfs. He was assassinated mainly because of a mistake in foreign policy. He failed to support Slavs of neighbouring States when they rebelled against Turkish rule in 1875-1876. He was also unsuccessful in the 1877-1878 war against Turkey. One of the assassins was Sophia Perovskaya the aristocratic daughter of a governor.

a. Study and interpretation of statements by the accused and those who witnessed the homicide.

Table I

Result of matching twelve assassins against twelve "normal" or average individuals acting as controls

Assassins	Poor history of mental disorder	Poor rapport with parents	Poor physical health	Serious mental disorder at time of homicide(s)	Disturbed personality	Average intelligence	Satisfactory heterosexual adjustment	Poor standard of living	Persistent resentment of current legal authorities	Great discontent with conditions in his own country	Desire to escape from anonymity by altering the course of national political history	Relief of tension after the homicide(s)
One	(-)	(-)	+ (-)	- (-)	+ (-)	+ (+)	(+)	+ (-)	+ (-)	+ (-)	(-)	+ (-)
Two	+ (-)	+ (-)	+ (-)	- (-)	+ (-)	+ (+)	(+)	+ (-)	+ (-)	+ (-)	(-)	+ (-)
Three	(+)	+ (-)	+ (-)	- (-)	+ (-)	+ (+)	(+)	+ (-)	(-)	+ (-)	(-)	+ (-)
Four	+ (-)	+ (-)	(-)	- (-)	+ (-)	+ (+)	(+)	+ (-)	+ (-)	+ (-)	(-)	+ (-)
Five	+ (+)	+ (-)	(-)	- (-)	+ (-)	+ (+)	+ (+)	(-)	+ (-)	+ (-)	+ (-)	(-)
Six	(-)	+ (-)	(-)	+ (-)	+ (-)	+ (+)	(+)	+ (-)	+ (-)	+ (-)	+ (-)	+ (-)
Seven	(-)	+ (-)	(-)	+ (-)	+ (-)	+ (+)	(+)	+ (-)	+ (-)	+ (-)	(-)	+ (-)
Eight	(-)	+ (-)	(-)	- (-)	+ (-)	+ (+)	+ (+)	(-)	+ (-)	+ (-)	+ (-)	+ (-)
Nine	+ (-)	+ (-)	(-)	+ (-)	+ (-)	+ (+)	(+)	+ (-)	+ (-)	(-)	(-)	+ (-)
Ten	(-)	+ (-)	(-)	+ (-)	+ (-)	+ (+)	(+)	+ (-)	+ (-)	+ (-)	(-)	+ (-)
Eleven	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	+ (+)	+ (+)	- (-)	+ (-)	+ (-)	- (-)	+ (-)
Twelve	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	+ (-)	+ (+)	+ (+)	+ (-)	+ (-)	+ (-)	+ (-)	+ (-)

Notes: The affirmative sign + means conformity with the particular characteristic specified and the negative sign - means non-conformity. Characteristics of controls are indicated in brackets with similar interpretation.

b. Analysis and interpretation of evidence of expert witnesses such as pathologists, specialists in ballistics and psychiatrists.

c. The Jury comes to a conclusion as to guilt or innocence on the basis of the facts and expert opinions presented. The Judge gives guidance and advice to the jury in the context of legal principles relating to the offence.

d. Under United Kingdom Law, the accused would be detained in a Special (Maximum Security) Hospital for an indefinite period, if psychiatric evidence acceptable to the court indicated that he or she was mentally disordered within the meaning of the Mental Health Act (1959).

REFERENCES

- BROMBERG, W. (1965) *Crime and The Mind*. Collier and Macmillan Ltd., London. Pp. 5, 136-151.
 FINNEY, J. C., SKEETERS, D. E., AUVENSHIRE, C. D. and SMITH, D. F. (1973). Phases of psychopathology after assassination. *Amer. J. Psychiat.* 130, 12, 1379-1380.
 MOSLEY, N. (1972). The Assassination of Trotsky. Joseph M. Ltd., London. Pp. 10, 89-90.
 PURCELL, H. D. (1969). Cyprus. Ernest Benn Ltd. London. Pp 6 247, 256-261.
 REMAK, J. (1959). Sarajevo. Weidenfeld and Nicolson. London. Pp. 5, 46, 59-63.
 SWANSON, W. S., BOHNERT, P. J. and SMITH, A. J. (1970). The Paranoid. J. & A. Churchill Ltd., London. Pp. 21, 481, 491-494.
 WESTERMAYER, J. (1973). Assassination in Laos. *Arch. gen Psychiat*, 28, 740-743.

QUEEN'S HONORARY PHYSICIAN

Major-General T. S. Hart, M.B., M.F.C.M., D.P.H., D.T.M.&H., Late Royal Army Medical Corps, was appointed Honorary Physician to The Queen, with effect from 11 February, 1978, in succession to Major-General S. E. Large who has retired.

Honorary Consultant to the Army

Dr. G. H. Tovey, C.B.E., M.D., F.C.R.P., F.R.C.Path., was appointed Honorary Consultant in Blood Transfusion to the Army, with effect from 7 February, 1978, in succession to Dr. W. d'A Maycock, C.B.E., M.V.O., M.D., F.R.C.Path., who has retired.

Consultant Adviser to the Army

Colonel R. Fuller, M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P., D.Phys.Med., was appointed Adviser in Rheumatology and Rehabilitation to the Army, with effect from 3 January, 1978, in succession to Colonel A. R. Robinson, M.B., Ch.B., F.R.C.P.(Ed.), who has retired.