An Introduction
to the
JFK Assassination

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Who Killed President Kennedy?

This series of essays isn't going to give you the answer, but it will try to illustrate the best way to think about the question.

Much of the evidence in the JFK assassination is inconclusive and open to a variety of interpretations. There are, however, some basic, indisputable, uncontroversial facts. These facts suggest only two realistic solutions, both of which revolve around the role of Lee Harvey Oswald:

- either Oswald killed Kennedy, with or without associates,
- or he was set up in advance to take the blame.

The Basic Facts of the JFK Assassination

On 22 November 1963, President John F. Kennedy was a passenger in a motorcade through the centre of Dallas, Texas. At about 12:30pm, the motorcade was in Dealey Plaza, just outside the downtown area, when several gunshots were fired. Altogether, three people were injured:

- President Kennedy was wounded in the back and the throat, and, fatally, in the head.
- The governor of Texas, John Connally, who was sitting directly in front of Kennedy, sustained three wounds:
  - one bullet hit him in the back, destroyed four inches of one rib, punctured his right lung, and came out of the right side of his chest;
  - his right wrist was shattered;
  - and a fragment of a bullet was embedded in his left thigh.
- A bystander, James Tague, received a slight cut on the cheek from the impact of a bullet to the concrete curb near his feet.

At the time of the shooting, the presidential limousine was heading west on Elm Street, and had just passed the Texas School Book Depository, which contained publishers' offices and a book warehouse. A window was half open at the eastern end of the sixth floor of the building. Three empty bullet shells were discovered just inside this window. Elsewhere on the sixth floor, a rifle was discovered. Tests showed that those bullet shells had been fired from that rifle.

The rifle had been purchased several months earlier by mail order. The name on the mail order coupon was a pseudonym known to have been used elsewhere by Lee Harvey Oswald. The handwriting on the coupon matched Oswald's. The supplier had sent the rifle to a post office box rented by Oswald.

Oswald worked in the Texas School Book Depository, and had legitimate access to the sixth floor. He claimed to have been elsewhere at the time of the shooting, but there were no eye–witnesses to support his alibi.

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1 The basic, uncontested facts of the JFK assassination can be found in the Warren Report.
2 Lack of agreement about the exact location and nature of President Kennedy's wounds is the main reason why the JFK assassination remains controversial. President Kennedy's autopsy was carried out poorly: his back and throat wounds were not dissected, and none of his wounds were measured or photographed with adequate precision. The two official interpretations of the medical evidence differ in crucial ways; see Warren Report, pp.86ff and House Select Committee on Assassinations Report, appendix vol.7, pp.80ff.
3 For Governor Connally's chest wound, see Warren Commission Hearings, vol.4, p.104. For his wrist wound, see ibid., pp.118ff.
5 This is the American definition of 'sixth floor'; in the UK it would be the fifth floor. All such references will use the American definition.
6 For the discovery of the bullet shells and the rifle, see e.g. Warren Commission Hearings, vol.6, pp.300f. The bullet shells were matched to the rifle by Robert Frazier of the FBI: Warren Commission Hearings, vol.3, pp.431ff.
Lee Harvey Oswald's Alibi

If any recordings or transcripts were made of Oswald's many hours of interrogation, none survive, apart from some scribbled notes.

Oswald stated that he had been on the first (i.e., ground) floor of the Texas School Book Depository at the time of the assassination, which happened shortly after he had eaten his lunch in the 'domino room' on that floor.\(^8\)

There is some corroboration for his alibi:

- An FBI agent who interviewed him wrote that "Oswald stated that ... he had eaten lunch in the lunch room at the Texas School Book Depository, alone, but recalled possibly two Negro employees walking through the room during this period. He stated possibly one of these employees was called 'Junior' and the other was a short individual."\(^9\)
- The notes of Captain J.W. Fritz, of the Dallas police, read: "say[s] two negr came in. One Jr. + short negro."\(^10\)

Two black employees matched these descriptions: James Jarman was known as 'Junior', and Harold Norman was short.

Both men had been standing outside the TSBD, waiting to see the president. When they heard that the motorcade had reached Main Street, they decided to go back into the building to obtain a better view. Because of the crowd standing on the front steps of the TSBD, they used one of the building's rear entrances. Their route took them close to the domino room. Oswald could hardly have known this unless he too had been on the first floor at the time.

According to police logs, the motorcade was on Main Street from about 12:23pm until 12:29pm, which places Oswald on the first floor just a few minutes before the shooting. Jarman narrows the time further: he was standing outside "until about 12:20, between 12:20 and 12:25."\(^11\)

Some second-hand versions of Oswald's alibi have him claiming to have eaten lunch with 'Junior' Jarman, which Jarman denied. This denial allowed the *Warren Report* to dismiss without argument Oswald's claim that he was on the first floor.\(^12\)

On the face of it, this is an open–and–shut case: Oswald did it. The only realistic alternative is that Oswald had been carefully framed in advance.

The other, purely theoretical, solution, that some other lone nut happened to stumble across Oswald's rifle and decided to take a few pot shots at the president, is too unlikely to be worth considering.

Either Oswald did it, or he was set up. Let's examine each of these options in turn.

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\(^8\) According to a report by FBI agents who interviewed the suspect, "OSWALD claimed to be on the first floor when President JOHN F. KENNEDY passed this building" (*Warren Report*, p.613). The most detailed account of Oswald's alibi is in a report by Captain J.W. Fritz of the Dallas police: "I asked him what part of the building he was in at the time the president was shot, and he said that he was having his lunch about that time on the first floor" (*ibid.*, p.600). Some researchers have claimed that Oswald would surely have been questioned comprehensively about his activities and location at the time of the shooting, and that pertinent information from the interviews may have been deliberately omitted from the reports. Others have pointed out that Oswald was consistently unhelpful to his interviewers, and may simply have refused to expand on his alibi.


\(^10\) Handwritten notes of Captain J.W. Fritz's interview of Oswald, p.1. Fritz's notes also contain the words, "out with Bill Shelley in front" (*ibid.*, p.3), which have been taken to describe Oswald's location at the time of the assassination. In fact, they almost certainly refer to his actions a few minutes later. An FBI interviewer reports that, after the assassination, Oswald "went outside and stood around for five or ten minutes with foreman BILL SHELLEY" (*Warren Report*, p.619).

\(^11\) The Dallas Police radio log states that at 12:22pm the motorcade was on Harwood Street and "just about to cross Live Oak [Street]" (*Warren Commission Hearings*, vol.17, p.461). Main Street was about one minute further on. Jarman's testimony: *Warren Commission Hearings*, vol.3, pp.201ff. Norman's testimony: *ibid.*, pp.189ff. For a plan of the first (ground) floor, see *Warren Report*, p.148 (Commission Exhibit 1061). The domino room was in the north–east corner, overlooking the loading bay; it provided a good view of anyone using the rear entrances. *Warren Commission Documents 81 and 496* contain photographs of the domino room. Another witness, Carolyn Arnold, saw Oswald on either the first or second floor at about this time; see Appendix F, 'Carolyn Arnold's FBI Statements,' pp.90ff below.

Did Oswald Kill President Kennedy?

The rifle and bullet shells found at the scene of the crime suggested very strongly that Lee Harvey Oswald had fired three shots at President Kennedy. Other evidence quickly emerged which indicated that he had not been the only gunman:

- The Texas School Book Depository was behind Kennedy at the time of the shooting, but many of the closest eye-witnesses described one or more shots coming from the opposite direction.\(^{13}\)
- The medical staff who gave emergency treatment to Kennedy considered his throat wound to be one of entrance, not exit, and described a substantial exit wound toward the back of his head.\(^{14}\)

This evidence of gunfire from the front was reported by newspapers, radio and television very soon after the assassination. Although governmental and, eventually, media opinion settled on Lee Harvey Oswald as the only assassin, the early news reports caused a great deal of public scepticism of the lone–gunman explanation, both in the USA and abroad. Suspicion increased when Oswald was himself murdered two days later, while in police custody, by another lone gunman, a man with connections to organised crime.\(^{15}\)

Public scepticism of the lone–gunman account was expressed as public distrust of the governmental and media institutions which promoted that account.\(^{16}\) These institutions were instrumental in establishing the Warren Commission, which was created with the explicit purpose of convincing the general public that Oswald alone had killed President Kennedy.\(^{17}\)

The Warren Commission's report endorsed and expanded an earlier FBI report, and presented more evidence against Oswald to add to the bullet shells and rifle found in the Texas School Book Depository. Photographs were discovered of Oswald holding what appeared to be the same rifle.\(^{18}\) His wife admitted that he had owned the rifle,\(^{19}\) and that he had planned to kill the former vice-president, Richard Nixon.\(^{20}\)

In addition to the shooting in Dealey Plaza, Oswald was held to have shot dead a policeman in a suburb of

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\(^{13}\) The earliest newspaper accounts mentioned several witnesses who described shots coming from the western end of Dealey Plaza. Charles Brehm, who was standing very close to President Kennedy, "seemed to think the shots came from in front of or beside the President," according to the *Dallas Times Herald* on the evening of 22 November. Ochus Campbell, the vice-president of the Texas School Book Depository Company, "says he ran toward a grassy knoll to the west of the building, where he thought the sniper had hidden" (*Dallas Morning News*, 23 November 1963). Mary Woodward, a journalist on the *Dallas Morning News*, was standing on the north side of Elm Street, about halfway between the TSBD and the knoll. She wrote in the next day's edition that "suddenly there was a horrible, ear-shattering noise coming from behind us and a little to the right." Altogether, around 40 witnesses claimed to have heard shots from the general direction of the grassy knoll; see Appendix A, 'Grassy Knoll Witnesses,' pp.98ff below.

\(^{14}\) In a press conference given shortly after Kennedy's death, Dr Malcolm Perry stated that 'the wound appeared to be an entrance wound in the front of the throat; yes, that is correct'; see Appendix B, 'Parkland Hospital Press Conference,' pp.72ff below. The rear head wound is described in several of the accounts made by the medical staff immediately after the treatment: *Warren Commission Hearings*, vol.17, pp.1–22 (Commission Exhibit 392). For example, Dr Kemp Clark, professor of neurosurgery and the most senior doctor present, described "a large wound in the right occipital–parietal region" (*ibid., p.1*). The parietal bones are on the sides of the skull; the occipital bone is at the back of the skull.

\(^{15}\) Jack Ruby's links to organised crime were glossed over by the Warren Commission but acknowledged by the House Select Committee on Assassinations in a 1000–page report: *HSCA Report, appendix vol.9, pp.125ff*.

\(^{16}\) As an example of the attitude of many upstanding citizens to the case, see *FBI HQ JFK Assassination File, 62–109060–15*.

\(^{17}\) Within hours of Oswald's own assassination, J. Edgar Hoover, the director of the FBI, said: "The thing I am concerned about, and so is Mr Katzenbach [the deputy attorney general], is having something issued so that we can convince the public that Oswald is the real assassin. Mr Katzenbach thinks that the President might appoint a Presidential Commission of three outstanding citizens to make a determination." (*HSCA Report, appendix vol.3, p.472*). In a memo written later that day, Nicholas Katzenbach made the case for establishing what became the Warren Commission; see Appendix D, 'Katzenbach: Memo to Moyer's,' pp.84ff below. For an example of pressure by the news media, see Appendix E, 'LBJ's Phone Call to Joe Alsop,' pp.96ff below. For more about the political necessity of the lone–gunman explanation and the creation of the Warren Commission, see Chapter 7, "A Little Incident in Mexico City", pp.23ff below.

\(^{18}\) Photographs of Oswald with a rifle: *Warren Report, p.126*.

\(^{19}\) Marina Oswald described the weapon found on the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository as "the fateful rifle of Lee Oswald": *Warren Commission Hearings*, vol.1, p.119.

Dallas about forty minutes later, and to have attempted to assassinate a retired general in Dallas several months earlier.

The Warren Report was issued in one volume in September 1964, and was immediately and widely praised in the print and broadcast media. More informed and disinterested voices, however, found it less convincing.

Two months later, once the reviews had appeared, the report’s twenty-six volumes of hearings and exhibits were published. Of those who took the trouble to examine the supplementary volumes, a substantial number discovered that most of the report’s conclusions were either:

- not strongly supported by the evidence it cited, or
- actively contradicted by the evidence it cited.

Over time, as more research was undertaken, and as more and more previously classified documents became available to researchers, public trust in the Warren Commission’s conclusions and objectivity diminished even further.

Other official investigations and reports were commissioned to deal with various aspects of the case. The most prominent was the House Select Committee on Assassinations in 1977–78, which concluded, in an almost universally derided compromise, that Oswald had been the assassin, and that an unidentified person had also fired a shot, which missed.

The HSCA’s case against Oswald largely followed that of the Warren Commission. Although the Commission had successfully refuted one or two of the earliest and more improbable conspiracy theories, neither it nor the Select Committee was able to provide a convincing account of exactly how Lee Harvey Oswald killed President Kennedy.

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23 See e.g. Bertrand Russell, ‘16 Questions on the Assassination’, *Minority of One*, 6 September 1964, pp.6–8. Also unconvinced about the *Warren Report*’s conclusions were three of the seven Commissioners. One of them, Senator Richard Russell, objected strongly to the central part of the case against Oswald; see Appendix J, ‘Richard Russell and the *Warren Report,*’ pp.11ff below.
24 Although hundreds of thousands of copies of the *Warren Report* were issued in paperback to coincide with the publication of the official edition, public access to the documentary evidence was carefully rationed. Only 5000 copies of the complete supplementary volumes were printed, all in expensive hardback format; see http://www.acorn.net/jfkplace/09/fp.back_issues/31st_Issue/wc_notes.html. Much of the background material was not published at all, but placed in the National Archives. Other material was deemed to be dangerous to national security, and was ordered to be kept secret for 75 years. Law suits under the Freedom of Information Act enabled some of this material, such as the transcripts of the Commission’s executive sessions, to be made public.
25 A CIA document (see Appendix K, ‘CIA and Warren Report Critics,’ pp.16ff below) claimed in 1967 that “46% of the American public did not think that Oswald acted alone.” According to an opinion poll in 1976, the figure was 81%; see http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/white_house/july-dec03/jfk_11-20.html.
26 The HSCA Report’s conclusions: *HSCA Report*, p.3. A recording had come to light of a police radio broadcast that appeared to contain evidence of a fourth gunshot. Acoustic tests indicated that the evidence was credible and that the fourth shot originated from the infamous grassy knoll at the north–west corner of Dealey Plaza. The HSCA was unable to dispose of this evidence before its report was due to be published, and so was obliged to suggest the existence of a third, albeit unsuccessful, lone nut in addition to Oswald and Ruby. The acoustics evidence is technical, and its interpretation is disputed. For the case in favour of a shot from the grassy knoll, see D.B. Thomas, ‘Echo Correlation Analysis and the Acoustic Evidence in the Kennedy Assassination Revisited,’ *Science & Justice*, vol.41 no.1 (January 2001), pp.21–32. For the case against, see R. Linsker, R.L. Garwin, H. Chernoff, P. Horowitz, and N.F. Ramsey, ‘Synchronization of the Acoustic Evidence in the Assassination of President Kennedy,’ *Science & Justice*, vol.45 no.4 (October 2005), pp.207–26. For a readable overview, see G. Paul Chambers, *Head Shot: The Science Behind the JFK Assassination*, Prometheus Books, 2010, pp.116–144.
How Did Oswald Kill President Kennedy?

Although the bullet shells and the rifle implicated Lee Oswald in the assassination, a substantial proportion of the general public either remained unconvinced that he had acted alone, or doubted that he had been involved at all.

In order to help the media to ‘convince the public that Oswald is the real assassin,’ the Warren Commission was obliged to describe in detail how Oswald, without assistance, was able to kill one man and injure two others.

The essential part of the Commission's case involved three claims:

• that all of the shooting came from the easternmost south-facing window on the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository;
• that Lee Harvey Oswald had brought the rifle to work, and was at the sixth floor window with the rifle at the time of the shooting;
• and that it was physically possible for a lone gunman to have caused all the known injuries with only three shots.

All the Shots Came from the Sixth Floor

As well as the presence of the rifle and the empty bullet shells, there was other strong evidence that at least some of the shooting came from the TSBD:

• many eye-witnesses heard one or more shots from the building;
• and a gunman was seen on one of the upper floors.

The idea that every gunshot originated from the building's south-easternmost sixth-floor window was, however, merely the Warren Commission's working assumption. The idea had no explicit evidence in its favour, and was contradicted by, among other things, the location and nature of President Kennedy's head injuries.

The autopsy pathologists consistently claimed that there was an entry wound low down on the back of President Kennedy’s skull. There was also a large wound, the location of which was variously described as toward the top, right and rear of the skull. All of these locations of the supposed exit wound are higher than the entry wound, and are incompatible with a shot coming from above and behind at an angle of about 10°-15° to the horizontal, given the inclination of Kennedy’s head at the moment of the fatal shot or shots, which is shown on frame 312 and frame 313 of the Zapruder film.

The majority of the damage to the head appears to have been caused by a soft-nosed bullet, a type designed to break apart on impact, while all the non-fatal wounds were caused by metal-jacketed bullets, which were designed to remain intact. The shells found on the sixth floor of the TSBD were all from the same batch, and must have contained the same type of bullet. The implication is that either the soft-nosed bullet was fired from elsewhere, or it was fired from the sixth floor by a second gunman, a conclusion equally unhelpful to the notion of Oswald as the lone assassin.

Perhaps the best-known evidence of shooting from somewhere other than the TSBD is the motion of

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28 The Warren Commission's interpretation of the head wounds is shown in Commission Exhibit 388, a drawing in which the angle of the head at the instant of the fatal shot does not correspond to that shown in the Zapruder film. The Clark Panel in 1968, followed by the House Select Committee on Assassinations in 1977–78, felt obliged to move the entry wound four inches or ten centimetres higher, so that it might plausibly appear to be in line with the sixth-floor window and the larger wound. Dr James Humes, the pathologist in charge of President Kennedy’s autopsy, gave his opinion of the revised entry wound, as shown in a photograph of Kennedy’s head: “I can assure you that as we reflected the scalp to get to this point, there was no defect corresponding to this in the skull at any point. I don’t know what that is. It could be to me clotted blood. I don’t, I just don’t know what it is, but it certainly was not any wound of entrance” (HSCA Report, appendix vol.7, p.254). For more about the medical aspects of the case, see Chapter 14, 'Medical Evidence,' pp.50f below.
29 For the ballistics aspects of the case, see G. Paul Chambers, Head Shot: The Science Behind the JFK Assassination, Prometheus Books, 2010, and Bonar Menninger, Mortal Error: The Shot That Killed JFK, St. Martin’s Press, 1992. Menninger’s treatment of the ballistics evidence is credible, even though his main conclusion is not; see Chapter 16, 'Fiction, Propaganda, and the Media,’ pp.55ff below.
President Kennedy’s head in reaction to the fatal shot. The sharp back–and–to–the–left movement was revealed when bootleg copies of the Zapruder film began to circulate a few years after the assassination. It corroborates the statements of the many witnesses who claimed to have heard one or more shots coming from the direction of the grassy knoll at the north–west corner of Dealey Plaza.30

A home movie by a spectator, Robert Hughes, showed the easternmost sixth-floor window as the president’s car passed directly underneath, no more than five seconds before the shooting started. The three TSBD employees in the fifth-floor window are clearly visible, but there appears to be no–one in the sixth-floor window. Another spectator, Charles Bronson, filmed the window six minutes earlier, at about the time when the motorcade had been due to pass by. Again, the window appears to be empty.31

Oswald at the Scene of the Crime with a Rifle

Other objections were made to the Commission’s claim that Oswald:

• had brought a rifle to work on the day of the assassination,
• was on the sixth floor at the time of the shooting,
• and fired that rifle from the sixth floor.

Only three witnesses had seen Oswald prior to and during his arrival at work on 22 November 1963. All three testified that he had not carried a rifle. Buell Wesley Frazier, who had driven Oswald to work, and his sister, Linnie Mae Randle, at whose house Oswald had met Frazier that morning, both claimed that Oswald had been carrying a paper bag, but that the bag was much too short to have held the Mannlicher Carcano rifle that was discovered on the sixth floor of the TSBD. Jack Dougherty, a colleague of Oswald’s who saw him enter the TSBD, was adamant that he did not see anything in Oswald’s hands.32

Dallas police officers claimed to have discovered on the sixth floor a paper bag that was long enough to

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30 The phrase “back and to the left” was popularised by the film JFK, and later by the TV show, Seinfeld. A Nobel Prize–winning physicist, Luis Alvarez, attempted to demonstrate that the motion was not in fact inconsistent with a shot from the sixth–floor window, which was almost directly behind the president; see Luis A. Alvarez, 'A Physicist Examines the Kennedy Assassination Film,' American Journal of Physics, vol.44 no.9 (September 1976), pp.865–7. Against Alvarez, see e.g. Chambers, op. cit., pp.165ff. It was pointed out that Alvarez’s method, which involved shooting at melons on a fence post, hardly resembled the conditions it was supposed to replicate. Against other aspects of Alvarez’s analysis, see Michael A. Strosco, ‘More Physical Insight into the Assassination of President Kennedy,’ Physics and Society, vol.25 no.4 (October 1996), pp.7ff. Alvarez’s motivation and objectivity came under suspicion when it was later revealed that his research in this area had been funded by the US government, and that in 1949 he had testified against the dissident physicist Robert Oppenheimer to the House Un–American Activities Committee. For more information, see the sources mentioned in Chapter 14, ‘Medical Evidence,’ pp.50f below. Altogether, about 40 witnesses claimed to have heard shots from the grassy knoll or seen smoke in that area; see Appendix A, ‘Grassy Knoll Witnesses,’ pp.58ff below.

31 For the films by Robert Hughes and Charles Bronson, see David Wrone, The Zapruder Film: Reframing JFK’s Assassination, University Press of Kansas, 2003, pp.150–5, and Richard Trask, Pictures of the Pain, Yeoman Press, 1994, pp.269–304. The FBI laboratory examined Hughes’s film, and concluded that “there are no images in any of the exposures ... which show the corner window ... that can be interpreted in the form of an individual. The forms recorded in this window can be interpreted as in the same general shapes of boxes, found at and just behind the window in question” (FBI HQ JFK Assassination File, 62-109060-899). Because the exact timing of the first shot is very much open to question, Hughes’s film may have depicted the empty window no more than two seconds before the beginning of the shooting sequence. Zapruder started filming Kennedy at frame 133, when the president’s car had just passed the window. The very latest point at which the first shot could have been fired was frame 224, when Kennedy came into view while reaching for his throat. At 18.3 frames per second, frame 224 is almost exactly five seconds later than frame 133. The Warren Report incorrectly states that Hughes took his film “at 12:20pm, 10 minutes before the assassination” (p.644), despite the film showing Kennedy’s car passing directly underneath the window.

