



The cop shop at LBPB HQ where reporter William Bradley "Bill" Hunter was shot and killed.  
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William Bradley "Bill" Hunter

In a story published in the Independent, Press-Telegram on March 22, 1963, William Bradley "Bill" Hunter, the papers' ace crime reporter, wrote that Lee Harvey Oswald "assuredly" killed John F. Kennedy and that Jack Ruby "assuredly" killed Oswald.

He was putting to rest the then-incipient idea of greater and more elaborate forces behind the assassination.

One month and one day later, Hunter was shot and killed, ironically putting the 35-year-old journalist in the ever-growing book of names gathered and pored over by those suspecting a conspiracy in the slaying of the president.

Bill Hunter was born in Wichita Falls, Texas, and he had friends in Dallas. So within minutes of news of Kennedy's killing on Nov. 22, he had begged to be sent to Texas to cover the events following the tragedy. Night City Editor Art Wild grabbed Hunter and the two dashed around the paper's building on Sixth and Pine looking for an OK for the trip. They ran into Publisher Dan Ridder in a hallway. Ridder scribbled out a voucher and soon Hunter was in Dallas, where he found an old reporter pal of his, Jim Koethe. Koethe had worked with Hunter in Wichita Falls and had gone on to work for the Dallas Times-Herald.

Hunter and Koethe (pronounced Koty) worked together covering the aftermath of the assassination, most notably the slaying on Nov. 24 of Oswald by local nightclub owner Jack Ruby. A few hours after that shooting, Ruby's attorneys gave the reporters access to his apartment, where all we know is they had a "look around." If they found anything of interest, they never wrote about it.

Hunter wrote an award-winning special section for the I,P-T, "Three Days in Dallas," and returned to Dallas to cover Ruby's trial. Throughout his coverage, he never wrote anything about conspiracy, other than his assertion of the assuredness that Oswald killed Kennedy and Ruby killed Oswald (though in the latter case the shooting occurred in front of TV cameras and was seen by millions on American television).

Hunter went back to covering Long Beach crime, spending his time in the press room at police headquarters downtown, playing cards in the cop shop and

drinking in bars with his friends on the force.

Among these friends was police Officer Creighton Wiggins, who dropped by the press room at headquarters late some time after midnight on April 23, 1964. Hunter was still hanging out, reading a book, when he was shot dead by Wiggins, who told investigators that he had dropped his gun, causing it to discharge. The bullet hit Hunter in the heart, killing him instantly.

Subsequent investigation showed that the trajectory of the bullet was not consistent with a shot from ground level, and Wiggins changed his story to say he was playing quick-draw with Hunter and he accidentally squeezed off a shot. Another policeman, Erroll F. Greenleaf, was at the scene at the same time. He testified that he had his back turned and that he saw nothing. Both officers were convicted and given three-year probation sentences.

Hunter's killing and its sort of dodgy facts fed into the conspirators' playbook, especially when coupled with Koethe's murder five months later by a man who broke into his Dallas apartment and killed him with a karate chop to the throat. That murder remains unsolved. Even the death of Tom Howard, one of Ruby's attorneys who let Koethe and Hunter into Ruby's apartment, is considered suspicious by some when he died of a heart attack at 48 the following March.

Hundreds, if not thousands, of books and articles have been written about Kennedy assassination conspiracy theories, and few omit the "suspicious" deaths of Hunter and Koethe, especially when discussing the theory of "clean-up crews," a squad of killers charged with eliminating everyone who had evidence of a conspiracy.

Throughout, however, Hunter's colleagues at the Press-Telegram saw Hunter's death as nothing but a tragic mistake.

Hunter's editor, Art Wild, wrote in a letter to the P-T in 1993: "For many years I maintained a quiet but thorough investigation into the (shooting of Hunter). I am convinced that the (conspiracy) theory concerning Bill Hunter has absolutely no validity."

And longtime I, P-T columnist George Robeson, who had plenty of friends in the LBPD during his time as a reporter and columnist, wrote in 1991 about his own experience with firearm horseplay with cops in his day.

"Guns had been shoved in my ribs more than once," he wrote. "It was childish and terribly dangerous fun, and finally fatal. The only surprise is that it hadn't happened before."

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