32 Frazier’s testimony: Warren Commission Hearings, vol.2, pp.239–43. Randle’s testimony: ibid., pp.248–50. Dougherty’s testimony: Warren Commission Hearings, vol.6, pp.376ff. In interviews with the FBI, Randle (Warren Commission Hearings, vol.24, p.408) and Frazier (ibid., p.409) both claimed that the bag they saw was 27 inches long. The rifle, however, was 34.8 inches long when disassembled and 40.2 inches long when intact (Warren Commission Hearings, vol.3, p.395). Oswald said that he had brought a sandwich and an apple to work, so Dougherty must have been mistaken about having seen nothing in Oswald’s hands. Overlooking a small lunch bag is perhaps understandable; overlooking a bag containing a long rifle, on the other hand, is not. The Warren Commission overcame the problem by claiming that all three witnesses were mistaken, which would have been a reasonable assumption had it been supported by strong independent evidence of Oswald’s guilt. A later lone–nut account, Case Closed by Gerald Posner, took a less reasonable route: by misrepresenting elements of Frazier’s and Randle’s testimony, Posner was able to claim that the package they saw was in fact large enough to contain the rifle. The context and credibility of Case Closed are discussed in Chapter 16, ‘Fiction, Propaganda and the Media,’ pp.55ff below. For various reasons, the only date on which Oswald plausibly could have brought the rifle to work was the day of the assassination. If, as the evidence strongly suggested, he did not do so, either Oswald had an accomplice or the rifle was taken into the building without his knowledge.
have contained the rifle, but the bag turned out to have had no association with either Oswald or the rifle:

- Frazier and Randle were shown this bag. Both claimed that it was several inches longer than the one they had seen.
- The bag did not show creases or oil stains consistent with it having held the disassembled rifle.33
- The bag that was produced in evidence was almost certainly not found at the scene of the crime: the police officers who first came across the alleged sniper’s nest gave confused testimony about whether there was a paper bag nearby,34 and none of the crime scene photographs showed the bag in situ.35
- Oswald could not have assembled the bag: although it had been constructed from wrapping paper and tape used at the depository, the bag could only have been assembled at the building’s wrapping table, to which Oswald did not have access.36

The first sighting of Oswald after the shooting was by two reliable witnesses, a policeman and the building supervisor, who encountered him on the second floor of the TSBD very shortly after they heard gunshots. The timing of the incident suggests that Oswald was not on the sixth floor during the assassination.

Two problems were pointed out with the Commission’s treatment of the encounter:

- The Commission re–enacted the movements of the two witnesses, who had come up from the first floor, and of Oswald, who in theory had come down from the sixth floor after laboriously hiding the rifle. The re–enactments were only able to get Oswald to the second floor in time to meet the witnesses by artificially quickening his descent and slowing their ascent.37
- The Commission brushed aside evidence from other people within the TSBD who would have seen or heard anyone dashing down the stairs, but who failed to do so.38

James Cadigan, of the FBI laboratory, testified that "I was also requested ... to examine the bag to determine if there were any significant markings or scratches or abrasions or anything by which it could be associated with the rifle, Commission Exhibit 139, that is, could I find any markings that I could tie to that rifle. ... And I couldn't find any such markings" (Warren Commission Hearings, vol.4, p.97).

Roger Craig (Warren Commission Hearings, vol.6, p.668) and Gerald Hill (Warren Commission Hearings, vol.7, p.46) denied seeing a bag. Richard M. Sims saw what he described as "some wrappings", "a brown wrapping", "some loose paper" and "a wrapper" (ibid., p.166). Marvin Johnson did see a paper bag: "L.D. Montgomery, my partner, picked it up off the floor, and it was folded up, and he unfolded it ... It was folded and then refolded. It was a fairly small package. ... The sack was folded up here and it was east of the pipes in the corner. To the best of my memory, that is where my partner picked it up. I was standing there when he picked it up." (ibid., pp.103f). Montgomery also saw a bag but denied picking it up (ibid., p.98). It is conceivable that the paper bag that some of the officers saw was a small one that was later shown to have contained a TSBD employee’s lunch.

The nearest thing to a photograph of the paper bag at the crime scene was Commission Exhibit 1302 (Warren Commission Hearings, vol.22, p.479): a photograph showing the sniper’s nest with a printed outline of the supposed location of the bag. The earliest known photograph of the bag was taken on the front steps of the TSBD shortly before 4pm, more than three hours after the police had entered the building; see Richard Trask, Pictures of the Pain, Yeoman Press, 1994, p.552.

The paper and the tape both contained markings from one particular tape dispensing machine at the TSBD: Warren Commission Hearings, vol.4, pp.90–93. The machine was too sturdy to have been removed from the premises, and was under constant supervision. Troy West testified that he spent his entire working day at the wrapping table, and that Oswald never had a chance to manufacture the bag: Warren Commission Hearings, vol.6, pp.360ff. James Cadigan of the FBI laboratory testified that the paper and tape of the bag possessed “identical” physical characteristics to samples of wrapping paper and tape taken by the Dallas police on the afternoon of 22 November (Warren Commission Hearings, vol.4, p.93). The TSBD used approximately one roll of paper every three days, and one roll of tape every three hours, which suggests that the paper bag supposedly found on the sixth floor was constructed after Oswald’s arrival at the TSBD and within a short time of the samples being taken. For a detailed account of the paper bag, see Ian Griggs, 'The Paper Bag that Never Was, part 1', Dealey Plaza Echo, vol.1, no.1 (July 1996), pp.30–36 and Ian Griggs, 'The Paper Bag that Never Was, part 2', Dealey Plaza Echo, vol.1 no.2 (November 1996), pp.30–38.

The Warren Commission’s account of Oswald’s descent to the second floor where the encounter occurred: Warren Report, pp.140ff. For the problems with this account, see David Wrone, 'The Zapruder Film: Reframing JFK's Assassination', University Press of Kansas, 2003, pp.170f, and Howard Roffmann, Presumed Guilty: How and Why the Warren Commission Framed Lee Harvey Oswald, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1975, pp.209ff (available online at http://www.ratical.org/ratville/JFK/PG/PGchp8.html). The known facts of the encounter are entirely consistent with Oswald having ascended from the first floor by a more direct route than that taken by the witnesses.

Several employees were on or close to the stairs and would have seen or heard Oswald on his journey to the second floor, but none did. Jack Dougherty was working on the fifth floor close to the stairs; he heard a shot from the floor above him, but did not report any sound from the stairs (Warren Commission Hearings, vol.6, pp.380–1). Nor did he or the three other workers on the fifth floor hear anyone shifting cartons of books, which would have been necessary in order to hide the rifle (Bonnie Ray Williams: Warren Commission Hearings, vol.3, pp.161–184; Harold Norman: ibid., pp.186–198; James Jarman: ibid., pp.198–211). Victoria Adams and Sandra Styles were with two colleagues on the fourth floor at the time of the shooting. Adams and Styles immediately ran to the stairway.
Several people had seen at least one person with a rifle on the sixth floor of the TSBD, but only one witness, Howard Brennan, provided an identification that came close to matching Oswald’s appearance. Brennan, however, turned out to be unreliable and unhelpful:

- He claimed that the gunman had been standing up when firing, although the half-open window required any gunman to have crouched or kneeled.
- He claimed to have seen the gunman’s trousers, which would not have been visible from Brennan’s viewpoint on the street sixty feet below.
- When asked whether he had actually seen the firing of the rifle, he replied, “No.”
- He claimed that on hearing the first shot, “I looked up at the building. I then saw this man I have described in the window and he was taking aim with a high powered rifle. I could see all of the barrel of the gun.” Brennan’s reaction to the first shot is visible on the Zapruder film: standing directly opposite the sixth-floor window, he watches Kennedy’s car go past him to his left, then from about frame 204 he in fact turns his head sharply to his right, away from the TSBD, rather than up toward the sixth floor.
- He failed to pick out Oswald at an identification parade, despite already having seen Oswald’s picture on television.  

A more credible witness, Arnold Rowland, saw a man on the sixth floor, holding a rifle, who did not resemble Oswald. Rowland saw the gunman a few minutes before the shooting, when Oswald’s alibi almost certainly places him on the first floor, a location which is consistent with his encounter with the policeman and the building supervisor.

The Bullet Shells Matched the Wounds

The final, and perhaps the most important, element of the case against Oswald required the three bullet shells to be matched to the wounds.

Several facts soon emerged which greatly constrained any explanation of how a lone gunman, in the time available, could fire one particular rifle from one particular location and cause one particular set of wounds.

The rifle found on the sixth floor was examined and tested by the US Army and the FBI, who found that it was in poor condition. It could not be aimed accurately, and so it was tested mainly for the speed with which it could fire a sequence of shots. In a series of tests by skilled marksmen, the fastest time taken to operate the bolt and the trigger pull, without aiming the rifle, was 2.3 seconds.  

Adams was asked specifically if she had seen or heard anyone else on the stairs, and replied that she had not (Warren Commission Hearings, vol. 6, pp. 388–90). Styles and her other two colleagues were not questioned.

Howard Brennan’s testimony: Warren Commission Hearings, vol.3, pp.142–158. His statement to the Dallas Sheriff’s office on the afternoon of the assassination, in which he describes the gunman: Warren Commission Hearings, vol.19, p.470. The House Select Committee on Assassinations chose not to use Brennan as a witness. In the absence of any other plausible candidates, the Commission nominated Brennan as the source of the Dallas police radio despatcher’s description of the gunman, but his limited credibility as a witness raises uncomfortable questions about the actual source. Brennan’s turn to his right after the first shot suggests that at least that shot came from somewhere other than the TSBD.

Arnold Rowland described the gunman as having “dark hair ... it was dark, probably black. ... He had on a light shirt, a very light-colored shirt, white or a light blue or a color such as that” (Warren Commission Hearings, vol.2, p.171). Amos Euiins stated that “I seen a bald spot on this man’s head, trying to look out the window. He had a bald spot on his head. I was looking at the bald spot” (ibid., p.204). Oswald’s hair was light brown; it was receding slightly at the temples, but he did not have a bald spot. Brennan agreed with Rowland that the gunman had been wearing a light-coloured shirt: “light colored clothes, more of a khaki color” (Warren Commission Hearings, vol.3, p.145; see also ibid., p.163). Carolyn Walther saw a man on one of the upper floors, holding a rifle and wearing “a white shirt” (Warren Commission Hearings, vol.24, p.522). Two other witnesses saw a man, wearing a light-coloured shirt, in the easternmost sixth-floor window of the TSBD: Ronald Fischer (“light in color; probably white” [Warren Commission Hearings, vol.6, p.194] and Robert Edwards (“light colored shirt” [ibid., p.203]). Oswald was wearing a dark brown shirt when arrested (see the photographs in Robert Groden, The Search for Lee Harvey Oswald, Viking Penguin, 1995, e.g. p.161). He claimed to have changed out of a “reddish colored, long sleeved, shirt with a button-down collar” between the assassination and his arrest (Warren Report, p.622; see also Handwritten notes of Captain J.W. Fritz’s interview of Oswald, p.7). He had certainly been wearing a dark shirt before he left the TSBD. Linnie Mae Randle stated that “I remember some sort of brown or tan shirt” (Warren Commission Hearings, vol.2, p.250). Marrion Baker, the policeman who encountered Oswald on the second floor immediately after the shooting, said that Oswald was wearing “a brown-type shirt” that was perhaps “a little bit darker” than the one the suspect wore after his arrest (Warren Commission Hearings, vol.3, p.572).

At least 2.3 seconds were required between shots: Warren Report, p.97. 2.3 seconds was very much the minimum amount of time that could have been taken by a gunman firing at a moving target from 60 feet above, and scoring two hits out of three. The army’s experts, having adjusted the rifle to improve its accuracy, fired seven groups of three shots at stationary targets from 30 feet above. Their times were: 4.45, 4.6, 5.15, 6.45, 6.75, 7, and 8.25 seconds.
The first constraint is that if Oswald’s rifle fired all the shots, there must have been a minimum of 2.3 seconds between each shot.

Three empty rifle bullet shells were found on the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository, all of them close to the window in the south–eastern corner. One unfired bullet was found in the rifle. No other rifle bullets or bullet shells were discovered either in the building, or on Oswald’s person, or in his belongings.

The second constraint is that if Oswald’s rifle was the only weapon used, all the injuries had to have been caused by no more than three bullets.

Abraham Zapruder’s famous home movie of the shooting allowed the timing of Kennedy’s progress along the road to be accurately determined. As Kennedy’s car passed the Texas School Book Depository, it was hidden at first from the sixth–floor window by a large oak tree. There was a period of just under six seconds between the car becoming visible to anyone in the easternmost sixth–floor window and the moment of the fatal head shot.42

The fact that Oswald encountered reliable witnesses on the second floor shortly after the shooting meant that he would have had to leave the sixth floor immediately after the head shot.

The third constraint is that if every shot was fired by Oswald from the easternmost sixth–floor window, all the shooting must have taken place within six seconds.

**Was Lee Harvey Oswald the Lone Gunman?**

For Oswald to have been the lone gunman, all of the following constraints had to apply:

1. There were at least 2.3 seconds between each shot.
2. No more than three bullets caused all of the wounds.
3. The whole shooting took no longer than six seconds.

If any of these statements were contradicted by the balance of the evidence, Oswald could not have committed the crime alone. The Warren Commission attempted to deal with these constraints by devising what became known as the single–bullet theory.

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42 The time available for all the shots: *Warren Report, p.117*. President Kennedy would have become visible to a sixth-floor gunman at frame 210 of the Zapruder film. He is hit in the head immediately after frame 312. At 18.3 frames per second, Zapruder’s camera took 103 frames in just under six seconds.
The Single-Bullet Theory

The case against Lee Harvey Oswald required the creation of what became known as the single-bullet hypothesis or single-bullet theory.43

The single–bullet theory was developed in three stages. In December 1963, the FBI’s report into the assassination matched the wounds to the three bullets in the following way:

• one bullet caused all of Governor Connally’s wounds by passing through his torso and shattering his right wrist;
• one bullet caused President Kennedy’s fatal head wound;
• and one bullet caused one of Kennedy’s non–fatal wounds by entering his back, but did not cause his throat wound.44

The Warren Commission modified this explanation in March 1964 by assuming that Kennedy’s throat wound had been caused by the same bullet that had caused his back wound.

When the wounding of the bystander, James Tague, was unexpectedly made public in June 1964, the Commission became obliged to use the only plausible explanation that would account for all of the wounds having been inflicted by just three bullets:

• one bullet caused Tague’s wound;
• one bullet caused President Kennedy’s fatal head wound;
• and one bullet caused all of Kennedy’s and Connally’s non–fatal wounds by entering Kennedy’s back, exiting through his throat, entering Connally’s back, exiting his chest, passing through his right wrist, and lodging itself in his left thigh: the single–bullet theory.45

Objections to the Single–Bullet Theory

Although objections were raised to all of the important parts of the Warren Commission’s account, the most powerful objections were aimed at the most fundamental part, the idea that all of Kennedy’s and Connally’s non–fatal wounds were caused by one bullet.

If the single–bullet theory is false, at least one shot must have been fired by someone other than Oswald. In other words:

• either Oswald had at least one accomplice,
• or Oswald fired none of the shots himself.

Governor Connally’s Back Wound

Governor Connally testified to the Warren Commission that the bullet which struck him in the back was

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43 It is debatable whether the Warren Commission’s construction should be referred to as the single–bullet hypothesis or the single–bullet theory. The terms ‘hypothesis’ and ‘theory’ are largely interchangeable in popular usage. If there is a difference, it is that a hypothesis is supported by a weaker basis of evidence and argument than a theory. In this case, uncharitable sceptics have often preferred the term ‘magic bullet theory’. For the development of the single–bullet hypothesis, see Gerald D. McKnight, Breach of Trust: How the Warren Commission Failed the Nation and Why, University Press of Kansas, 2005, pp.181–212. The theory is generally credited to Arlen Specter, one of the Commission’s assistant counsel.

44 The FBI Summary Report states only that “two bullets struck President Kennedy, and one wounded Governor Connally” [p.1], and that “one of the bullets [that struck Kennedy] had entered just below his shoulder to the right of his spinal column at an angle of 45 to 60 degrees downward ... there was no point of exit” [p.18]. The report gave no description of Connally’s injuries, and entirely failed to mention Kennedy’s throat wound and James Tague’s wound. It implies that at least one more bullet was fired, making at least four in total.

45 Warren Report, p.177. James Tague’s wound demanded its own bullet because he was too far away for his injury plausibly to have been caused by a fragment of a bullet which had struck Kennedy or Connally. President Kennedy’s head wound demanded its own bullet because it clearly occurred later than at least some of his and Connally’s non–fatal wounds. That left a single bullet to create all the other wounds. The single-bullet theory had been proposed by Arlen Specter a few weeks earlier, but it was the publicity attached to Tague’s wounding that forced the Commission to adopt the theory.
fired later than the bullet which caused at least one of President Kennedy's non-fatal wounds. Connally maintained for the rest of his life that he was struck by a separate bullet, after Kennedy had already been wounded.\footnote{Connally's testimony: \textit{Warren Commission Hearings, vol.4, pp.135f}. He was quoted in the \textit{Washington Post}, 21 November 1966, saying that "there is my absolute knowledge that ... one bullet caused the president's first wound and that an entirely separate shot struck me. It is a certainty. I will never change my mind." It was Connally's testimony that persuaded one of the Warren Commissioners, Senator Richard Russell, that the single-bullet theory was untenable; see Appendix J, 'Richard Russell and the \textit{Warren Report}', pp.11ff below.}

Two of the closest eye-witnesses were Governor Connally's wife, who was sitting to his left, and James Chaney, the police motorcyclist who was riding to President Kennedy's right. Both independently claimed that Connally's back wound was caused by a separate bullet.\footnote{Nellie Connally: "I turned over my right shoulder and looked back, and saw the President as he had both hands at his neck. ... Then very soon there was the second shot that hit John." (\textit{Warren Commission Hearings, vol.4, p.147}). James Chaney was one of four police motorcyclists who had a close-up view of the shooting. None of the four was invited to testify before the Warren Commission. Chaney's opinion is known from the testimony of another policeman, Marrion Baker: "I talked to Jim Chaney, and he made the statement that the two shots hit Kennedy first and then the other one hit the Governor." (\textit{Warren Commission Hearings, vol.3, p.266}). Chaney, incidentally, was filmed on the afternoon of 22 November stating to a reporter that the fatal shot had "hit him [Kennedy] in the face;" see David Wrone, \textit{The Zapruder Film: Reframing JFK's Assassination}, University Press of Kansas, 2003, p.184.}

This was consistent with the evidence provided by the Zapruder film. The film shows President Kennedy emerging from behind a road sign at about \textbf{frame 225}, with his hands reaching to his throat. He has clearly been shot by this point. Indeed, the single-bullet theory demands that he has been shot by this point. The Warren Commission claimed that Kennedy had in fact been shot two-thirds of a second earlier, at frame 210, the instant at which he became visible from the easternmost sixth-floor window after being hidden behind an oak tree. Connally, however, shows no sign of being shot in the back until two-thirds of a second later, at about \textbf{frame 238}, when he starts to twist and fall to his left.\footnote{\textbf{Frame 224} of the Zapruder film shows the right lapel of Connally's jacket flapping outward. This movement cannot have been caused by the same bullet that caused President Kennedy's throat wound, for two reasons. Firstly, the bullet that passed through the front of Connally's jacket did so several inches from the lapel. Secondly, too much time elapsed between Kennedy's throat wound and Connally's lapel flap. The minimum time for a neurological reaction to an external stimulus is 200 milliseconds, or between three and four frames of the Zapruder film. Because frame 224 shows Kennedy's hands already moving toward his throat, the wound to which he is responding cannot have occurred later than frame 221. A hypothetical bullet fired from the rifle found on the sixth floor would have travelled at least 400 feet between the time of Kennedy's throat wound and the time of Connally's lapel flap. The distance between Kennedy and Connally was about three feet. For details, see G. Paul Chambers, \textit{Head Shot: The Science Behind the JFK's Assassination}, Prometheus Books, 2010, pp.155-8. The flapping of Connally's lapel was probably caused by nothing more sinister than a gust of wind.}

This bullet arrived much too late to have been the one which wounded Kennedy, and much too early for both to have been fired from the rifle attributed to Oswald.

\section*{Connally's Cowboy Hat and Shirt Cuff}

The governor of Texas was holding a cowboy hat in his right hand. Both the hat and the hand are visible in the Zapruder film intermittently for several seconds after Kennedy comes into view while clutching at his throat. As late as \textbf{frame 268}, more than two seconds after frame 225, Connally's hand is gripping his hat tightly, his shirt cuff white and free of blood. Clearly, he has not yet been hit by the bullet which clipped the end of his jacket sleeve, passed through his shirt cuff, then shattered the radius bone in his wrist and severed the tendon by his thumb.\footnote{For the location of the damage to Governor Connally's shirt and jacket, see the \textit{Warren Report}, p.94. For the surgeon's description of Connally's shattered wrist, see \textit{Warren Commission Hearings, vol.4, pp.118f}. For the severed tendon, see \textit{ibid., p.124}. Nellie Connally later claimed that her husband was still holding onto his hat while laying across the car seat on arrival at Parkland hospital.}

\section*{Kennedy's Throat Wound}

President Kennedy was sitting upright until he was shot. His throat wound was far too high, or his back wound far too low, for them both to have been caused by one bullet from the Texas School Book Depository's sixth floor, which was sixty feet above the road.\footnote{This objection applies not only to the single-bullet theory but almost certainly to the FBI's four-shot scenario as well.}

The throat wound was located just below the Adam's apple and just above the knot of the tie. Dr Charles Carrico, who saw Kennedy's throat wound before it was distorted during a tracheotomy and before the
The presidential shirt and tie were removed, was asked to point to the location on his own throat. His questor clarified the location for the record:

MR DULLES: And you put your hand right above where your tie is?

DR CARRICO: Yes, sir.\textsuperscript{51}

The Warren Commission preferred to place the bullet wound about one inch lower, just below the level of Kennedy’s collar button. This location is contradicted by:

- the lack of an obvious bullet hole in the front of Kennedy’s shirt,
- and by the absence of bullet damage to his tie.

There were several slits in the president’s jacket, tie and shirt, but all of them are consistent with having been made in the hospital’s emergency room by nurses using scalpels or scissors to free the patient’s clothing. The two cuts close to the collar of the shirt did not match each other, as those caused by a bullet would have done.\textsuperscript{52}

The cuts in the president’s shirt lay directly underneath the knot of the tie, but there was no damage to the knot of the tie apart from a tiny nick on the front of the knot, to the wearer’s left. Material surrounding the nick was removed in order to obtain a sample for testing, to see whether a bullet had deposited traces of copper. Although there were traces of copper around the bullet hole in the back of the shirt, there were none on the tie or on the front of the shirt.\textsuperscript{53} The damage to the tie, just like the damage to the front of the shirt, was evidently made by a surgical instrument, not by a bullet.

**Kennedy’s Back Wound Was Too Low**

It makes no practical difference whether President Kennedy’s throat wound was located at or just above the knot of his tie. The balance of the evidence places his back wound several inches lower than either location.\textsuperscript{54}

- The death certificate signed by Dr George Burkley, the president’s personal doctor, who was present both in the emergency room at the hospital in Dallas and at the autopsy at Bethesda Naval Hospital in Maryland, located the back wound “at about the level of the third thoracic vertebra,” which is typically four to six inches, or 10 to 15 centimetres, below the top of the shirt collar.\textsuperscript{55}
- The only surviving contemporary report of the autopsy supported this location.\textsuperscript{56}

\textsuperscript{51} Dr Carrico’s testimony: Warren Commission Hearings, vol.3, pp.36ff.

\textsuperscript{52} The Warren Report asserted that “these two holes fell into alinement on overlapping positions when the shirt was buttoned. Each hole was a vertical, ragged slit.” (Warren Report, p.117) The FBI’s exhibit 60 includes a photograph of the two slits in the collar, which shows that they do not line up completely: the slits are of different shapes, and the one below the button-hole extends higher than the one below the button. This exhibit was withheld from official publication, but is reproduced at: McKnight, op.cit., p.241; Harold Weisberg, Never Again, Carroll and Graf, 1995, p.245; and Robert Groden, The Killing of a President, Viking Studio Press, 1993, p.77. A close-up of the slits in the collar is available online at the Mary Ferrell Foundation website. The photographs of Kennedy’s shirt in the Warren Commission Hearings, vol.17, pp.23f are insufficiently detailed to show the cuts in the front or the bullet hole in the back.

\textsuperscript{53} The traces of copper on the back, but not the front, of Kennedy’s shirt: FBI HQ JFK Assassination File, 62-109060-14.

\textsuperscript{54} The documentary record of President Kennedy’s autopsy is severely and inexcusably deficient. Consequently, the locations of none of his wounds are known with any precision. The back wound, for example, was not measured against a standard anatomical feature, and was photographed with the body in a distorted position. The fundamental question, of whether or not the back and throat wounds were caused by the same bullet, could have been answered by dissecting the wounds and the connecting tissue, but the pathologists were ordered not to do this; see Appendix L, ‘Pierre Finck: Dissecting JFK’s Wounds,’ pp.120ff below. For detailed discussions of the medical evidence, see the sources listed in Chapter 14, ‘Medical Evidence,’ pp.50ff below.

\textsuperscript{55} Dr Burkley’s death certificate: Assassination Records Review Board Medical Document 6, p.2. Two other death certificates exist, but neither mentions the location of the back wound with any precision. For the location of the third thoracic vertebra, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Orientation.png, on which the third thoracic vertebra is marked ‘T3’.

\textsuperscript{56} The report by James Sibert and Francis O’Neill, the two FBI agents who attended the autopsy, describes “a bullet hole which was below the shoulders and two inches to the right of the middle line of the spinal column”: see Appendix C, ‘The Sibert and O’Neill Report,’ pp.68ff below. In private, the Warren Commission was aware of the problem: “the bullet entered below the shoulder blade to the right of the backbone, which is below the place where the picture shows the bullet came out”: Warren Commission Executive Session, 27 January 1963, p.103. The FBI report goes on to contradict two other essential elements of the single-bullet hypothesis: “it was determined that the trajectory of the missile entering at this point had entered at a downward position of 45 to 60 degrees. Further probing determined that the distance travelled by this missile was a short distance inasmuch as the end of
Kennedy’s exact position in the car is not known, but an examination of still photographs and the We can represent the implications of a downward angle of about 17–18° by using a model. President 225, when Kennedy can first be seen to be injured, would have travelled downward at an average angle of making allowances for the slight downward slope of the road, it was determined that any bullet fired The FBI calculated the angle from the easternmost sixth-floor window to Kennedy’s upper back. After The distance and angle from the sixth-floor window to Kennedy: throat wounds were caused:

- either by separate bullets
- or by one bullet fired from somewhere other than the sixth-floor window.

It also follows that at least one further bullet is required in order to account for Connally’s wounds.

The Single–Bullet Theory and the Holes in JFK’s Shirt and Jacket

Because of the lack of reliable documentary evidence from the autopsy, the precise location of the bullet wound in President Kennedy’s back is not known. In the case of the bullet holes in his shirt and jacket, however, the precise locations are known. These locations allow us to test the plausibility of the single–bullet theory. The question is whether both garments could have ridden up sufficiently for their holes to be consistent with a shot that:

- originated from the sixth floor,
- and exited through the throat at the same angle, in order to cause Governor Connally’s injuries.

The FBI calculated the angle from the easternmost sixth-floor window to Kennedy’s upper back. After making allowances for the slight downward slope of the road, it was determined that any bullet fired between frame 210, the first instant at which a sixth-floor gunman could have seen Kennedy, and frame 225, when Kennedy can first be seen to be injured, would have travelled downward at an average angle of 17° 43’ 30” to the horizontal.

We can represent the implications of a downward angle of about 17–18° by using a model. President Kennedy’s exact position in the car is not known, but an examination of still photographs and the

the opening could be felt with the finger.”

The autopsy descriptive sheet was endorsed as correct (“Verified”) by Dr Burkley. His endorsement and signature were missing from the version published by the Commission (Warren Commission Hearings, vol.27, p.45 [Commission Exhibit 397]), the complete version was only made public three decades later, by the Assassination Records Review Board (ARRB MD). Burkley was the only medical professional to have been present at both Dallas and Bethesda, which would have given him a unique knowledge of Kennedy’s wounds. Whether despite or because of this, he was largely ignored by the Warren Commission, and was not even called as a witness.

For the location of the holes in President Kennedy’s jacket and shirt, see the Warren Report, p. 92 and FBI HQ JFK Assassination File, 62–109060–14. The photographs in FBI exhibit 60 show the locations; see note 52 above.

59 Photograph no. 5 by Phil Willis corresponds to frame 202 of the Zapruder film, and is the photograph that was taken closest in time to the hypothetical shot from the sixth floor. For the timing of Willis’s photograph, see Wrone, op.cit., pp.191f. Frame 202 occurs just under half a second before frame 210, the first point at which Kennedy would have become visible to a sixth-floor gunman, and 1.2 seconds before frame 224, the last frame before Kennedy is seen reacting to his throat wound. For a clear reproduction of Willis’s photograph, see Groden, op.cit., p.24 and Josiah Thompson, Six Seconds in Dallas: A Micro–Study of the Kennedy Assassination, Bernard Geis Associates, 1967, p.223. Willis himself claimed that he took the photograph in immediate response to hearing the first shot, which, if true, would by itself disprove the single–bullet theory.

60 The distance and angle from the sixth–floor window to Kennedy: Warren Report, p.106. The Warren Commission was obliged to line up not only Kennedy’s back and throat wounds, but also Connally’s back wound. The commission’s own reconstruction demonstrated that the only way this could be done was by placing Kennedy’s back wound too high and his throat wound too low: Warren Commission Hearings, vol.18, p.96 (Commission Exhibit 903).
Zapruder film allows certain assumptions to be safely made:

- Kennedy was sitting with his back against the seat.
- His head was tilted slightly forward.
- His right elbow was on or just above the side of the car, a little below the level of his shoulder.
- His left arm was not raised.

The location of the bullet hole in the back of the jacket is $5 \frac{3}{8}$" below the top of the collar. The hole in the back of the shirt is $5 \frac{3}{4}$" below the top of its collar. With the garments in their normal positions, the hole in the jacket was either level with, or a small fraction of an inch below, the hole in the shirt:

The following photograph, taken by Phil Willis at the same time as frame 202 of the Zapruder film, shows that the jacket was in its normal position less than half a second before Kennedy came into view from the sixth-floor window:\textsuperscript{61}

\textsuperscript{61} See note 59 above for details of Phil Willis’s photograph.
With the shirt and jacket aligned normally, the holes are far too low for the hypothetical bullet to have come out of the throat at the required angle. The bullet holes would have had to be about four inches higher, close to the level of the collars:

Some photographs, taken further from the time of the shooting than the Willis photograph, show the right shoulder of the jacket slightly raised as the president waved to the crowd. Even with the arm in this position, the bullet hole is much too low:
For the bullet hole to approach the level of the shirt collar, the back of the jacket would have had to ride up far beyond the level shown in any photographs of Kennedy during the motorcade:

When the collars of the shirt and jacket were in their normal positions, the two bullet holes were at almost exactly the same level. This suggests that if both garments had ridden up when the bullet passed through them, they had ridden up by almost exactly the same amount.

Buttoned-up shirts are generally much more restricted in their movements than are jackets. Even if the jacket had ridden up sufficiently to allow a bullet to enter the president's back near the level of the collar, the shirt could not have done so:

The known location of the hole in the shirt is not consistent with a hypothetical shot from the easternmost sixth-floor window that came out of Kennedy's throat.

No doubt the physical dimensions of our model, and the physical properties of his clothing, differ from those of President Kennedy. But any such differences are surely insignificant. It is clear that the hole in Kennedy's jacket, and especially the hole in his shirt, could not have been caused by a bullet entering his back at an angle of 17° or 18°, continuing in a straight line, and coming out of the throat just below the Adam's apple.

The location of the bullet holes disproves the single-bullet theory.
The Status of the Single–Bullet Theory

Although some of the incontrovertible facts of the case appeared to implicate Oswald, other incontrovertible facts appeared to exculpate him:

• the time available for the shooting,
• the capabilities of the alleged weapon,
• and the nature of the injuries.

These three factors came together to suggest strongly that the essential part of the Warren Commission’s case, the single–bullet hypothesis or theory, was not only unsupported by the evidence but was actively contradicted by the evidence.

The failure of the single–bullet theory proved that Oswald could not have committed the crime alone.
Oswald’s Rifle and Paraffin Tests

Not only was the Warren Commission unable to demonstrate that Oswald had committed the crime alone, but two important pieces of evidence showed that he had almost certainly not played any part in the shooting:

- the poor physical condition of the rifle
- and the absence of gunpowder residues on Oswald’s cheeks.

The experts from the US Army and the FBI who had tested the rifle discovered that it was actually not usable in its original state:

- Shims had to be applied to the telescopic sight before the rifle could be aimed.  
- Even after the telescopic sight had been repaired, it proved unreliable and inaccurate.
- The condition of both the bolt and the trigger pull meant that the rifle could not be aimed accurately.

The rifle discovered on the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository could not have caused any of the wounds to Kennedy, Connally or Tague, except by accident.

A few hours after the assassination, Oswald underwent a test that was routinely carried out on those suspected of having fired a gun. Liquid paraffin wax was spread on his hands and his right cheek. When hardened, the paraffin wax would extract from deep in the pores of his skin any fine residues given off by the firing of a gun, even if he had washed his skin in the meantime.

Barium and antimony, which are found in gunpowder residues, are also found in several common substances such as printing ink, which Oswald certainly had handled on the morning of the assassination. The presence of these substances is not sufficient evidence of having fired a gun, but their absence is sufficient evidence of having not fired a gun.

In other words, firing a gun would deposit barium and antimony on parts of the skin close to the gun. If barium and antimony were found on Oswald’s skin, they may have been deposited by the firing of a gun. But they may instead have been deposited by other means: for example, the handling of books. If barium and antimony were not found on Oswald’s skin, he almost certainly did not fire a gun.

Oswald’s paraffin casts were subjected to two analyses. Spectrographic analysis, the method normally used by the police, showed evidence of barium and antimony on Oswald’s hands, but not on his cheek. Spectrographic analysis was considered sufficiently reliable for criminal investigations, but in this case a more incisive test was also used. Neutron activation analysis, which is capable of identifying the presence of substances in quantities much too small to be captured by spectrographic analysis, also showed no incriminating quantities of residues on Oswald’s cheek. The result was reported in an internal Warren

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62 “They [the US Army marksmen] could not sight the weapon in using the telescope, and no attempt was made to sight it in using the iron sight. We did adjust the telescopic sight by the addition of two shims, one which tended to adjust the azimuth, and one which adjusted an elevation”: Warren Commission Hearings, vol.3, p.443.

63 According to the FBI’s firearms specialist, “Every time we changed the adjusting screws to move the crosshairs in the telescopic sight in one direction it also affected the movement of the impact or the point of impact in the other direction. ... We fired several shots and found that the shots were not all landing in the same place, but were gradually moving away from the point of impact.”: Warren Commission Hearings, vol.3, p.405.

64 Problems with the bolt and the trigger mechanism: “There were several comments made — particularly with respect to the amount of effort required to open the bolt. ... There was also comment made about the trigger pull ... in the first stage the trigger is relatively free, and it suddenly required a greater pull to actually fire the weapon.”: Warren Commission Hearings, vol.3, p.449. “The pressure to open the bolt was so great that that we tended to move the rifle off the target.”: ibid., p.451.

65 According to an FBI memo, “The results show Punctate traces of nitrate found in the paraffin on the right and left hands consistent with that of a person who handled or fired a firearm. The paraffin of right cheek [sic] showed no traces of nitrate.”: FBI HQ JFK Assassination File, 62–109060–8.

66 The presence of almost identical, small quantities of barium and antimony both on the inside of the cast, which had touched Oswald’s cheek, and the outside, which had not, suggests that the cast had become contaminated. The results were complicated by the fact that they were conducted later than the spectrographic tests, which involved applying chemicals to the casts, then washing the casts. This has the effect of removing substantial amounts of barium and small amounts of antimony. The apparent contamination of the paraffin cast of Oswald’s right cheek allowed the Warren Report unjustifiably to discard the evidence of the neutron activation analysis; see Warren Report, p.562, which incorrectly states that both of Oswald’s hands tested negative.
Commission memo: "At best, the analysis shows that Oswald may have fired a pistol, although this is by no means certain. ... There is no basis for concluding that he also fired a rifle."

In order to check the validity of the neutron activation analysis of Oswald’s paraffin casts, a controlled test was made. Seven marksmen fired a rifle of the same type as that found on the sixth floor. The standard paraffin test was administered, and the paraffin casts were subjected to neutron activation analysis. All seven subjects showed substantial amounts of barium and antimony on their hands and, more importantly, on their cheeks.

The absence of significant quantities of residues on Oswald’s cheek meant that he almost certainly had not fired a rifle that day.

Although Lee Oswald was strongly associated with the rifle and bullet shells that were discovered on the sixth floor of the TSBD, it is extremely unlikely that he fired that rifle on the day of the assassination. The only realistic conclusion is that the evidence was planted, and that he had been framed.

67 Memo from Redlich to Dulles, 2 July 1964, Investigation and Evidence File, RG 272, Series 12, box 4, folder 3, National Archives. The FBI’s message to the Warren Commission that “as a result of these [neutron activation analysis] examinations, the deposits found on the paraffin casts from the hands and cheek of Oswald could not be specifically associated with the rifle cartridges” (FBI HQ Oswald File, 105-82555-94) is a red herring. All those involved knew that neutron activation analysis can only identify the presence of particular elements, and cannot distinguish between the sources of those elements.

68 Even after the control casts had undergone the same chemical treatment as Oswald’s casts, they still displayed substantial amounts of both barium and antimony. See Harold Weisberg, Post Mortem: JFK Assassination Cover-Up Smashed, Weisberg, 1975, p.437. Because the tests required the use of a nuclear reactor, they were carried out on behalf of the FBI at a reactor owned by the Atomic Energy Commission. Before the neutron activation analyses were made, it had been decided that “any such examinations will, of course, be with the strict understanding that the information and dissemination of the results will be under complete FBI control”: FBI HQ JFK File, 62-109060-5. The results of the NAA controlled test were made public two decades after the assassination as the result of a court case, and are available in the Harold Weisberg Archive, Hood College, Frederick, Maryland. The case was Weisberg v. Energy Research and Development Administration and the Department of Justice, Civil Action 75-226 (by the time of the court case, the AEC had been absorbed into the ERDA).
Was Lee Oswald Framed?

The rifle and bullet shells which had been discovered on the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository pointed unambiguously to Lee Harvey Oswald as the assassin of President Kennedy.

The evidence assembled and considered by the Warren Commission, however, demonstrated that Oswald almost certainly had not been involved in the assassination. The rifle and bullet shells must, therefore, have been planted in order to frame Oswald.

Perhaps the most blatant indication of the framing of Oswald was the emergence of an unlikely candidate for the single bullet which supposedly caused all of Kennedy’s and Connally’s non-fatal injuries.

A bullet was discovered on a stretcher outside the operating theatre in Parkland Hospital, Dallas, at around the time when Governor Connally was undergoing emergency surgery. The Warren Commission was told that this bullet was of the same type as those found on the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository, and that it had been fired from the rifle discovered on the sixth floor.69

Several problems soon emerged with the nature and provenance of what became known, derisively, as the magic bullet.

It became clear that this bullet alone could not have caused all of Connally’s injuries:

- Despite the great destruction it had apparently caused, the bullet had suffered very little damage. Its base was slightly squashed, and its copper sheath possessed several fine scratches, but the bullet was otherwise intact. It was supposed to have destroyed four inches of one of Connally’s ribs and shattered the radius bone in his wrist, one of the densest bones in the human body. To determine whether the condition of the bullet was consistent with these injuries, two sets of tests were conducted:
  - The US Army fired ten similar bullets into the wrists of human cadavers. In all ten cases, the bullets were severely damaged.70
  - The FBI fired two bullets into tubes of cotton. Both of these bullets displayed a minimal amount of damage, just like CE 399.71
- More metal had been deposited in Governor Connally’s wounds than was missing from the bullet. The surgeons who operated on Connally noted several tiny fragments of bullet lead in his wrist, as well as a larger fragment in his thigh. Other fragments may well have been washed out when the wounds to the torso and wrist were cleaned prior to surgery. The only part of the CE 399 bullet which was not sheathed in copper, and from which the lead fragments could have come, was the base, but the only piece missing from the base was a very small sample taken by the FBI for testing. Even without that sample and another taken from the nose, the weight of the bullet was within the normal tolerance of intact bullets.72

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69 Warren Commission Hearings, vol.3, p.435. At the time of the House Select Committee on Assassinations in 1977, it was claimed that neutron activation analysis was able to match the CE 399 bullet to fragments of bullets found in the presidential car, but this theory has since been debunked. For a layman–friendly account of the issue, see Gary Aguilar, ’Review of Reclaiming History,’ The Federal Lawyer, November/December 2007.

70 The US Army report on its test, Wound Ballistics of 6.5mm Mannlicher-Carcano Ammunition (see Appendix H, ’Edgewood Arsenal Bullet Tests,’ pp.87ff below), was classified, and only became known to the public ten years after the assassination. A photograph of the least damaged of the ten bullets was published: Warren Commission Hearings, vol. 17, p.850 (Commission Exhibit 856). For photographs of CE 399, see Warren Commission Hearings, vol. 17, p.49 (Commission Exhibit 399) and the Mary Ferrell Foundation website.

71 Warren Commission Hearings, vol.3, p.437. Photograph of the intact bullets: Warren Commission Hearings, vol.17, p.258 (Commission Exhibit 572). Although the FBI examiner did not describe his method, it is standard procedure to fire bullets into tubes of cotton in order to create a rifling pattern on the outside of a bullet without destroying the bullet. The inside of a rifle barrel contains ridges and grooves in a spiral pattern which cause a bullet to spin in the air, increasing the accuracy of its flight. By examining the rifling pattern on a test bullet, it is possible to determine that a bullet of the same type has been fired from a specific rifle.

72 The metallic fragments in the wrist: Warren Commission Hearings, vol.4, pp.120ff, and ibid., p.113; see also Assassination Records Review Board Medical Document 184, pp.2f. The fragment in the thigh: Warren Commission Hearings, vol.4, p.125. The weight of the bullet: ibid., p.68.
It also became clear that the bullet presented to the Warren Commission had not come from Governor Connally’s stretcher.

There had been two stretchers outside the operating theatre: one had held Connally, while the other had had no connection with either Connally or Kennedy. Darrell Tomlinson, the hospital employee who discovered the bullet, was insistent that he had found it on the other stretcher. Not only had no bullet been found on Connally’s stretcher, but the bullet produced in evidence was not in fact the one discovered at the hospital. The Warren Commission’s bullet, Commission Exhibit 399, was not shown to Tomlinson during his testimony. Another hospital employee, O.P. Wright, who also saw the bullet on the stretcher, was not called to testify. Three years later, a researcher showed a photograph of the CE 399 bullet to Wright, who claimed that the bullet he had seen on the stretcher was of an entirely different type.

Like the bullet shells and rifle found on the sixth floor, the magic bullet appears to have been planted in order to incriminate Lee Harvey Oswald. Three other areas of evidence also indicated that Oswald had been framed:

- Oswald’s impersonation in Mexico City about six weeks before the assassination.
- The appearance of Oswald, or someone impersonating him, in Dallas at around the same time.
- Oswald’s career as a defector to the Soviet Union and as an agitator in New Orleans.

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73 See *Warren Commission Hearings, vol. 6*, pp.130ff for the pressure put on Tomlinson to change his mind. President Kennedy’s stretcher was in a different part of the hospital, and could not have been the source of the bullet. The *Warren Report* claimed disingenuously that the fact that the bullet had not come from Kennedy’s stretcher increased the likelihood that it must have come from Connally’s; see the *Warren Report*, p.81.

74 Josiah Thompson, *Six Seconds in Dallas: a Micro–Study of the Kennedy Assassination*, New York: Bernard Geis Associates for Random House, 1967, p.175. The story is complicated by the bullet’s inadequately documented chain of custody, and by an FBI memo to the Warren Commission which claimed falsely that both Tomlinson and Wright had confirmed that the official bullet, Commission Exhibit 399, was the one they had seen on the stretcher. See Gary Aguilar and Josiah Thompson, *The Magic Bullet: Even More Magical Than We Knew* at history-matters.com.
Lee Harvey Oswald was arrested less than an hour and a half after the assassination of President Kennedy. Very soon after his arrest, two pieces of background information reached government circles in Washington:

- Oswald, a self-declared Marxist and former marine, had defected to the Soviet Union in 1959. He had threatened to renounce his US citizenship and to pass on secrets he had obtained while working as a radar operator for the U2 spy plane operation. He had returned to the US in 1962.75
- Between 27 September and 3 October 1963, Oswald had been in Mexico City, where he had contacted the Soviet Embassy and the Cuban Consulate several times by telephone and at least five times in person.76

The Soviet and Cuban diplomatic compounds in Mexico City were being thoroughly monitored by the CIA, which possessed tape recordings and transcripts of Oswald’s telephone calls, as well as photographs of Oswald as he went in and out.77

Oswald had applied for a visa to allow him to visit Cuba, and had enquired about obtaining a visa to visit the Soviet Union. More ominously, he had met and spoken by telephone to Valeriy Kostikov, a Soviet diplomat who was strongly suspected of being an agent attached to the KGB’s Department 13, which was in charge of assassinations and sabotage.78

The obvious implication was that the man accused of assassinating President Kennedy was in some way associated with the Soviet or Cuban regimes. This implication was strengthened when the FBI discovered shortly after the assassination that, two weeks earlier, it had intercepted a letter apparently sent by Oswald to the Soviet Embassy in Washington, in which he claimed that he had met Kostikov in Mexico City.79

The FBI learned on the afternoon of the assassination that it had not been kept fully informed by the CIA of Oswald’s activities in Mexico City. To remedy this, two sets of evidence were sent by the CIA station in Mexico City to the FBI in Dallas, arriving early on the morning of 23 November:

- At least one tape recording of a phone call by a man claiming to be Oswald.
- Several photographs of the only non-Hispanic man to enter the Soviet compound on the date of Oswald’s meeting there with Kostikov.80

FBI agents in Dallas made an unexpected and ominous discovery: neither the voice on the recording nor the man in the photographs matched the man who was in custody. Someone had impersonated Oswald in Mexico City.81

77 According to Winston Scott, the head of the CIA station in Mexico City, “persons watching these embassies photographed OSWALD as he entered and left each one; and clocked the time he spent on each visit” (Russ Holmes Work File, 104–10439–10114, p.14, National Archives and Records Administration). For the extent of the CIA’s surveillance, see Oswald, the CIA, and Mexico City (the Lopez Report), p.24ff. Contrary to certain official sources, the CIA’s Mexico City station knew about Oswald’s visits to the Cuban Consulate before the assassination, and passed this information to headquarters. Scott stated that “every piece of information concerning Lee Harvey Oswald was reported immediately after it was received to: US Ambassador Thomas C. Mann, by memorandum; the FBI Chief in Mexico, by memorandum; and to my headquarters by cable; and included in each and every one of these reports was the conversation Oswald had, so far as it was known. These reports were made on all his contacts with both the Cuban Consulate and with the Soviets.” See Winston Scott, Foul Foe, op. cit., p.416.
78 For Oswald’s dealings with Kostikov, see Newman, op. cit., pp.356–62. For the CIA’s belief that Kostikov was associated with the KGB’s sabotage and assassinations department, see NARA Record Identification no. 104-10436–10025.
79 Although the letter (Warren Commission Hearings, vol.16, p.33 [Commission Exhibit 15]) refers to “Kostin”, it is widely assumed that “Kostin” was in fact Kostikov; see Warren Report, p.309.
80 One photograph was published by the Warren Commission: Warren Commission Hearings, vol.20, p.69. Several others have since been widely published; see e.g. Robert Groden, The Search for Lee Harvey Oswald, Viking Penguin, 1995, pp.245–9.
81 J. Edgar Hoover gave the news to President Johnson early on the morning after the assassination: “We have up here the tape and the photograph of the man who was at the Soviet Embassy, using Oswald’s name. That picture and
Although there was good evidence that Oswald had in fact made at least one visit to the Cuban Consulate and one to the Soviet Embassy, several other encounters provided strong evidence that he had also been impersonated:

- In two telephone calls to the Soviet Embassy, a man claiming to be Lee Harvey Oswald spoke "terrible, hardly recognizable Russian", according to the CIA's translator. Oswald himself spoke Russian very well.
- The man who made the incriminating phone call to Kostikov had also phoned from the Cuban Consulate three days earlier, on Saturday 28 September. In this instance, not only was Oswald impersonated but the phone call or the transcript appear to have been fabricated. The Cuban Consulate and the switchboard at the Soviet Embassy were closed on Saturdays. Silvia Tirado de Durán, an employee at the Cuban Consulate, who was mentioned by name on the transcript, denied that she had taken part in the call on the 28th.
- Silvia Durán and the Cuban Consul General, who had had three encounters with a man who claimed to be Oswald, both recalled that the man they met looked nothing like either the real Oswald or the man in the photographs.

Oswald's apparent contacts with the Soviet and Cuban representatives in Mexico City were reported by the news media, and gave rise to two competing conspiracy theories:

- either the assassination was the result of a communist conspiracy,
- or it was a conspiracy by elements sympathetic to the US state to blame the Soviet or Cuban regimes.

The details of Oswald's impersonation, on the other hand, were kept secret from the general public. The transcripts and recordings of the telephone calls were tightly controlled by the CIA station in Mexico City, and most of the recordings appear to have been erased within a short time of the assassination.

J. Edgar Hoover, Lyndon Johnson, and other Washington insiders were aware of the impersonation, and of its implications, early on the day after the assassination. It was clear that there was no innocent explanation: either Oswald had had at least one accomplice in Mexico City, or he had been impersonated without his knowledge. Either he was working for the Soviet or Cuban regimes, or he had been manipulated in order to implicate those regimes in Kennedy's assassination.

The existence of an impostor in Mexico City both undermined the idea that Oswald alone had killed the tape do not correspond to this man's voice, nor to his appearance. In other words, it appears that there is a second person who was at the Soviet Embassy down there" (Johnson to Hoover, White House Telephone Transcripts, 23 November 1963, LBJ Library, Austin, Texas). The recording of this call was erased, and a transcript survived only by luck; see Rex Bradford, 'The Fourteen Minute Gap,' at history-matters.com. Later that day, Hoover reported the evidence of an impostor to the head of the Secret Service: HSCA Report, pp.240ff.

82 Oswald's Cuban visa application form, dated 27 September 1963, contains his signature and photograph, and must have been obtained from the Cuban Consulate: Warren Commission Hearings, vol.25, pp.81ff (Commission Exhibit 2564). Valeriy Kostikov believed that he met the real Oswald at the Soviet Embassy on 27 September, according to the memoirs of his Vice–Consul; see Newman, op. cit. p.355. Against this, HSCA investigators were told by CIA assets who had worked inside the Cuban Consulate that the majority of the employees within the consulate doubted that Oswald had visited the building; see Gaeton Fonzi, The Last Investigation, Thunder's Mouth Press, 1993, p.294.

83 "Terrible, hardly recognizable Russian": National Archives and Records Administration Record Identification no. 104–10052–10084. Three other phone calls, made on 27 September, in which a fluent Spanish speaker enquired about obtaining a visa to visit the Soviet Union, were originally thought to have been the work of an impostor. Because Oswald knew very little Spanish, and the speaker does not mention Oswald by name, these calls are now generally considered not to have any relevance to the Oswald case. For a list of all the phone calls, see Lopez Report, p.117.

84 For a transcript and discussion of the 28 September phone call, see Newman, op. cit., pp.364–8.

85 For Durán and Eusebio Azcue López, the consul, see Fonzi, op. cit., pp.289ff, and HSCA Report, appendix vol.3, p.136.

86 The impersonation was first documented in the HSCA's Lopez Report in 1978. The Lopez Report was only made available to the public in 1993, and even then several passages were withheld. The censored material included "another section of this final report dealing with whether or not Lee Oswald was an agent or asset of the Central Intelligence Agency" (Lopez Report, p.142). The Warren Report's necessarily incomplete account of Oswald in Mexico City can be found on pp.658ff and pp.730ff.

87 The telephone calls now survive only as transcripts. One call, in which an English–speaking man identifies himself as Lee Oswald, no longer exists even as a transcript; see Newman, op. cit., pp.360–75. Official sources claimed that all the recordings had been erased before the assassination, but documents released three decades later show that this was not the case. Some recordings existed at the Mexico City station shortly after the assassination, and copies had been sent to Washington as soon as they were made. At least one recording seems to have existed as late as April 1964, when it was listened to by two representatives of the Warren Commission. For the existence of the tapes, see Assassination Records Review Board, CIA Testimony, p.147 and Fonzi, op. cit., pp.286f.
President Kennedy, and turned the idea into a solid political necessity.

The conspiracy in Mexico City involved Oswald, either as a member or as a victim. The apparent association between Oswald and Kostikov implied that the conspiracy was connected to the assassination of President Kennedy. The notion that Oswald, despite being centrally involved in this conspiracy, had actually planned and carried out the assassination all by himself, was surely recognised in Washington to be far too much of a coincidence to be true.

It was clear to knowledgeable insiders that both of the competing conspiracy theories created severe threats to established political institutions:

- either the US security system had failed to prevent a communist conspiracy,
- or some elements of the US security system were complicit in the assassination.

Although, as Hoover put it, the evidence against Oswald was “not very, very strong,” the lone–nut explanation became the only expedient solution to a serious political problem.88

Once Oswald himself was murdered, and the burden of proof dramatically reduced, it became practicable to avoid an honest investigation into the assassination.

A report was commissioned from the FBI, but the news media felt that it would be unable to convince the public of Oswald’s guilt without having a more objective source on which to rely. The Warren Commission was set up, and was given the task of endorsing the idea that Oswald, acting for inscrutable personal motives, had been the lone assassin. The Commission proceeded to assemble a case for the prosecution.

The print and broadcast media gave the Warren Report a huge amount of almost entirely uncritical coverage, and the political institutions survived.69

The apparent collusion between Oswald and the Soviet and Cuban regimes, if established, would have led to pressure for military retaliation. The need to defuse the danger of a nuclear war provided President Johnson with a bargaining tool. When pressing the reluctant Senator Richard Russell to serve on the Warren Commission, Johnson mentioned how he had managed to persuade the equally reluctant Earl Warren to play his part in promoting the lone–nut solution: “I just pulled out what Hoover told me about a little incident in Mexico City.”90

It is unclear whether the man in the photographs was the man who was claiming to be Oswald:

- At least one of the photographs was taken after the impersonation was over and Oswald had returned to the US.
- Silvia Duran and Eusebio Azcue, two members of the Cuban Consulate who encountered an impostor, both claimed that he did not resemble the man in the photographs.

Many years later, it became clear that deliberate deception had taken place. When the CIA station in Mexico City sent the photographs to the FBI in Dallas, individuals within the station had known for several weeks that the man depicted was not Oswald:

- The station was able to compare photographs of the real Oswald with those of the impostor. Photographs were taken of every foreign visitor entering and leaving the diplomatic compounds. The real Oswald seems to have made at least one visit to each compound, and so must have been photographed at least four times.99
- The station had been told by headquarters that the man in the photographs was not Oswald. On 9

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88 Hoover’s acknowledgement of the weakness of the case against Oswald: Johnson to Hoover, White House Telephone Transcripts, 23 November 1963, LBJ Library, Austin, Texas.
89 The FBI report (Warren Commission Document 1) turned out to be extremely superficial; it spent only 200 words on the details of the assassination, and failed to mention all of the wounds. For the Warren Commission as a political tool and a public relations exercise, see Appendix D, ‘Katzenbach: Memo to Moyers,’ pp.84f below, and Appendix E, ‘LBJ’s Phone Call to Joe Alsop,’ pp.86ff below. For the workings of the Warren Commission, detailed criticism of the Warren Report’s case, and criticism of its media cheerleaders, see the sources mentioned in Chapter 14, ‘Fiction, Propaganda and the Media,’ pp.45ff below.
90 In Johnson’s words, “Warren told me he wouldn’t do it under any circumstances … wouldn’t have anything to do with it … and I said let me read you one report … and I said OK … there’s a million Americans involved here … I just pulled out what Hoover told me about a little incident in Mexico City…. And he started crying and said, well I won’t turn you down … I’ll just do whatever you say”: Johnson to Russell, White House Telephone Transcripts, 29 November 1963, 8:55pm, LBJ Library, Austin, Texas.
91 For the extent of the surveillance, see note 75 above. The Lopez Report concluded that, contrary to early official claims, there was almost no chance that Oswald’s visits would have been missed by the cameras; see Lopez Report, pp.91–3. The cameras were tested and were working correctly on 26 September, the day before Oswald arrived in Mexico City: ibid., p.18. Several CIA employees believed that photographs of Oswald existed: ibid., pp.94–106. The chairman of the HSCA, Louis Stokes, alleged in 1978 that the CIA was withholding photographs of Oswald: NARA RIF no. 180–10140–1075. Along with the recordings of the phone calls, the photographs of Oswald at the compounds no longer exist.
October, a few days after the photographs were taken, the station alerted CIA headquarters to the visit of the man claiming to be Oswald: “Have photos male appears be American entering Sovemb 1216 hours, leaving 1222 on 1 Oct. apparent age 35, athletic build, circa 6 feet, receding hairline.” Headquarters consulted the genuine photographs and personal information in its file on the defector. It replied by cable the next day, stating that, on the contrary, the 23-year-old “Oswald is five feet ten inches, one hundred sixty-five pounds, light brown wavy hair, blue eyes.”

Not only were individuals within the CIA's headquarters and Mexico City office aware of Oswald’s identity, but they were of course aware also of the significance of a US citizen making contact with communist officials. According to one of the CIA officers who helped to issue the cable from headquarters to Mexico City on 10 October, the reply revealed that the agency possessed “a keen interest in Oswald on a need-to-know basis” just six weeks before President Kennedy's assassination.

The impersonation of Lee Harvey Oswald in Mexico City could only have been organised by people with knowledge of the CIA’s surveillance of the Soviet and Cuban diplomatic compounds; in other words:

- either the Soviet regime,
- or the Cuban regime,
- or the Mexican government,
- or the US security system.

The destruction of evidence and the transmission of false evidence could only have been organised by people with inside access to the CIA station in Mexico City.

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92 The reply from CIA headquarters is available online at http://www.ourmaninmexico.com/documents_oswald.html. Despite sending this truthful description to Mexico City, CIA headquarters passed on the incorrect description to the FBI, the Navy, and the State Department; see Newman, op. cit., pp.398f.

93 See Jefferson Morley, 'What Jane Roman Said, part 3' at history-matters.com. CIA headquarters obscured its “keen interest in Oswald” by withholding from the Mexico City station the fact that it was aware of the incriminating activities which Oswald had undertaken in New Orleans a few weeks before his trip to Mexico City. For more about Oswald’s apparent undercover work in New Orleans, see Chapter 9, 'The Career of Lee Harvey Oswald,' pp.29ff below.
A large community of anti–Castro Cuban refugees was living in Dallas in 1963. One of them, Silvia Odio, claimed that she was visited one evening in late September by three anti–Castro sympathisers: two Hispanic men and one American, who was introduced to her as ‘León Oswald’. The conversation was largely in Spanish, which the American did not appear to understand. One of the Hispanic men claimed to be a friend of her father, who was a political prisoner in Cuba. She was told that:

- the group had arrived in Dallas from New Orleans,
- they were about to go on a trip,
- and that ‘León Oswald’ might join the resistance movement in Cuba.

Lee Harvey Oswald had been living in New Orleans during the summer of 1963, and was about to travel to Mexico City, where he would attempt to obtain a visa to visit Cuba.

The next day, one of the Hispanic men telephoned Odio and described ‘León’, the American, as:

- a former Marine,
- a crack marksman,
- someone who thought that President Kennedy should have been assassinated after the failed invasion of Cuba at the Bay of Pigs,
- and, in her words, “kind of nuts.”

When Silvia Odio saw the television coverage of the assassination, she immediately recognised Oswald as her American visitor.

Silvia Odio’s story appeared to be reliable:

- Her sister, Annie, who was staying with Silvia at the time of the visit, saw the men and independently recognised Oswald when she saw him on television after the assassination.
- Before the assassination, Silvia Odio had written about the episode to her father. A letter from him refers to Silvia’s letter and to an unknown person who claimed to be his friend.
- Silvia Odio had mentioned the incident before the assassination to her psychiatrist, Dr Burton Einspruch, who considered her a reliable witness.
- Silvia and Annie Odio were reluctant to publicise their stories. The episode became known only by chance.

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94 Silvia Odio’s account: *Warren Commission Hearings*, vol.11, pp.377ff. Silvia, not Sylvia, Odio is the correct spelling of her name.


96 Even the Warren Commission accepted that Odio was a believable witness. Wesley Liebeler, who interviewed Odio for the Commission, stated that “a number of details in the woman's story coincided with facts she could not possibly have known.” See Edward Epstein, *Inquest: the Warren Commission and the Establishment of Truth*, Viking Press, 1966, p.102. The House Select Committee on Assassinations likewise found “that Silvia Odio's testimony was essentially credible.” See *HSCA Report*, appendix vol.10, p.31.


100 Immediately after the assassination, the third Odio sister, Sarita, mentioned to Silvia’s friend, Lucille Connell, that Silvia had met Oswald. The FBI learned that another friend of Connell’s had met Jack Ruby. The bureau eventually interviewed Connell, who told them about the Odio incident. See *HSCA Report*, appendix vol.10, p.28.
According to Odio, the meeting may have occurred on Wednesday 25 September, but was more likely to have occurred on Thursday 26 September.\textsuperscript{101} Either way, there was a problem: both of these dates coincided with Oswald's Mexico City adventure.

Oswald is presumed to have been in New Orleans on the morning of 25 September, when a cheque in his name was cashed.\textsuperscript{102} He is presumed to have arrived in Mexico City early on 27 September, when he registered at a hotel and made his first visits to the Soviet and Cuban diplomatic compounds.\textsuperscript{103} Oswald could not drive,\textsuperscript{104} and had little money. The bus was the only suitably economical mode of transport that Oswald could have taken if he had travelled to Mexico without an associate.

Just one itinerary fitted the available dates. It involved three separate bus journeys:

1. leaving New Orleans shortly after mid–day on the 25th, and arriving in Houston, 350 miles away, very late the same day;
2. leaving Houston early on the morning of the 26th, and arriving in Nuevo Laredo on the Mexican border that afternoon;
3. leaving Nuevo Laredo an hour or so later, and arriving in Mexico City shortly before 10am on the 27th.\textsuperscript{105}

In order to arrive in Mexico City on the 27th, Oswald must have set off from New Orleans on the 25th. New Orleans, however, is more than 500 miles by road from Dallas. Without assistance, Oswald could not have reached Dallas in time to visit Silvia Odio on the 25th and then travel the 240 miles to Houston in time to catch his bus.

This created several uncomfortable options:

- Either the real Oswald was on a bus hundreds of miles away when Silvia Odio was introduced to 'Leon Oswald' in Dallas;
- or Oswald met Odio in Dallas and then travelled to Mexico City by some other means, which must have involved assistance from at least one accomplice;
- or Oswald did not visit Mexico City at all.

The episode posed a similar problem to that of the impostor in Mexico City:

- either Oswald had associates;
- or he was impersonated in Dallas as well as in Mexico City.\textsuperscript{106}

Apart from the question of whether or not Oswald was impersonated, the more sinister issue is the telephone call which planted specific information linking Oswald to the assassination, and which strongly suggests that he was being set up to take the blame.

101 The date of the visit: 

102 Oswald could not have obtained the cheque before 25 September: 
\textit{Warren Commission Hearings, vol.24, p.716 (Commission Exhibit 2121, pp.31f).} The Warren Commission was aware that Oswald may in fact have begun his bus journey to Mexico on 24 September, the day before the cheque arrived in New Orleans (\textit{Warren Commission Hearings, vol.26, p.596 [Commission Exhibit 3045]}), but did not attempt to resolve the problem.

103 Guillermo Garcia Luna, the owner of the Hotel del Comercio, claimed that Oswald checked in between 10:00am and 11:00am on Friday 27 September 1963: 
\textit{Warren Commission Hearings, vol.24, p.997 (Commission Exhibit 2121, p.54).}

104 Oswald began taking driving lessons a few weeks later, according to Ruth Paine, with whom he and his family were staying at the time: 

105 This itinerary was the one used in the Warren Commission's reconstruction of Oswald's bus journey; see 
\textit{Warren Report, p.731.} Oswald appears to have crossed the border on the 26th (\textit{ibid., p.323}), but the documentary evidence that he entered and left Mexico by bus is inconclusive and suspicious. One list of passengers for the return journey, provided by the Mexican government, had the name 'Oswld' [sic] added fraudulently; see \textit{Warren Commission Hearings, vol.24, p.716 (Commission Exhibit 2121, pp.90ff).} There is some evidence that Oswald may have travelled by car, according to a memo from J. Edgar Hoover to the FBI office in Mexico City: "Until we can prove Oswald was on a bus, the possibility will always exist that he left by automobile as indicated in Mexican immigration records." (\textit{FBI Oswald Mexico City File, 105–3703–5}).

106 The Silvia Odio incident created huge difficulties for the Warren Commission and the FBI. After some urgent prompting as the \textit{Warren Report} was about to go to press (\textit{Warren Commission Hearings, vol.26, p.595 [Commission Exhibit 3045]}), the FBI produced three men who, it alleged, were Odio's visitors. This allowed the Commission to explain away the problem as one of faulty identification; see \textit{Warren Report, p.324}. But this story fell apart even before the \textit{Warren Report} was published. All three men denied it, and the one who was supposed to have been 'León Oswald' had a cast–iron alibi. For a refutation of the Warren Commission's version, and a good general account of the problem, see 
\textit{HSCA Report, appendix vol.10, pp.21–32.}
The Career of Lee Harvey Oswald

It became clear after Oswald's arrest and murder that he was not just an order-filler at a book warehouse. The more information that came to light, the more unusual his career appeared to be:

- He was a former Marine who had defected to the Soviet Union.
- He was involved in both pro- and anti-Castro activity in New Orleans.
- He had a strong interest in purchasing weapons by mail order.

Oswald was one of a series of former US military types who defected to the Soviet Union between 1958 and 1960.¹⁰⁷

He was armed with a very good knowledge of Russian, which he had almost certainly been taught at a specialist military language school, the Defense Language Institute in California.¹⁰⁸

Oswald's return to the USA in 1962 appeared to be actively condoned by the US authorities. Despite having promised to hand over state secrets to the Soviet regime:

- Oswald was not prosecuted.
- The State Department had assisted his return, by lending him the fare for the trans-Atlantic ocean crossing.¹⁰⁹
- Oswald and his Russian wife settled in the Dallas area, where they were befriended by George de Mohrenschildt, a petroleum geologist with connections to US intelligence. They mixed socially with the strongly anti-Soviet Russian émigré community in Dallas.¹¹⁰
- Oswald applied for a new passport in June 1963, stating on the application form that he was planning to travel to the Soviet Union. The passport was granted the next day.¹¹¹

Lee Oswald moved to New Orleans in April 1963, ostensibly to find work. He made contact with several Cuban anti-Castro activists, including Carlos Bringuier, who was in charge of public relations for two organisations: the Cuban Revolutionary Council and the Directorio Revolucionario Estudiantil.¹¹² Oswald surprised Bringuier by offering to assist with a paramilitary training camp operated partly by the DRE. Bringuier declined the offer; he assumed that Oswald was an infiltrator working for either the pro-Castro movement or a US agency such as the FBI.¹¹³

¹⁰⁷ Some of this group of military defectors appear to have been compromised by the Soviets; others appear to have been working for US intelligence. See John Newman, Oswald and the CIA, Carroll and Graf, 1995, pp.169–73, 182–90. For an example of a US undercover agent in the Soviet Union, see NARA RIF no. 104–10066–10201, p.6.

¹⁰⁸ The Warren Commission appears to have heard, from sources not yet publicly identified, that Oswald had received instruction from the Defense Language Institute: "We are trying to run that down to find out what he studied at the Monterey School of the Army in the way of languages" (Warren Commission Executive Session, 27 January 1964, p.192). He had spent about three months at a marine base not far from Monterey: Warren Commission Document 113. According to the portion of his Marine Corps record that has been made public (Warren Commission Hearings, vol.19, pp.656ff), Oswald had been tested in the Russian language while in the marines, which implies that he had been taught Russian while in the marines. Needless to say, foreign language tuition and testing were not normally part of Marine Corps life. Oswald had no significant knowledge of any other foreign language.

¹⁰⁹ The loan from the State Department: Warren Report, p.770.

¹¹⁰ George de Mohrenschildt’s connections to the world of intelligence were originally denied, but have since become better known. For his background, see HSCA Report, appendix vol.12, pp.53ff.

¹¹¹ Details of Oswald’s passport application are summarised in this FBI report: Warren Commission Hearings, vol 22, p.12 (Commission Exhibit 1062). Even members of the Warren Commission expressed surprise that a former defector could obtain a passport so easily: Warren Commission Executive Session, 22 January 1964, pp.8ff. An FBI memo makes Oswald's status clear: "With Oswald's background we should have had a stop on his passport, particularly since we did not definitely know whether or not he had any intelligence assignments at that time." (HSCA Report, appendix vol.3, p.541). Any intelligence assignments that justified the granting of a passport must, of course, have been on behalf of US intelligence.

¹¹² For Oswald's links to anti-Castro Cubans in New Orleans, see Peter Dale Scott, Deep Politics and the Death of JFK, University of California Press, 1993, pp.80ff. The HSCA's assertion (HSCA Report, appendix vol.10, p.63) that Bringuier was unconnected to the CRC is false; see Scott, op. cit., p.327 n.21.

¹¹³ Warren Commission Hearings, vol.10, p.35. For US intelligence activity in relation to both pro- and anti-Castro Cubans, see the Schweiker–Hart Report, pp.10ff. Although both the FBI as an agency and its senior officers as individuals were sympathetic to the anti-Castro movement, the Bureau also had to respond to pressure to limit the public’s access to weapons.
Bringuier’s suspicions seemed to be justified when he encountered Oswald a few days later, handing out ‘Hands Off Cuba!’ leaflets on behalf of the Fair Play for Cuba Committee, a pro–Castro organisation specifically targeted by the DRE. The two men got into an argument, the police were called, and Oswald spent the night in jail.

Oswald’s release from jail was covered by the local news media. Two more publicity stunts helped to identify him further with the pro–Castro cause:

- He hired assistants for a brief session of handing out leaflets. The session was covered on television.114
- After being interviewed on a local radio station, Oswald was invited to take part in a radio debate on the Cuban question, in which he claimed that he was a Marxist and a member of the FPCC.115

There were two main consequences of Oswald’s activity:

- When applying for a Cuban visa in Mexico City a few weeks later, he made use of the pro–Castro credentials he had acquired in New Orleans.
- After the assassination of President Kennedy, the identification of Oswald with the Cuban regime led to the closure of the FPCC.116

Oswald’s pro–Castro activity was not, however, what it seemed. Despite his left–wing media persona, Oswald had no known left–wing associates. The New Orleans branch of the FPCC consisted only of Oswald and one A.J. Hidell, which was presumed to be an alias for Oswald himself.117

Some of Oswald’s FPCC leaflets were stamped with an address, 544 Camp Street, which had no connection to the organisation. On the contrary, the building was associated with strongly anti–Castro interests:

- in 1962 it had been used as a base by the Cuban Revolutionary Council,
- and in 1963 it housed the offices of a private detective agency run by W. Guy Banister, a former FBI agent who was working at arms’ length for the FBI and other federal agencies on a number of projects, including anti–Castro activity.118

Oswald was a frequent visitor to Banister’s office at 544 Camp Street. He was seen in public on several occasions with Banister, who himself was very much opposed to the FPCC and the Castro regime, and who was strongly in favour of racial segregation. Banister was present with Oswald at Louisiana State University on two occasions when Oswald argued against racial integration.119

114 The leafletting took no longer than 15 minutes (Warren Commission Hearings, vol.10, p.66), which suggests that the television station had been alerted in advance.
115 A transcript of the interview: Warren Commission Hearings, vol.21, pp.621ff. A transcript of the debate: ibid., pp.633ff. Recordings survive of the interview and the debate: http://www.maryferrell.org/wiki/index.php/Other. At one point in the debate, Oswald states that “I worked in Russia. I was under the protection of the, that is to say, I was not under the protection of the American government” (this portion begins at about 15 minutes 45 seconds into the 23–minute programme; Oswald’s umming and ahhing has been omitted from this transcript). The official transcript incorrectly reads: “I worked in Russia. I was not under the protection of …” (Warren Commission Hearings, vol.21, p.632).
116 Within hours of the assassination, the DRE released to the news media a recording of Oswald’s radio debate. The FPCC was a long–standing target of the FBI and CIA; see the Schweiker–Hart Report, p.65, which quotes an FBI memo that “CIA is also giving some thought to planting deceptive information which might embarrass the [Fair Play for Cuba] Committee”. The DRE received $25,000 per month from the CIA, through a propaganda operation directed by George Joannides. In his later role as the liaison officer between the CIA and the House Select Committee on Assassinations, Joannides ensured that the HSCA remained unaware of the agency’s financial and operational links to the DRE. For more about the publication of Oswald’s radio debate, and the relationship between the DRE and the CIA, see Jefferson Morley, ‘What Jane Roman Said, part 6’, at history–matters.com
117 Whether or not it actually was an alias, the name ‘Hidell’ functioned as an alias for Oswald. Both Oswald and Hidell were linked to the post office box to which the sixth–floor rifle was sent: Warren Report, pp.104ff. Oswald himself ensured that official records associated his name with Hidell and with sympathy for the Castro regime. After the scuffle with Bringuier, Oswald refused to pay a small fine, and spent the night in jail. He requested, and was granted, an interview with an FBI agent, in which he linked Hidell’s name with the FPCC. This information was duly relayed to the 112th Army Military Intelligence Group and the Office of Naval Intelligence, whose files surfaced immediately after the assassination. For details, see Scott, op. cit., pp.258–60.
118 For Banister’s agency as a proxy or subcontractor for federal investigators, see HSCA Report, appendix vol.10, p.130, and Scott, op. cit., pp.86ff.
119 For Oswald’s association with Banister and his anti–Castro activity, see Newman, op. cit., pp.308ff, and Michael L. Kurtz, ‘Lee Harvey Oswald in New Orleans: a Reappraisal,’ Louisiana History, vol.21 no.1 (Winter 1980), pp.7–22 (available online in PDF format at JSTOR: http://www.jstor.org/stable/4230952), which also discusses Oswald’s pro–segregationist activity. Among those who saw Oswald and Banister together was William Gaudet, a CIA asset who was peripherally involved in Oswald’s Mexico City adventure; see HSCA Report, pp.218ff and Newman, op. cit., pp.346f.
Oswald was very interested in purchasing weapons by mail order, both during the summer of 1963 in New Orleans and at the beginning of the year while living in Dallas. In addition to the rifle found on the sixth floor and the revolver found on Oswald when he was arrested, Dallas police discovered among his possessions several complete advertisements for weapons and at least five mail order coupons.

One of these coupons, for a Mannlicher–Carcano rifle from Klein's Sporting Goods of Chicago, was matched to a specific copy of the June 1963 issue of American Rifleman which contained his thumbprint. This copy of the magazine was discovered by the FBI and the Secret Service on the day after the assassination, in a garage in New Orleans. In June 1963 Oswald had been working in a building next door to the garage. The proprietor of the garage claimed that Oswald had often spoken to him about guns, and in particular about how to obtain them by mail order.

There seems to be no legitimate reason why Oswald should have wanted to order guns while in New Orleans. Several months earlier, a Mannlicher–Carcano rifle very similar to that found on the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository had been ordered and received by 'A. Hidell' from Klein's Sporting Goods of Chicago, using a coupon in the February 1963 issue of American Rifleman. Likewise, 'A.J. Hidell' had bought Oswald's revolver by mail order in January 1963.

When the mysterious Mr Hidell had ordered the revolver and the rifle, Oswald was living in Dallas, Texas. The easiest way to obtain a weapon in Texas in 1963, and the only sensible way for an aspiring assassin, was to visit a shop and buy one over the counter. No identification was needed, and no incriminating paper trail would exist. Identification was only required, and an incriminating paper trail created, when purchasing a weapon from a different state, by mail order.

In 1962 and 1963, the growing trade in mail–order weapons was being investigated by two official bodies:

- the Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms unit of the Internal Revenue Service,
- and by a subcommittee of the Senate Judiciary Committee, headed by Senator Thomas Dodd.

Among the organisations under investigation were:

- The American Nazi Party, whose officials’ names and addresses featured in Oswald’s address book.
- Cuban exile organisations, including three with whom Oswald had attempted to make contact in New Orleans and Dallas.
- Klein’s Sporting Goods, of Chicago, from whom ‘A. Hidell’ had purchased a 36-inch–long Mannlicher–Carcano rifle by mail order. That rifle was the same model as the 40-inch–long rifle that was discovered on the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository.
- Seaport Traders, of Los Angeles, from whom ‘A.J. Hidell’ had purchased a revolver by mail order. That revolver was found on Oswald when he was arrested on 22 November 1963.

There is no categorical proof that Lee Oswald was working for one or another agency of the US government, either directly or through a proxy, but the circumstantial evidence is overwhelming.

It is unclear whether Oswald himself, using the Hidell alias, purchased the 40-inch–long rifle discovered in the Texas School Book Depository. A more important issue is also unclear: how much of Oswald’s activity in New Orleans, Mexico City and Dallas was directed by others specifically in order to incriminate him, and how much of it was genuine undercover work that was seized on at some stage in the planning of the assassination. Several aspects of the Mexico City episode, for example, can be interpreted as an attempt by the counter–intelligence branch of the CIA to expose Soviet moles within the US security system. Oswald need not have been, and probably was not, a straightforward employee of one agency.

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120 For Hidell’s purchases, see the Warren Report, p.723. For Oswald’s thumb print, see Henry Hurt, Reasonable Doubt: An Investigation into the Assassination of John F. Kennedy, Henry Holt, 1985, p.298.
121 Oswald was working at the William B. Reily Coffee Company, next door to Adrian Alba’s garage: Warren Commission Hearings, vol.10, pp.220ff.
122 For the history of the weapons associated with Oswald, see Warren Report, pp.118ff. The rifle ordered by ‘A. Hidell’ was a 36-inch–long version of the 40-inch–long model found on the sixth floor. Apart from the revolver he was carrying when arrested, no weapons, ammunition or related equipment were found among Oswald’s possessions.
123 For the Dodd Committee’s activities, which included the use of undercover investigators who purchased guns, see Hurt, op. cit., pp.300ff.
The Verdict: Was Oswald Guilty or Not Guilty?

There is no absolutely conclusive evidence that proves Lee Harvey Oswald’s guilt or innocence of the assassination of President Kennedy. For example:

• There are no known photographs of anyone, whether Oswald or someone who was not Oswald, firing a gun from the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository.
• Nor are there any photographs showing Oswald elsewhere at the time of the assassination, although one photograph, taken halfway through the shooting, depicted a man who resembled Oswald standing in the doorway of the TSBD. The man turned out to be one Billy Lovelady, a colleague of Oswald’s.125

Had Lee Oswald not been murdered by Jack Ruby, it would have been up to the prosecution in a court of law to prove the case against him beyond a reasonable doubt to a jury of citizens.

In the event, the case against Oswald was made by the Warren Commission. The jury, formed of the print and broadcast media, accepted a very low standard of proof and delivered an almost unanimous verdict: Oswald alone was guilty of the assassination.

Evidence of Oswald’s Innocence

There were weaknesses in all three elements of the case against Lee Harvey Oswald as the lone assassin of President Kennedy:

1. The first claim, that all of the shooting came from the easternmost south–facing window on the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository, was supported by some of the eye–witness evidence but was strongly contradicted by the medical and photographic evidence.
2. The second claim, that Oswald had brought a rifle to work and was on the sixth floor with the rifle at the time of the shooting, was contradicted by all of the relevant, credible evidence. None of this evidence was conclusive, however, so the claim remained plausible.
3. The third claim, that it was physically possible for a lone gunman to have caused all the known injuries with only three shots, turned out to be emphatically contradicted by the medical, photographic and eye–witness evidence.

Oswald was almost certainly not the lone gunman that he was made out to be. Other evidence suggested very strongly that:

• Oswald had not fired a rifle at all on the day of the assassination,
• and a bullet was dishonestly placed into evidence in order to frame Oswald.

Evidence of Oswald’s Guilt

It is commonly recognised, and even occasionally admitted by the news media, that the Warren Commission made no attempt to discover how or by whom President Kennedy was killed.126 Neither the

125 Oswald and Lovelady were not dissimilar in appearance. The face of the figure in James Altgens’s photograph occupies a tiny part of the frame, and is insufficiently detailed to provide a definitive judgment, at least in published versions of the photograph. Current majority opinion is that the man’s shirt more closely resembles that worn by Lovelady than that worn by Oswald when he was arrested. The question is complicated by the fact that Oswald probably changed his shirt between the assassination and his arrest (see Warren Report, p.622 and Handwritten notes of Captain J.W. Fritz’s interview of Oswald, p.7). For a reproduction of Altgens’s image, and for photographs of Oswald’s and Lovelady’s shirts, see Robert Groden, The Killing of a President, Viking Penguin, 1993, pp.186f. For an online comparison of the figure in the photograph and Lovelady, see http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/JFKlovelady.htm. Several witnesses claimed that the man standing near them was Lovelady; no-one claimed that it was Oswald. For the case that the man in the doorway was in fact Oswald, see David Wrone, The Zapruder Film: Reframing JFK’s Assassination, University Press of Kansas, 2003, pp.174-180.

126 Bertrand Russell, in his 16 Questions on the Assassination, was one of the first commentators to point out the Warren Commission’s lack of concern over who killed Kennedy: “At the outset the Commission appointed six panels through which it would conduct its enquiry. They considered: What did Oswald do on November 22, 1963? What was Oswald’s background? What did Oswald do in the U.S. Marine Corps, and in the Soviet Union? How did Ruby kill Oswald? What is Ruby’s background? What efforts were taken to protect the President on November 22? This raises my fourth question: Why did the Warren Commission not establish a panel to deal with the question of who killed President Kennedy?”
Commission nor the FBI, the agency that supplied almost all of the evidence that was considered by the Commission, acted in good faith; both of them consistently ignored or misrepresented evidence or witnesses that were unhelpful to the Commission’s preconceived conclusions.\footnote{127}

Of course, the Warren Commission’s dishonesty does not by itself invalidate its conclusions. It is possible to argue that, despite the Warren Report’s case against him, Lee Harvey Oswald did in fact kill President Kennedy. For this argument to be valid, however, it is necessary for many witnesses and other individuals to have been mistaken and for many unlikely eventualities all to have happened.

\textbf{Witnesses Must Have Been Mistaken}

- The two witnesses who saw Oswald carrying a bag on the morning of the assassination, and who were unhelpful to the Commission’s preconceived conclusions.\footnote{128}
- Arnold Rowland, the witness who saw a gunman on the sixth floor a few minutes before the shooting, at a time when Oswald had a strong alibi, must have been mistaken.\footnote{129}
- The many eye–witnesses who claimed to have heard gunshots from the direction of the grassy knoll, or who claimed to have seen smoke or smelled gunpowder from that direction, must have been mistaken.\footnote{130}
- The doctors in Dallas who claimed that President Kennedy’s throat wound was one of entrance, not exit, must have been mistaken.\footnote{131}
- The many medical and other witnesses who claimed to have seen a large wound located toward the back of Kennedy’s head, must have been mistaken.\footnote{132}
- The pathologists at the autopsy, who were unhelpful to the Commission’s preconceived conclusions.\footnote{133}
- Or who claimed to have seen smoke or smelled gunpowder from that direction, must have been mistaken.\footnote{134}
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- The pathologists at the autopsy, who were unhelpful to the Commission’s preconceived conclusions.\footnote{141}
- Or who claimed to have seen smoke or smelled gunpowder from that direction, must have been mistaken.\footnote{142}

\footnote{127} For examples of the Warren Commission’s suppression of inconvenient evidence and witnesses, see: the claim by a doctor at Parkland Hospital that President Kennedy was shot from in front (Appendix B, ‘Parkland Hospital Press Conference,’ pp.72ff below); the rumours that Oswald was an FBI agent (Appendix G, ‘Memo: Was Oswald an FBI Agent?’ pp.94ff below); and the ballistics tests carried out by the Department of Defense (Appendix H, ‘Edgewood Arsenal Bullet Tests,’ pp.97ff below) that demonstrated that the so-called magic bullet, Commission Exhibit 399, could not have caused Governor Connally’s injuries. The Commission even suppressed the dissenting views of one of its members, Senator Richard Russell; see Appendix J, ‘Richard Russell and the Warren Report,’ pp.11ff below.

\footnote{128} The rifle that had been discovered on the sixth floor was 40.2 inches long when in use, and 34.8 inches long when disassembled: \textit{Warren Commission Hearings, vol.3, p.305}. Both Buell Wesley Frazier, who had given Oswald a lift to work that morning, and his sister, Linnie Mae Randle, at whose house Oswald had met Frazier, claimed that the bag they saw was about 27 inches long. Frazier: \textit{Warren Commission Hearings, vol.2, pp.239-43} and \textit{Warren Commission Hearings, vol.4, p.409}. Randle: \textit{Warren Commission Hearings, vol.2, pp.248-50} and \textit{Warren Commission Hearings, vol.4, p.408}.

\footnote{129} Arnold Rowland’s testimony: \textit{Warren Commission Hearings, vol.2, pp.169-189}. He saw a gunman on the sixth floor at the same time as Carolyn Arnold saw Oswald on either the first or second floor; see Appendix F, ‘Carolyn Arnold’s FBI Statements,’ pp.90ff below.

\footnote{130} Among the 40 or so witnesses who claimed that shots had come from the infamous grassy knoll in the north-west corner of Dealey Plaza are: William Newman (“He was hit in the side of the head. ... I thought the shots had come from the garden directly behind me, that was on an elevation from where I was.” \textit{[Warren Commission Hearings, vol.19, p.490]}); Thomas Murphy (“These shots came from a spot just west of the Texas School Book Depository Building.” \textit{[Warren Commission Hearings, vol.22, p.853]}); John Chism (“I looked behind me, to see if it was a fireworks display or something.” \textit{[Warren Commission Hearings, vol.24, p.204]}); Faye Chism (“It came from what I thought was behind us.” \textit{[ibid., p.205]}); Sam Holland (“The puff of smoke I saw definitely came from behind the arcade through the trees.” \textit{[ibid., p.312]}); Jean Newman (“The shots came from my right.” \textit{[ibid., p.218]}); and two Secret Service agents, Paul Landis (“The [fatal] shot came from somewhere towards the front.” \textit{[Warren Commission Hearings, vol.18, p.750]}) and Forrest Sorrels (“I looked towards the top of the terrace to my right as the sound of the shots seemed to come from that direction.” \textit{[Warren Commission Hearings, vol.3, p.548]}). For a full list, see Appendix A, ‘Grassy Knoll Witnesses,’ pp.48ff below.

\footnote{131} In a press conference at Parkland Hospital soon after the assassination, Dr Malcolm Perry, the surgeon who examined President Kennedy’s throat wound, stated three times that the wound was caused by a shot from the front; see Appendix B, ‘Parkland Hospital Press Conference,’ pp.72ff below.

\footnote{132} In several of the accounts written by the medical staff shortly after President Kennedy’s treatment at Parkland Hospital, the large head wound is described as extending into the rear of the head: \textit{Warren Commission Hearings, vol.17, pp.1-22} (Commission Exhibit 392).

\footnote{133} The autopsy report (\textit{Warren Report, p.541}) claimed that there was an entry wound close to the external occipital protuberance, the small bony lump low on the back of the head. The Warren Commission published a drawing (Commission Exhibit 388) which demonstrated that this bullet wound was aligned both with the sixth floor window and the large wound at the top of the president’s head. The Zapruder film, however, showed that this drawing was inaccurate, and that Kennedy’s head was not tilted far enough forward to have allowed a shot from the sixth floor, sixty feet above the road, to enter near the external occipital protuberance and come out of the top.
• The witnesses who claimed to have seen a bullet hole lower in Kennedy's back than was consistent with the single-bullet theory, must have been mistaken.134
• Dr Charles Carrico, who saw Kennedy's throat wound before the president's shirt and tie were removed, and who claimed that the wound was located above the shirt, must have been mistaken.135
• John Connally, who was sitting directly in front of Kennedy, and who maintained under oath and repeatedly in later interviews that he and Kennedy were injured by separate bullets, must have been mistaken.136
• Nellie Connally, who was sitting to her husband's left, and who also claimed that he and the president were injured by separate bullets, must have been mistaken.137
• The police motorcyclist who was riding to the president's right, and who also claimed that Kennedy and Connally were injured by separate bullets, must have been mistaken.138
• The experts from the US Army and the FBI, who found that the sixth-floor rifle was too inaccurate to have been able to accomplish the shooting, must have been mistaken.139

Unlikely Events Must Have Happened

• Immediately after the shooting, Oswald must have dashed down four flights of stairs in less time than it took two other men to climb one flight.140
• The several well-placed witnesses who failed to see or hear Oswald running down the wooden stairs must have been exceptionally negligent.141
• The large wound in the president's head, which displayed all the signs of having been caused by a soft-nosed bullet, must instead have been the result of very unusual behaviour by a solid, metal-

of the head. See frame 312 and frame 313 for the actual angle of Kennedy's head at the moment of impact. Later official investigations felt obliged to move the entry wound to a higher, more helpful location. Dr James Humes, the senior pathologist at the autopsy, strongly disagreed: HSCA Report, appendix vol.7, p.254.

134 The death certificate prepared by Dr George Burkley stated that the back wound was located at "about the level of the third thoracic vertebra" (Assassination Records Review Board Medical Document 6, p.2), which is typically four to six inches below the top of the shoulders. Clint Hill, the Secret Service agent who famously had jumped onto the presidential limousine, and who attended part of the autopsy, wrote that "I observed a wound about six inches down from the neckline on the back just to the right of the spinal column" (Warren Commission Hearings, vol.18, p.744 [Commission Exhibit 1024]). The two FBI agents who attended the autopsy described "a bullet hole which was below the shoulders and two inches to the right of the middle line of the spinal column" (See Appendix C, 'The Sibert and O'Neill Report', pp.78ff below). For the single-bullet theory to be credible, the bullet needed to have entered President Kennedy at the base of the neck, as depicted in Commission Exhibit 384. If the single-bullet theory was false, the assassination could not plausibly have been carried out by just one gunman.


136 Governor Connally's testimony: Warren Commission Hearings, vol.4, pp.127ff. Among his many later remarks reaffirming his belief that he and Kennedy were struck by separate bullets: "there is my absolute knowledge that ... one bullet caused the president's first wound and that an entirely separate shot struck me. It is a certainty. I will never change my mind" (Washington Post, 21 November 1966). If Connally's and Kennedy's non-fatál wounds were caused by more than one bullet, those bullets must have been fired by more than one gunman. Connally's testimony even caused one of the Warren Commissioners to doubt that Oswald had committed the crime alone; see Appendix J, 'Richard Russell and the Warren Report,' pp.11ff below.

137 Nellie Connally testified that "I turned over my right shoulder and looked back, and saw the President as he had both hands at his neck. ... Then very soon there was the second shot that hit John" (Warren Commission Hearings, vol.4, p.147).

138 James Chaney, the police motorcyclist who was closest to Kennedy, was not called before the Warren Commission, but his colleague, Marrion Baker, testified that "I talked to Jim Chaney, and he made the statement that the two shots hit Kennedy first and then the other one hit the Governor" (Warren Commission Hearings, vol.3, p.466).

139 The rifle that had been discovered on the sixth floor of the TSBD was examined by experts from the US Army and the FBI. They stated that it was necessary to apply shims before the telescopic sight could be used (Warren Commission Hearings, vol.3, p.443); that even when the sight had been repaired it was still inaccurate (ibid., p.402); and that the condition of the bolt and trigger pull meant that the rifle could not be aimed accurately (ibid., pp.449-51).

140 Oswald met two witnesses, an employee of the Depository and a policeman, on the second floor about a minute and a half after the assassination. For the timing of the encounter, see Howard Roffman, Presumed Guilty: How and Why the Warren Commission Framed Lee Harvey Oswald, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1975, pp.209ff (available online at http://www.rational.org/ratville/JFK/PG/PGchp8.html).

141 No-one saw or heard Oswald's alleged descent from the sixth floor. Of the four employees who were on or close to the stairs on the fourth floor, only Victoria Adams was called before the Warren Commission. She denied seeing anyone on the stairs: Warren Commission Hearings, vol.6, pp.388-90. For the credibility of Victoria Adams's account, see Gerald D. McKnight, Breach of Trust: How the Warren Commission Failed the Nation and Why, University Press of Kansas, 2005, pp.113f. Jack Dougherty was close to the stairs on the fifth floor, and did not notice anyone descending: Warren Commission Hearings, vol.6, pp.380-1.
The unimportant question of who pulled the triggers will probably never be answered. To explore the available to the Warren Commission, let alone on the basis of the evidence that has been made public.

A more fruitful question would be: who didn’t kill President Kennedy? Lee Harvey Oswald, the one.

Not all of these unlikely eventualities are equally unlikely. It is not implausible that some of them did in fact occur. Frazier and Randle, who saw Oswald carrying a paper bag to work, may plausibly have underestimated the size of the bag. Arnold Rowland may plausibly have been mistaken about the time when he saw a gunman on the sixth floor.

Other eventualities, however, are less likely to have happened. The notion that the Zapruder film was altered to show evidence of conspiracy, for example, is quite implausible.

For Oswald to have committed the assassination, every single one of these unlikely eventualities, and several others, must have occurred.

So Who Killed President Kennedy?

A more fruitful question would be: who didn’t kill President Kennedy? Lee Harvey Oswald, the one person investigated in detail, can be eliminated from suspicion even on the basis of the evidence made public since then.

The unimportant question of who pulled the triggers will probably never be answered. To explore the

142 For evidence that the head wound was consistent with having been caused by a soft-nosed bullet rather than a metal-jacketed bullet, see G. Paul Chambers, Head Shot: The Science Behind the JFK Assassination, Prometheus Books, 2010, and Bonar Menninger, Mortal Error: The Shot That Killed JFK, St. Martin’s Press, 1992. The central conclusion of Menninger’s book is wrong, for reasons given in Chapter 16, ‘Fiction, Propaganda and the Media,’ pp.55ff below, but the book’s treatment of the ballistics evidence is sound.

143 There was a period of only three-quarters of a second in which the hypothetical single bullet could have been fired. Kennedy was photographed by Phil Willis less than half a second before this (see p.15 above). His posture and the alignment of his jacket are clearly visible; they show that the locations of the bullet holes in his clothing, and the location of his throat wound, are entirely inconsistent with the trajectory of a shot from the sixth floor of the TSBD.

144 If Oswald had been the lone assassin, all of President Kennedy’s and Governor Connally’s non-fatal wounds must have been caused by just one bullet. The Zapruder film shows Kennedy reacting to his throat wound as he comes into view at frame 225. Connally, however, reacts no earlier than about frame 238, and his right wrist is undamaged as late as frame 268, more than two seconds after frame 225.

145 For the abrupt back-and-to-the-left motion of Kennedy’s head, see the Zapruder film online. The only plausible explanation for the motion is that it was caused by a shot from the front; see Chambers, op. cit., pp.160-8.

146 The paraffin tests showed no traces of gunpowder deposits on Oswald’s cheek: FBI HQ JFK Assassination File, 62-109060-8. In the words of an unpublished internal Warren Commission memo, ‘At best, the analysis shows that Oswald may have fired a pistol, although this is by no means certain. ... There is no basis for concluding that he also fired a rifle’ (Memo from Redlich to Dulles, 2 July 1964, Investigation and Evidence File, RG 272, Series 12, box 4, folder 3, National Archives). It is very likely that Oswald had fired neither a rifle nor a pistol on the day of the assassination. According to an FBI memo, Oswald’s pistol was defective: “the firing pin would not strike ... the cartridges with sufficient force to fire them” (Jevons to Conrad, 12 February 1964, FBI HQ JFK Assassination File, 62-109060-916). This is corroborated by the testimony of the police officer who arrested Oswald: “I noticed on the primer of one of the shells it had an indentation on it, but not one that had been fired or anything - not that strong of an indentation” (Warren Commission Hearings, vol.3, p.301). The traces of nitrates on the casts of Oswald’s hands were consistent not only with gunpowder but also with several common substances, such as printing ink, with which Oswald certainly had come into contact on 22 November 1963.

147 It has long been proposed that the Zapruder film has been altered in order to conceal evidence of conspiracy. The proposal fails for several reasons, not least that no-one had sufficient access to the film before it was copied and distributed; see Chapter 15, ‘Zapruder Film: Genuine or Fake?’ pp.52ff below. Until bootleg copies began to circulate a few years after the assassination, the film was never in the possession of anyone who promoted the idea of a conspiracy.
more significant question, of who was behind the shooting, it is necessary to examine some of the many JFK assassination conspiracy theories and the wider political context of the assassination.
JFK Assassination Conspiracy Theories

Because the assassination of President Kennedy received only a token investigation by the authorities, there is no widely accepted solution to the crime.

Snippets of evidence point in many directions, and have helped to generate a large number of conspiracy theories, varying from the plausible to the outlandish.

Emergence of JFK Conspiracy Theories

The first JFK assassination conspiracy theories appeared almost at once, prompted by information in the earliest news reports, and were amplified over the next few days:

- Shots from more than one direction were reported by newspapers, radio and television within hours of Kennedy’s assassination.\(^{148}\)
- Evidence of Lee Harvey Oswald’s apparent sympathy with the Soviet and Cuban regimes was also reported very soon after the assassination.\(^{149}\)
- The shooting of Oswald by Jack Ruby, two days after the shooting of Kennedy, was widely interpreted as the silencing of a potentially troublesome patsy. Rumours quickly spread about Jack Ruby’s connections to organised crime in Dallas and Chicago, his history of gun-smuggling, his links to the Dallas police, and his stalking of Oswald in the two days before the murder.\(^{150}\)

Oswald as Part of a Communist Conspiracy

The first JFK conspiracy theories claimed that Oswald had been working for the Cuban or Soviet regimes, either as a lone gunman or, more likely, with others.

Oswald’s Role in the Shooting

It is almost certain that more than one gunman fired at President Kennedy:

- Photographic and eye-witness evidence of shots from the front indicates that at least one shot was fired from a location other than the TSBD.\(^{151}\)
- More shots were fired than one rifle could have managed in the time available.\(^{152}\)

Lee Harvey Oswald, however, was almost certainly not one of the gunmen. The only solid evidence linking Oswald with the crime was his apparent ownership of the rifle discovered on the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository.

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\(^{148}\) As well as reporting the arrest of a suspect who worked in a building that was almost directly behind the president during the shooting, the media also reported evidence of shots from the front: several accounts by eye-witnesses in Dealey Plaza, and a press conference given by two of the doctors who had treated President Kennedy at Parkland Hospital, in which the president’s throat wound was described as the result of a shot from the front; see Appendix A, ‘Grassy Knoll Witnesses’, pp.58ff below, and Appendix X, ‘Parkland Hospital Press Conference’, pp.72ff below.

\(^{149}\) Very soon after Oswald’s arrest, the media were revisiting their files for reports of his defection to the Soviet Union in 1959. Within hours, the media had received from an anti-Castro group, the Directorio Revolucionario Estudiantil (Revolutionary Student Directorate), a recording of a radio debate in which Oswald had claimed to be a Marxist sympathiser; see Jefferson Morley, *What Jane Roman Said, part 6*, at history-matters.com. Within days, the media was reporting on Oswald’s apparent contacts with representatives of the Soviet and Cuban regimes in Mexico City about seven weeks before the assassination; see Chapter 7, ‘A Little Incident in Mexico City’, pp.23ff above.

\(^{150}\) For more about Ruby’s background, see *HSCA Report, appendix vol.9, pp.125ff* and Peter Dale Scott, *Deep Politics and the Death of JFK*, University of California Press, 1993, pp.127–208. For the Dallas police’s complicity in Ruby’s murder of Oswald, see *HSCA Report, pp.126ff*.

\(^{151}\) About 40 witnesses in Dealey Plaza testified to shots from the general direction of the grassy knoll to the front and right of the president’s car. The home movies by Abraham Zapruder, Mary Muchmore and Orville Nix show the fatal shot sending President Kennedy’s head sharply back and to the left, directly away from the direction of the knoll.

\(^{152}\) For the deficiencies of the rifle discovered on the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository, see Chapter 5, ‘The Rifle and Paraffin Tests’, pp.19ff above. The Zapruder film shows Governor Connally reacting to a shot after President Kennedy had been shot but too soon for the sixth-floor rifle to have fired both shots; see Chapter 4, ‘The Single-Bullet Theory’, pp.5ff above.
speculation: knowingly or otherwise, in the planning of the shooting, but there is no solid evidence to support this. Oswald almost certainly had nothing to do with the shooting in Dealey Plaza. He may have had a role, Lee Harvey Oswald as a Conspirator

Oswald almost certainly had nothing to do with the shooting in Dealey Plaza. He may have had a role, but there is no solid evidence to support this speculation:

- Oswald’s apparent meeting in Mexico City with Valeriy Kostikov, a Soviet diplomat who was suspected by the CIA of being part of the KGB’s assassinations department, became public knowledge shortly after the assassination. The public was not informed until some time later that Oswald had been impersonated in Mexico City, and that the man who met Kostikov was probably an impostor.
- The communist conspiracy theory was inflamed by a report from Mexico that Oswald had accepted money from a representative of the Cuban regime as an advance payment for killing Kennedy, but the report was soon shown to be false.
- Reports that Oswald had discussed the assassination in New Orleans with David Ferrie and Clay

Lee Harvey Oswald as a Conspirator

Oswald almost certainly had nothing to do with the shooting in Dealey Plaza. He may have had a role, knowingly or otherwise, in the planning of the shooting, but there is no solid evidence to support this speculation:

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153 No fingerprint evidence linked Oswald to the crime. The rifle contained no identifiable fingerprints (Warren Commission Hearings, vol.4, p.258). Of the 19 book cartons by the window in the south–east corner of the sixth floor, only two contained Oswald’s fingerprints or palmprints, and only one of those prints had been deposited within three days of the assassination. This was consistent with Oswald having handled the cartons during the normal course of his work in the TSBD, but not with him arranging the boxes to conceal his supposed sniper’s nest. The cartons contained fragmentary prints, presumably from other employees, as well as one set that could not be attributed to any employee or law enforcement officer (Warren Report, pp.138f). The rifle was linked to the so–called magic bullet, Commission Exhibit 399, but that bullet could not be linked to the assassination; see Chapter 6, ‘Was Oswald Framed?’, pp.21ff above. Contrary to a claim by the House Select Committee on Assassinations (HSCA Report, appendix vol.1 p.384), the rifle could not be linked to all the fragments of bullets found in the presidential car and retrieved from Governor Connally’s wrist; see Erik Randich and Patrick M. Grant, ‘Proper Assessment of the JFK Assassination Bullet Lead Evidence from Metallurgical and Statistical Perspectives’, Journal of Forensic Sciences, vol.51 no.4 (July 2006), pp.717–28; for a readable account of the issue, see Gary Aguilar, ‘Review of Reclaiming History’, The Federal Lawyer, November/December 2007.

154 Buell Wesley Frazier, Linnie Mae Randle and Jack Dougherty saw Oswald before or during his arrival at the TSBD on 22 November 1963. For details, see Chapter 3, ‘How Did Oswald Kill Kennedy?’, pp.6ff above. Before the rifle’s discovery in the TSBD, its only plausible location was the garage of the house occupied by Oswald’s wife and children. Oswald’s only opportunity to retrieve the rifle was when he stayed there the night before the assassination.

155 For the timing of Oswald’s encounter with the policeman, Marrion Baker, and the TSBD building supervisor, Roy Truly, and for the eye–witness evidence that the gunman did not resemble Oswald, see Chapter 3, ‘How Did Oswald Kill Kennedy?’ pp.6ff above.

156 Arnold Rowland (Warren Commission Hearings, vol.2, p.171) saw two men on the sixth floor of the TSBD at about the same time as Carolyn Arnold saw Oswald elsewhere in the building. The testimony of two TSBD employees, Harold Norman and James Jarman, indirectly places Oswald on the first floor several minutes after the sighting of the gunman on the sixth floor; see Appendix F, ‘Carolyn Arnold’s FBI Statements’, pp.90ff below.

157 For the tests that showed the presence of nitrates on Oswald’s hands but not on his right cheek, see Chapter 5, ‘The Rifle and Paraffin Tests’, pp.10f above.

158 For the impersonation of Oswald, and the activities of the impostor, see Chapter 7, ‘A Little Incident in Mexico City’, pp.23ff above.

159 For Gilberto Alvarado’s claim that a Cuban had paid Oswald $6,500, see Peter Dale Scott, Deep Politics and the Death of JFK, University of California Press, 1993, pp.121ff, and Warren Report, p.307. The supposed encounter took place in Mexico City on 18 September 1963, when Oswald was known to have been in New Orleans.
Effects of the Communist Conspiracy Theory
The early communist conspiracy theory quickly prompted a second theory. The blatant evidence of Cuban and Soviet involvement was taken to be a fraudulent attempt by their political opponents to blame those regimes.

Both theories generated public distrust of established political institutions. This in turn led directly to the establishment of the Warren Commission. As J. Edgar Hoover, the director of the FBI, noted shortly after Oswald’s murder and before any real investigation of the crime had taken place:

The thing I am concerned about, and so is Mr Katzenbach [the deputy attorney general], is having something issued so that we can convince the public that Oswald is the real assassin. Mr Katzenbach thinks that the President might appoint a Presidential Commission of three outstanding citizens to make a determination.$^{160}$

Oswald and a Right–Wing Conspiracy
The Warren Commission had been given ten months, a staff of 70, and huge financial and legal powers, and was expected to come up with convincing evidence that Lee Harvey Oswald was the lone assassin of President Kennedy. When the weakness of the Warren Report’s case against Oswald became widely known, the way was open for conspiracy theories to fill the explanatory gap.

The majority of the post–Warren Commission theories named a variety of establishment and right–wing suspects. Not every theory focussed exclusively on one set of suspects; many theorists filled their plates with helpings from several areas of the conspiracy buffet.

The Framing of Oswald
One crucial factor set a barrier that few of these conspiracy theories were able to overcome. It was clear that whether or not Oswald had been aware of the assassination plot in advance, he had been carefully set up to take the blame:

1. The Silvia Odio incident shows that the framing of Oswald was an integral part of the assassination of President Kennedy.
2. Oswald’s undercover work shows that he was being directed by one or more US intelligence organisations.
3. Oswald’s impersonation in Mexico City shows that his framing was facilitated, whether knowingly or otherwise, by elements within the CIA.

So we can rule out as a prime mover in the assassination any individual or organisation that did not possess two things:

- knowledge of Oswald’s undercover activities,
- and access to the workings of the CIA’s office in Mexico City.

Several of the most popular suspects probably knew nothing of Oswald’s undercover work, and certainly could not have had access to the CIA’s Mexico City office.

The LBJ Killed JFK Conspiracy Theory
Lyndon Johnson was the most obvious direct beneficiary of the assassination. He certainly possessed the motive:

- There had been rumours that Kennedy had been planning to replace Johnson as vice–presidential candidate in the 1964 election.
- Johnson’s political career was being threatened by a corruption scandal, which his accession to the presidency allowed him to overcome.


$^{161}$ HSCA Report, appendix vol.3, p.472. Nicholas Katzenbach expressed the same thought in memo written the same day: “The public must be satisfied that Oswald was the assassin.... We need something to head off public speculation.” See Appendix D, ‘Katzenbach: Memo to Moyers’, pp.84f below.
There is, however, no convincing evidence that he had any advance knowledge of the assassination.\(^\text{162}\)

**J. Edgar Hoover or the FBI Killed JFK**

Kennedy and Hoover did not get on, but that is hardly a credible reason for one to kill the other. The FBI was not under any threat from the Kennedy administration. Hoover’s only plausible motive was that he may have feared that Kennedy would force him out of office when he reached the mandatory retirement age of 70 in 1965.

The FBI’s lack of willingness to investigate the assassination does not imply that it or its director were involved in the crime. Institutional reasons are sufficient to explain its role in the cover-up:

- The impersonation of Oswald in Mexico City demanded the adoption of the politically harmless lone-nut theory.
- Oswald’s association with Guy Banister in New Orleans, and the rumours that Oswald had been an informer for the FBI, obliged the Bureau to conceal any links it might have had to the alleged assassin.\(^\text{163}\)

**The Secret Service Killed President Kennedy**

The Secret Service was in charge of the president’s security, and clearly failed in its job. While the Secret Service as an institution had neither a credible motive nor the ability to carry out the assassination by itself, it is not inconceivable that one or more members of the Secret Service facilitated the assassination.

The Secret Service seems to have attracted some of the most implausible JFK assassination conspiracy theories. One such theory claims that Kennedy’s driver, a Secret Service agent, fired the fatal shot. Another claims that the Zapruder film was altered to conceal the driver’s complicity in bringing the car to a halt just before the fatal head shot. An equally absurd non-conspiracy theory claims that a Secret Service agent in the car behind Kennedy fired the fatal shot by accident.\(^\text{164}\)

**Anti–Castro Cubans Killed President Kennedy**

Most anti–Castro Cubans considered US policy on Cuba to be insufficiently aggressive. Many blamed Kennedy for the failure of the invasion of Cuba at the Bay of Pigs in 1961. Oswald’s links to anti–Castro Cubans in New Orleans in the summer of 1963 suggest that if he had been involved in the planning of the assassination, perhaps they had too.\(^\text{165}\)

If elements of the anti–Castro movement were behind the assassination, their actions had no practical effect. There was no significant difference between President Johnson’s Cuban policies and Kennedy’s.

**Right–Wing Extremists Killed JFK**

Kennedy was very unpopular with racists and fascists, who took exception to his proposed civil rights legislation and to what they considered to be his failure to stand up to the communist menace. One such extremist, Joseph Milteer, appeared to have predicted two weeks before the assassination that Kennedy would be killed by gunfire from a high building, and that a patsy would be apprehended soon afterwards. General Edwin Walker, whom Robert Kennedy had forced to resign from the army, and whom Oswald was supposed to have attempted to kill in April 1963, was alleged to have been the fascist mastermind behind

162 The ‘LBJ did it’ theory was first put forward in print by Joachim Joesten, *The Dark Side of Lyndon Baines Johnson*, Peter Dawn Ltd, 1968. One especially ludicrous version of the LBJ conspiracy theory claimed that Johnson attended a party on the evening before the assassination, at which he announced to a room full of senior politicians and Texan oil millionaires that the president was to be killed the next day; see Madeleine Brown, *Texas in the Morning*, Conservatory Press, 1997. For examples of Johnson’s legendary corruption, see Clark R. Mollenhoff, *Despoilers of Democracy*, Doubleday, 1965.

163 Mark North, *Act of Treason: The Role of J. Edgar Hoover in the Assassination of President Kennedy*, Skyhorse Publishing, 1991, argues for Hoover’s involvement. The rumours that Oswald had been an FBI informer were taken seriously by J. Lee Rankin and Earl Warren; see Appendix G, ‘Memo: Was Oswald an FBI Agent?’ pp.94ff below. For criticisms of the FBI’s performance in the investigation of the JFK assassination, see the Schweiker–Hart Report.

164 For the ‘Secret Service driver shot Kennedy’ theory, see Dan Robertson, *Definitive Proof: The Secret Service Murder of President John Fitzgerald Kennedy*, Lulu.com, 2006. Sadly for the theory, the Zapruder film shows clearly that William Greer, the driver, was holding nothing more dangerous than the steering wheel, and that the fatal shot hit Kennedy on the right side of his head while Greer was sitting to the president’s left. For the Zapruder film hoax theory, see Chapter 15, ‘The Zapruder Film: Genuine or Fake?’, pp.52ff below. For the theory that Kennedy was shot by the Secret Service agent in the following car, see Chapter 16, ‘Fiction, Propaganda and the Media’, pp.55ff below.

165 For Oswald’s links to anti–Castro Cubans, see Chapter 9 ‘The Career of Lee Harvey Oswald’, pp.20ff above.
the conspiracy.\textsuperscript{166}

It is plausible that fascist individuals or groups may have had advance knowledge of the assassination, but there is no evidence that they were involved in the shooting.

**The Mafia Killed President Kennedy**

The mafia’s close links to Jack Ruby suggest that it was involved at some level. The notion gained support in the 1970s, when it became known that the CIA had co-opted the services of senior mobsters for its assassination attempts on Fidel Castro.\textsuperscript{167}

FBI wiretaps and informers revealed that several senior mafia figures expressed hatred toward the Kennedy brothers, who had forced the FBI and other agencies to take action against mobsters.\textsuperscript{168} The House Select Committee on Assassinations lent credence to the ‘mafia killed JFK’ theory. It claimed that although “organized crime, as a group, was not involved in the assassination … individual members may have been involved.”\textsuperscript{169}

No doubt the mafia could have performed the assassination, but they alone, like LBJ, the FBI, the Secret Service, anti-Castro Cubans and assorted fascists, could not have framed Oswald.

**The Media and JFK Conspiracy Theories**

Perhaps the most common explanation by the media for the existence of JFK assassination conspiracy theories is that people are unable to accept the notion that a great hero could be slain by a maladjusted loser. This is a reflection of the media’s own representation of Kennedy in particular and the institution of the presidency in general. It is a poor explanation in two ways:

- The historical record shows that JFK conspiracy theories arose very quickly after the assassination and were based on reliable facts supplied by the media: the evidence of shots from the front, Oswald’s contacts with Soviets and Cubans, and his convenient execution by Jack Ruby.
- If JFK conspiracy theories are a reflection of any commonly held ideas, those ideas are more likely to be a general suspicion of US nation-state institutions rather than adoration of one of the state’s figureheads.

The media’s flawed depiction of presidents as hero figures, deciding policy for high-minded reasons and with little interference from social institutions, is not unlike the conception of the world put forward by some conspiracy theorists. The media, like the more naive or paranoid conspiracy theorists, gives little consideration to the wider political context of the JFK assassination.

\textsuperscript{166} Joseph Milteer’s prediction that Kennedy would be shot “from an office building with a high-powered rifle … they will pick up somebody within hours afterwards … just to throw the public off”: \textit{HSCA Report, appendix vol.3, pp.447ff}. For the case that General Edwin Walker was involved in the JFK assassination, see W.R. Morris, \textit{The Men Behind the Guns}, Angel Lea Books, 1975.

\textsuperscript{167} The use of mobsters by the CIA in the assassination attempts on Castro was first documented by the \textit{Schweiker-Hart Report}.

\textsuperscript{168} For the mafia’s attitude to the Kennedys, and for a representative sample of the ‘mafia did it’ theory, see David Scheim, \textit{Contract on America: The Mafia Murder of President John F. Kennedy}, Zebra, 1989.

\textsuperscript{169} For the HSCA’s opinion on mafia involvement, see \textit{HSCA Report, p.147}. 

41
The Political Context

President Kennedy's assassination has generated innumerable conspiracy theories, many of which fail to demonstrate a plausible relation between the assassination and Kennedy's role within the political system.

The CIA Killed President Kennedy

The CIA's reputation as a general-purpose bad guy ensures that it features heavily in many politically inspired conspiracy theories. The Agency certainly played a role in the JFK assassination: some of its members were clearly involved in the framing of Oswald in Mexico City and perhaps also in Dallas and New Orleans.\(^{170}\)

The question of an institutional motive is less clear. There was animosity from senior CIA officers toward Kennedy, who had transferred some of the CIA's powers to the military in response to the Agency's behaviour during the failed invasion of Cuba at the Bay of Pigs, but this alone is hardly a convincing motive for the president's assassination.\(^{171}\)

The central role of certain members of the CIA in the framing of Oswald does not imply that the Agency as a whole had any involvement in the assassination. Such a notion is highly implausible, given that the CIA as an organisation almost never acted contrary to policy laid down by the White House. One of the CIA's essential functions has been to carry out, and if necessary take the blame for, those aspects of official policy that could not easily be sold to the electorate, such as direct interference in the affairs of foreign regimes.\(^{172}\)

Two exceptions to this rule involved aspects of Operation Mongoose, the CIA's terrorist campaign against the Castro regime and the general population of Cuba:

- the CIA's alliance with mobsters to carry out assassination attempts on Castro, in contravention of official anti-mafia policy;
- and its indulgence of the more enthusiastic anti-Castro Cubans in their military attacks on Cuban towns and ships at the same time as the White House was exploring ways to mend relations with Castro.\(^{173}\)

Both examples contradicted the Kennedy administration's official policy, and both are pertinent to the assassination. The CIA, which helped to frame Oswald, was closely associated with elements of the mafia and the anti-Castro Cuban exile movement. It is not at all implausible that the assassination arose from within this loose alliance of interests.

The Military–Industrial Complex Killed JFK

Oliver Stone's movie, *JFK*, popularised the notion that economic and military elites within the United States instigated President Kennedy's assassination largely because he was threatening to withdraw US military and financial support for its client regime in South Vietnam, with the consequences that:

- the military would not get their war;
- the owners of armaments and construction companies would not get their state-subsidised profits;
- and capitalist ideologues would lose their influence over the economies of south-east Asia, with

\(^{170}\) For role of the CIA's Mexico City station in the framing of Oswald about seven weeks before the assassination, see Chapter 7, 'A Little Incident in Mexico City', pp.23ff above. At around the same time, Oswald or an impostor appeared in Dallas, and a telephone call implied that Oswald thought President Kennedy should be assassinated; see Chapter 8, 'Silvia Odio's Visitors', pp.27ff above.


\(^{172}\) The CIA carried out policy determined by the National Security Council, which was heavily influenced by the White House. For plausible deniability, the function that allows government officials to pass blame to the CIA, see the Church Committee Interim Report, pp.1ff.

\(^{173}\) The CIA's associations with mobsters was made public by the Schweiker–Hart Report of the Church Committee. For the assassination attempts on Castro, see the CIA Inspector General's *Report on Plots to Assassinate Fidel Castro* (NARA RIF no. 104-10213-10101), 1967. One such plot was even in progress on the day of the JFK assassination, involving CIA agents and a former Castro loyalist, Rolando Cubela Secades, code-named AM/LASH.
the possibility of a contagious outbreak of independent development throughout the US's sphere of influence.

**The JFK Assassination and Domestic Power**

The so-called military–industrial complex reflected the interests of domestic elites far more powerful than any *ad hoc* grouping of mobsters, anti–Castro Cubans, disaffected CIA agents and a few gung–ho generals who opposed President Kennedy's actions during the Cuban missile crisis.

There are two ways to interpret Kennedy's assassination and his relations with elite institutions:

- Either he was working against the interests of established power, and was eliminated for institutional reasons,
- or he was working within the limits set by established power, and was eliminated by individuals or groups for reasons that had nothing to do with the interests of elite institutions.

The first option defines the JFK assassination as a *coup d'état*; the second as a conspiracy. Although the wider definition of 'conspiracy' encompasses almost every *coup d'état*, a narrower definition is valuable in this case. Any worthwhile account of a political event must acknowledge the fundamental distinction between:

- an action that is part of the normal functioning of established institutions;
- and an action that is independent of such institutions.

Many JFK conspiracy theories fail to make this distinction, which is crucial to any useful explanation of who killed Kennedy or why he was assassinated. The distinction is crucial also to understanding the significance of the assassination. The further removed any conspirators were from the institutions of power, the less the assassination has to tell us about the workings of the US political system.

**The JFK Assassination and Domestic Power**

There are two ways to interpret Kennedy’s assassination and his relations with elite institutions:

- Either he was working against the interests of established power, and was eliminated for institutional reasons,
- or he was working within the limits set by established power, and was eliminated by individuals or groups for reasons that had nothing to do with the interests of elite institutions.

The first option defines the JFK assassination as a *coup d'état*; the second as a conspiracy. Although the wider definition of ‘conspiracy’ encompasses almost every *coup d'état*, a narrower definition is valuable in this case. Any worthwhile account of a political event must acknowledge the fundamental distinction between:

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**JFK and Vietnam**

The lack of any substantial change in official policy toward Cuba after the JFK assassination leaves only one credible reason why domestic elites might have had Kennedy removed from office by force: their disapproval of his policy toward Vietnam.

Under Kennedy’s administration, however, US financial and military support for the government in South Vietnam increased significantly, and the organised resistance of the South Vietnamese peasantry continued to be strongly suppressed:

- When Kennedy became president, there were about 700 members of the US military in South Vietnam. By November 1963, there were 16,700.
- The South Vietnamese army became larger and better equipped.
- A concentration camp system, known as the ‘strategic hamlet program’, was established to contain dissent in rural areas.
- Chemical warfare was used in South Vietnam to destroy forests and crops.
- Napalm was used against rural villages in South Vietnam.
- The US supported terrorist raids by South Vietnamese special forces in North Vietnam.174

**A Change of Policy Under President Kennedy?**

One dominant theme is visible in the historical record of US policy discussions under the Kennedy administration: that the US military would withdraw from South Vietnam when the local regime had imposed its control over the population. In response to the changing military and political situation in South Vietnam, there was much debate in US military, diplomatic and political circles about the best way to achieve this end.

President Kennedy began to favour a reduced role for the US military. On 11 October 1963, he signed National Security Action Memorandum no.263, which supported a proposal that the South Vietnamese army should be trained to take over the essential elements of the US military’s role, with the aim of

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allowing the US to withdraw 1,000 troops by the end of the year.\textsuperscript{75}

This policy had first been proposed in April 1963, and was implemented in October when the corruption and harshness of Ngo Dinh Diem's regime were seen as counterproductive to US interests. The State Department interpreted the memorandum as a hint that the regime ought to ease its repression of dissidents and political enemies.

High–level discussions had been taking place for some time about whether or not to support a coup by a group of South Vietnamese generals against Diem. NSAM 263 failed to have the desired effect, and US officials approved a coup. On 2 November, Diem and his brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, were executed.\textsuperscript{76}

The coup was followed by more internal disruption. Three weeks later, official policy was redefined in another document, NSAM 273, which mentioned the withdrawal of troops only in a general way as part of US “objectives”, and proposed that US military involvement be extended to North Vietnam. The memorandum was drawn up the day before the JFK assassination, while Kennedy was in Texas, and was signed by Lyndon Johnson on 26 November.\textsuperscript{77}

Kennedy, Johnson, and two NSAMs

Johnson was more willing than Kennedy to be persuaded of the need to increase US military involvement in south–east Asia, but this does not imply that he was installed for that purpose, nor that it was necessary for Kennedy to be replaced in order for military involvement to increase. The first substantial increase under Johnson did not happen until February 1965.

President Kennedy had consistently aligned himself with the less militaristic of his advisers, while remaining within the scope of acceptable debate. Although the official written record is incomplete, there is nothing in the publicly available documents to suggest that Kennedy strayed from the doctrine that the US military may only withdraw once the domestic rebellion is contained.

Even if NSAM 263 had been interpreted by domestic elites as recommending unconditional military withdrawal, it could hardly have provoked Kennedy’s assassination, the plans for which were clearly underway when Oswald or an impostor were seen in Mexico City and Dallas, two weeks before the memorandum was signed.\textsuperscript{78}

President Kennedy and Domestic Power

In the speech he gave in Fort Worth a few hours before his assassination, Kennedy boasted of his loyalty to US elite institutions:

In the past 3 years we have increased the defense budget of the United States by over 20 percent; increased the program of acquisition for Polaris submarines from 24 to 41; increased our Minuteman missile purchase program by more than 75 percent; doubled the number of strategic bombers and missiles on alert; doubled the number of nuclear weapons available in the strategic alert forces; increased the tactical nuclear forces deployed in Western Europe by over 60 percent; added five combat ready divisions to the Army of the United States, and five tactical fighter wings to the Air Force of the United States; increased our strategic airlift capability by 75 percent; and increased our special counter–insurgency forces which are engaged now in South Viet–Nam by 600 percent.\textsuperscript{79}

Although the Kennedy administration disapproved of some of the CIA’s actions against Cuba, it supported the Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961, set up Operation Mongoose later that year, and began the economic

\textsuperscript{76} For US involvement in the coup d’etat against Diem three weeks before the JFK assassination, see John Prados, \textit{JFK and the Diem Coup} at http://www.gwu.edu/.
\textsuperscript{79} A transcript of President Kennedy’s speech to the Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce at the Texas Hotel on the morning of 22 November 1963 can be found at http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=9538. For the escalation of the arms race under Kennedy, see Desmond Ball, \textit{Politics and Force Levels: The Strategic Missile Program of the Kennedy Administration}, University of California Press, 1980.
embargo of Cuba in 1962.\textsuperscript{80}

Kennedy consistently promoted the interests of US investors in Latin America by opposing land reform and supporting military coups in Guatemala, Ecuador, the Dominican Republic and Brazil.\textsuperscript{81}

The current state of the evidence shows that President Kennedy’s policy toward Latin America, Vietnam and the Soviet Union did not go against the interests of US elites. Nor had he caused problems by implementing radical domestic policies. The Kennedy administration’s civil rights legislation was a half-hearted response to a growing popular movement.\textsuperscript{82} There was little significant pressure on Kennedy to change the wealth distribution mechanisms to favour the general population rather than investors and owners. Kennedy showed no signs of independent action toward this; unsurprisingly so, since he personally benefitted from the existing mechanisms.

The JFK Assassination as a Coup d’État

In third-world dictatorships, a coup d’État by one political force against another can succeed because power is highly concentrated and easily targeted. In relatively democratic, industrialised nation states, elite power is distributed sufficiently widely to make a violent coup difficult to achieve.

Several institutional mechanisms allow domestic elites to keep short-term managers such as presidents in check. For example:

- Owners of the mass media may put an unfavourable slant on news stories;
- Owners of capital may threaten to invest abroad rather than within the domestic economy, or to withdraw investment from particular projects.
- Political sponsors may threaten to withdraw financial and other forms of support.

None of these measures was used to any significant extent against Kennedy. Even if the dominant social institutions disapproved of the president’s policies toward Vietnam, Cuba, domestic civil rights, or anything else, they evidently did not disapprove enough even to impose peaceful constraints on his actions.\textsuperscript{83} President Kennedy must have been removed from office by an ad hoc group working outside the normal structures of institutional power. The JFK assassination was the result of a relatively small-scale conspiracy rather than a large-scale coup d’état.

It is certainly conceivable that the conspirators included individual members of domestic elites. The strong evidence that President Kennedy’s autopsy took place under military control suggests that some senior military figures were, at the very least, aware of the conspiracy behind his murder. The extent of their active involvement, however, remains unclear.\textsuperscript{84}

\textsuperscript{80} For the Kennedy administration’s activities against Cuba, see Warren Hinckle and William Turner, The Fish is Red: The Story of the Secret War Against Castro, Harper and Row, 1981. For the role of the Attorney General, Robert Kennedy, in setting up Operation Mongoose in contravention of both US and international law, see Raymond L. Garthoff, Reflections on the Cuban Missile Crisis, Brookings Institution, 1989, p.32.


\textsuperscript{82} Partly in order to ensure the support of segregationist senators, the Kennedy administration consistently appointed segregationist judges in southern states, who failed to enforce existing civil rights legislation. Only after the violence in Birmingham, Alabama, early in 1963, did Kennedy treat the matter seriously, but even then he took the slower route of proposing new legislation rather than using his executive powers. See e.g. Howard Zinn, SNCC: The New Abolitionists, Beacon Press, 1964, pp.203ff.

\textsuperscript{83} An example of the peaceful replacement of a manager who had outlived his usefulness was President Johnson’s de facto resignation following the decision of domestic economic elites early in 1968 to withdraw US forces from Vietnam. In response to the Tet Offensive, the US military calculated that 200,000 extra troops were required. The need to contain the widespread dissent at home meant that this many troops could not safely be spared. When the domestic economic recession was taken into account, the war’s benefits were now outweighed by its financial costs and the risk it posed to the existing distribution of power. Johnson, the political face of the war, was given the news by his Senior Advisory Group on Vietnam on 26–27 March; see e.g. David Halberstam, The Best and the Brightest, Random House, 1969, p.653. He took the hint and announced four days later that he had decided not to seek re-election in 1968. For a political insider’s view, see James R. Jones, ‘Why LBJ Bowed Out’, Los Angeles Times, 30 March 2008. For the military’s assessment of the problem of domestic dissent, see the Pentagon Papers, Senator Gravel Edition, Beacon Press, 1972, vol.4, esp. pp.541. 564.

\textsuperscript{84} The evidence of Dr Pierre Finck, one of the pathologists at JFK’s autopsy, makes it clear that senior military figures prevented the dissection of the president’s back and throat wounds, and implies that they did this to avoid
How to Think About the JFK Assassination

It was obvious from very early on that President Kennedy’s assassination was a conspiracy. The transparent absurdity of the single–bullet theory by itself rules out a lone assassin as the culprit.

Many conspiracy theorists, however, slip too easily into blaming institutions for the murder. Just because this or that employee of the CIA or the army or the Dallas police department may have played a part in the assassination, it does not follow that the CIA or the army or the police were the driving force behind the assassination.

The notion that Kennedy was a gallant hero, killed by domestic institutions in a coup d’état, is almost as implausible as the notion that he was killed by a lone nut, Lee Harvey Oswald, firing an antiquated rifle with a broken telescopic sight.

In both cases, the ‘how’ and the ‘why’ are missing. Oswald’s motive for killing Kennedy, that “he was a general misanthropic fellow” who wanted to get his name in the history books, is no more convincing than the proposition that the owners of the country would eliminate someone who was serving their interests faithfully, or that, if it suited their needs to replace Kennedy, they would risk doing so with violence rather than with any of the peaceful means at their disposal.

discovering definitive evidence of shots from more than one direction; see Appendix L, ‘Pierre Finck: Dissecting JFK’s Wounds’, pp.120ff below.

185 This view was made popular by Oliver Stone’s movie, JFK. For a rose–tinted interpretation of Kennedy as a saviour figure, motivated by high moral principles and cruelly cut down by the forces of evil, see James Douglass, JFK and the Unspeakable: Why He Died and Why It Matters, Orbis Books, 2008. The book incorporates a very good general account of the JFK assassination and the activities of Lee Oswald, although not all of the evidence it presents in favour of a conspiracy is equally reliable.

186 Lyndon Johnson asked Richard Russell, one of the Warren Commissioners, about Oswald’s motive, and was told that “he was a general misanthropic fellow, that he had never been satisfied anywhere he was on earth ... he had a desire to get his name in history and all”. See Appendix J, ‘Richard Russell and the Warren Report’, pp.11ff below.
Further Reading About the Kennedy Assassination

These essays provide a concise introduction to the JFK assassination:

1. the strong *prima facie* evidence of Lee Oswald’s guilt;
2. a sceptical examination of that evidence;
3. and an account of Oswald’s activities before the assassination, which suggest a solution to the riddle.

What follows is a guide for those wishing to find out more about the Kennedy assassination without wasting their time on sensationalist potboilers and paranoid everything-is-a-conspiracy craziness.

Topics include the medical evidence and the authenticity of the Zapruder film, as well as a discussion of the two best-known anti-conspiracy books, Gerald Posner’s *Case Closed* and Vincent Bugliosi’s *Reclaiming History*.

Links have been given to online bookshops and other sources, where available. Needless to say, all online sources are liable to disappear or change without notice.

Primary Sources

Almost all of the publicly-available official documents and reports to do with the JFK assassination are available online at the Mary Ferrell Foundation website, many of them in a choice of PNG and PDF formats. This is an enormous resource, invaluable to anyone with a serious interest in the case. The Mary Ferrell Foundation website’s archive also contains copies of many research journals, some of them no longer extant.

Much of the material on the site is provided by and duplicated on the History Matters and Assassination Archives and Research Center websites, which also contain a selection of informative articles.

The Warren Report and some other documents are available online at the National Archives website. Many of the official reports are available on paper from the Mary Ferrell Foundation.

Essential Books on the JFK Assassination

Two books stand out:


Other titles worth examining include:

- John Newman, *Oswald and the CIA* (Carroll and Graf, 1995; ISBN 0-7867-0131-5), is the fullest account of Oswald's relationship with the organisation which played a major role in associating him with a communist conspiracy.
- Gaeton Fonzi, *The Last Investigation* (Thunder’s Mouth Press, 1993; ISBN 1-56025-052-6), is an insider’s account of the House Select Committee on Assassinations investigation, and includes strong evidence linking Oswald to elements within the CIA’s Mexico City station.

Early Criticism of the Warren Report

Informed criticism of the Warren Report began even before it was published, with Bertrand Russell, ‘16 Questions on the Assassination’, Minority of One, 6 September 1964, pp.6–8.

Much of the documentary material that undermines the Warren Report’s lone-nut explanation was withheld from the public until years after the event. The details of Oswald’s impersonation in Mexico City,
for example, were assembled in the *Lopez Report*, which was referred to in the *HSCA Report* of 1978 but only released to the public in the mid-1990s. The first generation of critics had to rely almost entirely on the limited body of evidence made available by the Warren Commission itself, much of which was placed in the National Archives but not published. Nevertheless, several of the earliest books still offer excellent critical accounts of the assassination:


Howard Roffmann, *Presumed Guilty: How and Why the Warren Commission Framed Lee Harvey Oswald* (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1975; ISBN 978–0–498–01933–4), was written after the first wave of classified documents were made public. It is currently out of print, but the text is available online in HTML format at [http://www.ratical.org/ratville/JFK/PG/](http://www.ratical.org/ratville/JFK/PG/).

**JFK Assassination Photographs**

There are three essential books for anyone interested in exploring the photographic record of the JFK assassination:

- Richard Trask, *Pictures of the Pain: Photography and the Assassination of President John F. Kennedy* (Yeoman Press, 1994; ISBN 0–9638595–0–1), is well-documented, and covers both still photographs and the surprisingly large number of home movies that record various aspects of the event. The book is very strong on the experiences of the individual photographers and film-makers.
- Robert Groden, *The Killing of a President* (Viking Studio Books, 1993; ISBN 0–670–85267–8), contains a comprehensive range of photographs of all aspects of the assassination, including President Kennedy’s autopsy, but also offers some very speculative theories.

**Online Book Shops**

Almost every book published about the assassination of President Kennedy can be obtained from one or more of these online shops:

- [Amazon](https://www.amazon.com): large selection of new JFK assassination books; some second-hand titles; ebooks.
- [Mary Ferrell Foundation](https://www.maryferrell.org): specialises in JFK assassination books.
- [The Last Hurrah Bookshop](https://www.lasthurrahbookshop.com): specialises in Kennedy and his presidency.

**JFK Assassination Ebooks**

The list of worthwhile ebooks (or eBooks, or e–books) about the John F. Kennedy assassination is small, but growing. The following titles are all worth reading, although several are available only in the proprietary Amazon Kindle format:

- An Introduction to the JFK Assassination (EPUB format).
- Vincent Bugliosi, *Four Days in November* (Kindle format).
- Peter Dale Scott, *Deep Politics and the Death of JFK* (Kindle format).
- Roger Feinman, *Between the Signal and the Noise* (EPUB format).
- The Warren Report (Kindle format).

Ebooks come in various formats, not all of which are compatible with every type of ebook reading software. The main offender at the time of writing is the Amazon Kindle, which has been deliberately crippled and is able to read only Amazon’s proprietary ebook format. Fortunately, it is possible to mend the Kindle and enable it to read the open EPUB format like almost every other ebook reader.
The problem of proprietary formats also means that ebooks created in the Amazon Kindle format cannot easily be read by other types of software. Of course, there are ways around these restrictions for those who want to find them. For more information:

- Project Gutenberg gives advice on how to get the different types of readers to cope with the various ebook formats.
- Richard Stallman writes about the problems with proprietary ebook formats.
- The Electronic Frontier Foundation has a guide to e-book privacy.
- The Publication Standards Project works to improve ebook publishing.

Ebooks in the EPUB format can be read on laptop and desktop computers, using Epub Reader, an extension for the Firefox web browser. Ebooks and PDF documents are different things. PDFs generally cannot be read by ebook reading software, and ebooks cannot be read by PDF software. Some online links to “ebook downloads” lead only to PDF downloads.

Miscellaneous Online Sources

- Citizens for Truth about the Kennedy Assassination, the former publisher of the magazine, Probe, also covers the other political assassinations of the 1960s.
- Kenneth Rahn’s Academic JFK Assassination Site offers a wide range of material covering many aspects of the topic.
- Baylor University in Waco, Texas, contains a good deal of research material.
- Part of the vast Harold Weisberg Archive at Hood College, Frederick, Maryland, is available online.
- JFK Lancer publishes books and research materials.
- Secrets of a Homicide contains an attempt by an award–winning animator, Dale Myers, to use a computer simulation to breathe life into the single–bullet hypothesis. Of course, a computer simulation is only as accurate as the data it uses. You could show that Richard M. Nixon shot John F. Kennedy while being given a piggy–back ride by Elvis A. Presley, if you used a sufficiently creative set of data. Pat Speer and, in video format, Robert Harris criticise Myers’s approach.
- Oswald’s Mother is an occasional series of articles by George Bailey.
- JFK Countercoup is an occasional series of articles by Bill Kelly.
- Wikipedia can be a useful source of information, but the website should not be trusted for anything controversial. Several of the Wikipedia entries related to the JFK assassination are superficial and uncritical. More worryingly, at least one entry appears to be under the control of one person, and so is unlikely to be substantially improved. See http://www.ctka.net/2010/wiki.html for the weaknesses of this entry and of Wikipedia in general. Wikipedia’s Byzantine editing system ensures that pages dealing with both controversial and uncontroversial topics can be hijacked by cliques or interested parties.
- John McAdams mounts a rearguard action in defence of the lone–nut explanation; his site is good at debunking poorly–argued conspiracy theories, but not so good at questioning the official account.
The Medical Evidence

The medical evidence is the single most complex aspect of the JFK assassination, and is the source of many of the contradictions and ambiguities that have allowed the case to drag on for so long.

Most of these contradictions and ambiguities are due to the nature of the autopsy, which appears at first sight to have been carried out to a scandalous level of incompetence. The most fundamental aspects of the medical evidence are the nature, size and location of President Kennedy’s wounds, none of which were documented to a reasonable degree of precision.

Problems with the Medical Evidence

The doctors who treated President Kennedy in Dallas, and the pathologists who conducted the autopsy at Bethesda, were interviewed many times over the years by a variety of people with a variety of agendas. Inevitably, inconsistencies and contradictions arose in their testimony.

There were problems also with the surviving photographic record of the autopsy:

- The photographs, or at least those that are publicly available, fail to provide clear and unambiguous views of any of Kennedy’s wounds. In particular, they do not allow a definitive description of the wounds to the head.
- The photographs do not match the recollections of the photographers and the pathologists. Both groups of participants recalled injuries that are not depicted in the existing photographs, and remembered ordering or taking photographs that appear no longer to exist.

The photographic record is not the only element of the autopsy that has attracted suspicions of foul play:

- One of the pathologists admitted under oath that he and his colleagues were ordered not to perform a dissection of the back and throat wounds, an elementary procedure that would have confirmed or denied the possibility of both wounds having been caused by one bullet. See Appendix L, ‘Pierre Finck: Dissecting JFK’s Wounds,’ pp.110ff below.
- The autopsy report was rewritten after Oswald’s murder, when it became clear that the contents of the report would not be questioned in court. Some of the contemporaneous notes upon which the revised report depends no longer exist.

Interpreting the Medical Evidence

The most comprehensive and readable overviews of the medical evidence can be found in two articles in James Fetzer, ed., Murder in Dealey Plaza: What We Know Now That We Didn’t Know Then About The Death of JFK (Catfeet Press, 2000; ISBN 0-8126-9422-8):

- Gary L. Aguilar, ‘The Converging Medical Case for Conspiracy in the Death of JFK’ (pp.175–217);
- David W. Mantik, ‘Paradoxes of the JFK Assassination: The Medical Evidence Decoded’ (pp.219–297).

Fetzer’s collection includes some unreliable material, especially concerning the authenticity of the Zapruder film, but these two articles are credible and informative.


The most complete online resource is Gary Aguilar and Kathy Cunningham, ‘How Five Investigations into JFK’s Medical/Autopsy Evidence Got it Wrong’ at history–matters.com.

Medical Controversy: JFK’s Head Wound

One of the medical paradoxes is the apparent contrast between the accounts of the doctors in Dallas and those at the autopsy. The House Select Committee on Assassinations stated that, of the 26 witnesses at the autopsy who had given evidence, none agreed with the Dallas consensus of a large wound situated toward the back of President Kennedy’s head, which implied a shot from the front.

This discrepancy gave rise to one of the most implausible and, perhaps not coincidentally, heavily-
publicised pro–conspiracy books: David Lifton, *Best Evidence: Disguise and Deception in the Assassination of John F. Kennedy* (Macmillan, 1981; 0-88184-438-1). Lifton’s over–imaginative solution was that the president’s body had been surgically altered between its departure from Dallas and its arrival at Bethesda Naval Hospital, Maryland, for the autopsy.

The autopsy witnesses’ testimony had been classified by the HSCA in 1978. When the evidence was finally released to the public, 30 years after the assassination, it turned out that:

- rather than 26 autopsy witnesses testifying against the wound at the rear of the head, the HSCA had taken evidence from only 12;
- those 12 witnesses at the autopsy had actually agreed with the earliest, incorrupt evidence of the witnesses in Dallas: the wound was located toward the back of the head.

The HSCA had simply lied, and the theory of bodily alteration was unnecessary.

Roger Feinman, *Between the Signal and the Noise* (available in HTML, EPUB and PDF formats), argues against Lifton; it is sometimes petty, but includes useful background information. Among Feinman’s objections to Lifton’s theories:

- The apparent discrepancies between the medical witnesses at Parkland and at Bethesda can be explained without having to assume foul play.
- Lifton proposes that all the shots were fired from the front. The only wound that was caused by a bullet whose trajectory is beyond dispute was the wound to Governor Connally’s torso: a bullet entered his back and came out of his chest. Lifton fails to deal with this fundamental contradiction.
- The body was supposedly altered to fool the pathologists into believing that all the shots came from behind, but there is good evidence that the pathologists were already aware that Kennedy’s throat wound was the result of a shot from in front.
- The wound in Kennedy’s back was supposedly constructed to implicate Oswald, but its location exonerates him.
- Feinman takes Lifton’s notion that the alteration of the body was an integral part of the plot, and points out the enormous extra complexity and potential for disaster that the notion entails. For example, rather than hiring snipers to shoot President Kennedy only from in front, and hiring surgeons to construct wounds in his back and head to mimic shots from behind, and hiring teams to kidnap the corpse and transport it to and from some unnamed location, all of which Lifton proposes, why not simply hire a sniper to shoot him from behind in the first place?

Lifton was not the first or the last writer to suggest that Kennedy’s body had been tampered with. Feinman points out that this type of thinking causes more harm than good:

- the invention of implausible and unnecessary conspiracies to resolve conflicts in the evidence does not bring an explanation for the assassination any closer;
- and propagandists for the lone–nut invention can point to the relative credibility of their beliefs when compared to the absurd theories of those such as Lifton, who also claims that the Zapruder film is a forgery.
The Zapruder Film: Genuine or Fake?

The Zapruder film, together with most of the other surviving video material, can be found online. The Mary Ferrell Foundation website lists the films that were taken in Dealey Plaza, and gives links to their locations on YouTube. Individual frames of the Zapruder film can be examined at http://www.assassinationresearch.com/zfilm/.

David Wrone, The Zapruder Film: Reframing JFK’s Assassination (University Press of Kansas, 2003; ISBN 0–7006–1291–2), provides a detailed history of the famous home movie. Wrone’s book is let down slightly by the author’s speculations about the fine details of the assassination. This is more than made up for, however, by Wrone’s strong refutation of the seriously improbable hypothesis that the Zapruder film has been substantially altered to cover up evidence of conspiracy.

Several pieces of documentary evidence in the Kennedy assassination appear to have been altered or forged, but there is currently no good reason to suppose that the Zapruder film is one of them:

- Its chain of possession is well documented, and provides no opportunity for conspirators to have gained access to the film before it had been copied and those copies had been widely distributed.
- There are no obvious contradictions between the Zapruder film and the rest of the photographic evidence, including the three other home movies that depict the shooting. Any photograph or film could have contained clear evidence that the Zapruder film had been altered, but no unambiguous examples of inconsistencies have yet been demonstrated. Several have been proposed, but there are straightforward explanations for all of them: they are either the by-products of poor-quality photographic reproductions, or the result of wishful thinking. Hundreds of photographs and several home movies recorded various aspects of the motorcade’s progress through Dealey Plaza. They form a consistent body of evidence.
- It would not have been possible to be certain that all such contradictions had been eliminated. Conspirators did not have access to the whole of the photographic evidence, and thus could not have known whether any alterations to the Zapruder film were at risk of being revealed. Nor could they have known how many photographs and other movies would consequently have needed to be altered to make them consistent with the forged Zapruder film. The investigating authorities made little effort to identify photographers or to obtain photographs and movies, many of which were not made public until long after the assassination. Some images may still remain hidden, such as those from an unidentified woman who appears to have been pointing a still or movie camera directly at President Kennedy as he was shot in the head, just a few yards in front of her.
- Altering the film would have been a very inefficient way of concealing the evidence contained within it. The Zapruder film was one of the few items of photographic material that came to the attention of the authorities very soon after the assassination. Rather than take on the almost impossible task of altering the film, it would have been far easier simply to seize the film and make it disappear.
- Finally, the most powerful and obvious point: the Zapruder film can hardly have been altered to cover up evidence of conspiracy, given that it contains almost irrefutable evidence of conspiracy. When combined with certain uncontroversial facts, the Zapruder film provides explicit disproof of the single–bullet theory: Kennedy’s reaction to his throat wound occurs earlier than Connally’s reaction to his back wound, which in turn occurs earlier than Connally’s wrist wound. Famously, the film reveals Kennedy’s sharp back–and–to–the–left movement in reaction to what can only plausibly be interpreted as a shot from in front. If anyone did manage to alter the Zapruder film, they didn’t make a very good job of it.

As well as claims of discrepancies between the Zapruder film and the rest of the photographic evidence, other allegations have been made.

One of the more far–fetched arguments for alteration is the discrepancy between the existing Zapruder film and an alternative version, which a handful of assassination researchers claim to have seen. This ‘other’ film is supposed to contain several elements that are not present on the familiar version.

It is difficult to imagine how such a film could be accessible only to a small number of well–connected enthusiasts. The film would surely either be locked away, well out of the reach of the curious, or it would be in public circulation. As with claims of sightings of UFOs and the Loch Ness monster, we might reasonably expect conclusive physical evidence to exist. The absence of such evidence to support these claims renders them invalid.

The most charitable explanation is that what the researchers saw was one or more of the many reconstructions that were filmed either by official investigators or by commercial projects such as Oliver 52
Stone's movie, *JFK*.

The strongest evidence for alteration is the discrepancy between:

- the many eye-witnesses who testified that the presidential limousine stopped on Elm Street at around the time of the fatal head shot,
- and the Zapruder film, which shows the car slowing down but not stopping.

The purpose of this particular alteration is supposed to be to cover up the complicity of the driver, a Secret Service agent.

As with all cases of apparent discrepancies between physical evidence and eye-witness evidence, a more reasonable explanation is that the witnesses were simply mistaken. This is especially so in this case, given:

- the serious practical difficulties any forgers would have faced,
- the film's consistency with the rest of the photographic evidence,
- the fact that the car was moving directly away from most of the witnesses rather than past them, thereby making its speed more difficult to judge,
- and the fact that the car was closely followed by the Secret Service car, which partially obscured it from most of the spectators.

Other aspects of the case show that large numbers of witnesses can indeed be mistaken. Many witnesses claimed to have heard only one, two or three shots, which cannot be true if the assassination was a conspiracy; and many claimed to have heard or seen shots from the grassy knoll, which cannot be true if the assassination was not a conspiracy. At least one group must be wrong.

James Fetzer, ed., *The Great Zapruder Film Hoax: Deceit and Deception in the Death of JFK* (Catfeet Press, 2003; ISBN 0–8126–9547–X), puts forward the case for forgery. Much of the evidence and argument in the book is laughably weak, incongruously so given that Fetzer is a former professor of philosophy. The book's credibility is not helped by the sad fact that one of its contributors appears to believe that the moon landings were faked. This sort of association of beliefs is liable to contaminate public trust in rational critical thinking about the JFK assassination.

The Zapruder film alteration hypothesis is also refuted at [http://www.jfk-info.com/moot1.htm](http://www.jfk-info.com/moot1.htm) and Josiah Thomson, ‘Bedrock Evidence in the Kennedy Assassination,’ at maryferrell.org (and the moon landings nonsense is refuted at [Bad Astronomy](http://www.jfk-info.com/moot1.htm) and [UK Sceptics](http://www.jfk-info.com/moot1.htm)).

Theories about the forgery of the Zapruder film range from:

- the just-about-plausible, though as yet unsubstantiated, idea that a patch was applied to a tiny area on a handful of frames in order to conceal damage to the back of President Kennedy's head;
- to the outrageously implausible idea that the entire film was recreated from scratch.

Once it is acknowledged that a conspiracy took place, and that some evidence had been faked, such as the planting of the rifle and the bullet shells on the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository, it can be tempting to suppose that any of the physical evidence might have been faked. But it is still necessary to demonstrate how a particular instance of deception might plausibly have been achieved.

For example, the planting of the evidence on the sixth floor is not in itself implausible:

- the TSBD was occupied by several companies, not all of whose employees would have been able to identify strangers within the building;
- many of the employees were not inside the building at the time of the assassination;
- it was common for delivery drivers, customers, and other non-employees to enter and leave the TSBD without hindrance;
- and the building had several rear entrances that were unlocked and unguarded.

As far as the medical evidence is concerned, the alteration of some of the autopsy photographs is not implausible, since any conspirators would have controlled all of the relevant photographic evidence, and would have had ample time in which to perform any alterations.

On the other hand, the physical alteration of either the Zapruder film or Kennedy's corpse would have had to have been done within an infeasibly short period of time, and with incomplete access to all the information that would have been needed to avoid detection in the future.

The current state of the evidence does not justify the conclusion that the Zapruder film is a forgery. Of course, new evidence may emerge that will provide such justification. At the moment, however, that conclusion is the result of irrational thinking.

It is irrational to invent a conspiracy to explain every apparent discrepancy in the evidence. Not every such discrepancy even requires a specific explanation. Eye-witnesses can be mistaken, technical data can be incompetently assembled and analysed, and photographs can display unexpected visual effects. In any complex set of evidence, there are likely to be elements that do not match.
The desire to explain everything, whether in order to find an elusive smoking gun or to stake one's claim to
a particular area of study, is a harmful characteristic of much JFK assassination research. It has led to cult-
like behaviour, in which anyone who fails to agree with every aspect of a particular explanation is damned
as a heretic.

‘Conspiracy theorist,’ when used as a derogatory term, usually refers to someone for whom a conspiracy is
the default explanation for events, or at least someone who uses conspiratorial explanations for events
when the evidence does not justify it. That definition applies to those who, on the current state of the
evidence, conclude that the Zapruder film was forged.

As a general rule, conspiracies very rarely happen. In some types of event, such as the assassinations of
political figures, conspiracies are not uncommon. In the case of President Kennedy's assassination, it is
almost certain that a conspiracy of some sort took place.

The important question is to define the extent of that conspiracy. The fewer people and institutions that
are required to be involved in a conspiracy, the more credible that conspiracy theory is. In the absence of
irrefutable evidence in their favour, theories that propose the alteration of the Zapruder film, or of the
president's corpse, expand the JFK conspiracy beyond reasonable limits.

Such theories are actively harmful in several ways:

- they divert effort from areas that may produce genuine results;
- they oblige rational critics of the official explanation to deal with two sets of arguments: the lone-
  nut arguments and the paranoid theorists' arguments;
- and they are useful to the print and broadcast media, which defend established institutions by
  claiming that the lone–nut explanation is more reasonable than the alternative: “OK, so there are
  lots of holes in the case against Oswald, but you should see some of the stuff those guys are saying.”

The last of these may be the most serious problem. The media gives little coverage to rational criticism of
the official explanation, and tends to portray the JFK assassination debate as a simple conflict between:

- the lone–assassin hypothesis
- and outrageously impractical, almost paranoid conspiracy theories.

The media recognises that any reasonable alternative to the lone–nut hypothesis implies criticism of
established political institutions. Consequently, it often treats the assassination in much the same way as
it treats other forms of political dissent. Just as the media's coverage of demonstrations tends to
concentrate on the handful of idiots or agents provocateurs who throw bricks through windows, so
criticism of the Oswald–did–it theory is often represented by the lunatic fringe. In both cases, little
publicity is given to rational, critical ideas.

The similarity in each case extends to the target audience. The media's misrepresentation of the JFK
assassination is not aimed primarily at:

- those who are interested in the subject and are predisposed to think critically; such people will
  hardly be prevented from discovering the large amount of informed criticism that is widely available;
- nor at those who are inclined to identify with established authority; they are unlikely to look for
  critical ideas, or be persuaded by any they stumble upon;
- nor at that relatively small number of people who are liable to be taken in by the more unbelievable
  conspiracy theories.

Instead, the media's message is mostly aimed at rational people who are aware that there is a controversy
about the facts of President Kennedy's assassination, but who have no particular interest in the
assassination itself. By emphasising the less credible conspiracy theories, the media tries to discourage a
sizeable part of the general public from exploring the subject.
Fiction, Propaganda and the Media

The *raison d'être* of the *Warren Report* was to enable an uncritical news media to "convince the public that Oswald is the real assassin" (*HSCA Report*, appendix vol. 3, p. 472). The unreliability of much of the evidence in the case, as well as an institutional need to impose one particular interpretation of the evidence, has allowed the JFK assassination to remain the subject of fiction and propaganda.

**Fiction and Drama**

Don DeLillo, *Libra* (available from [Amazon](#)), from one of the finest literary stylists around, has a dénouement that comes as a surprise, not least for the main character.

Norman Mailer, *Oswald's Tale* (available from [Amazon](#)), is a very long fictionalised biography of Lee Oswald. It is based on some dubious sources, so the art is better than the science.

Stephen King, *11.22.63* (published as *11/22/63* in the US), uses an established fictional device by sending its invented hero, Jake Epping, back in time to interact with a real historical event. King's novel is almost as long as Mailer's, but can probably be read in half the time.

Oliver Stone, director, *JFK* (Warner Brothers, 1991; available from [Amazon](#)), was probably the pivotal factor in the rejuvenation of public interest in the assassination, and in the consequent governmental activity that resulted in the establishment of the Assassination Records Review Board. Although very slick and professionally made, the film attracted a wide range of criticism:

- Those with a stake in promoting the lone–nut interpretation seized on the film's reliance upon questionable sources and the way it obscured the distinction between contemporary footage and reconstructions.
- More knowledgeable audiences questioned the film's use of a relatively trivial aspect of the case, the investigation by Jim Garrison, as the main structural device. Given the economics of the mass media and popular film–making, however, a cliché Hollywood storyline was probably the only practical way to get critical information onto a large number of screens.
- In the eyes of some viewers, the director made a tactical error in placing too much dramatic weight on one speculative theory about the nature of the conspiracy, and too little on the fact of Oswald's innocence. This allowed the print and broadcast media to misrepresent the issue as a simple choice between Stone's theory and the lone–nut theory.

**The Media Fight Back**

The notion that Lee Harvey Oswald had anything to do with the assassination is very much a minority point of view among those with any appreciable knowledge of the subject. It is still, however, the default position in newspaper and television coverage.

Media institutions surely recognise that any serious questioning of the official lone–nut explanation is an attack on the institutions which devised and originally promoted that explanation. Despite its deficiencies, the film *JFK* was such an attack.

The press campaign against *JFK* began even before filming had finished, when a draft version of the script was obtained in dubious circumstances. The most pertinent and revealing criticism was aimed not at the film itself but at the Hollywood system for its failure on this occasion to keep unwelcome ideas hidden. For a brief overview of the print media's attitude to *JFK*, see two articles by writers at opposite ends of the political spectrum: Sam Smith, 'Why They Hate Oliver Stone,' *Progressive Review*, February 1992, and Murray Rothbard, *The JFK Flap*, *The Rockwell-Rothbard Report*, May 1992.

With the *Warren Report* widely recognised to be the discredited product of a dishonest process, it was necessary to find a new holy book to which the media priesthood could defer. Gerald Posner, *Case Closed: Lee Harvey Oswald and the Assassination of JFK* (Random House, 1993; ISBN 0–4000–3462–0) filled the gap. The book was heavily promoted, and achieved an enormous amount of uncritical coverage. Reviews were generally entrusted to those who could be relied on not to delve too far into the subject.

As with the *Warren Report*, *Case Closed* received a serious beating from those with the motivation to look under the surface. For example:

- *Case Closed or Posner Exposed?* offers a wide range of critical reviews. Peter Dale Scott's review sums it up: "Posner often transmits without evaluation official statements that are now known to be false,
or chooses discredited but compliant witnesses who have already disowned earlier helpful stories that have been disproven. He even revives a wild allegation which the Warren Commission rejected, and reverses testimony to suggest its opposite.”

- David Wrone, ‘Review of Gerald Posner, Case Closed’, Journal of Southern History, 6 (February 1995), pp.186–88. See also Wrone’s The Zapruder Film: Reframing JFK’s Assassination, in which he offers more criticism of Case Closed and describes it, not without reason, as “one of the most error–ridden works ever published on the assassination.” (p.177)

- John Newman, ‘Case Closed Doesn’t Close the Oswald File’, Baltimore Sun, 22 September 1993, was one of the few critical reviews to appear in the corporate media.

- Harold Weisberg, Case Open: The Omissions, Distortions and Falsehoods of Case Closed (Carroll and Graf, 1994; ISBN 0–7867–0098–X). Weisberg provided Gerald Posner with access to his huge collection of JFK assassination files. He goes into details about Posner’s methods, and suggests that Case Closed was not entirely Posner’s own work. Although Weisberg’s book is informative, his prose style is often clumsy and occasionally almost unreadable. For example: “Posner’s parenthetical explanation of hardened jackets on military ammunition, not the only one he gives, those he does give not being consistent either with each other or with the provisions of that Geneva international agreement on this that he does not mention, if he knows about it, that it is to ‘increase its penetration’ is consistent with the need of Posner’s fabrication.” (pp.150–1) Weisberg made a huge contribution to research on the JFK assassination, but the size of his audience was severely limited by the lack of editorial restraint over his writing style. An expanded version of Case Open, entitled Hoax, is available online in PDF at the Harold Weisberg Archive at Hood College, along with Weisberg’s 1000-page unpublished and probably unpublishable manuscript, Inside the Assassination Industry, which criticises Posner along with several other well-known writers on the assassination, including Mark Lane, Harrison Livingstone, and David Lifton.

- Martin Cannon, ‘Compromised Reporting’, Lobster, 28 (December 1994), discusses Posner’s ethics, accusing him of misquoting witnesses and even inventing interviews.

The final nail in the coffin of Gerald Posner’s credibility was probably the repeated accusations of plagiarism made against him. See, for example, ‘Posner Plagiarizes Again,’ Miami New Times and ‘More Posner Plagiarism,’ Slate.

Vincent Bugliosi, Reclaiming History (W.W. Norton, 2007; ISBN 0–393–04525–0), acknowledged some of the problems with Posner’s book, and endeavoured to replace it as the definitive lone–nut account. One reviewer, Gary Aguilar, whom Bugliosi consulted when writing his book, calls Reclaiming History “an historic and important contribution. It is valuable … as a reference for the myriad facts in the case and for debunking some of the pro–conspiracy codswallop that has not elsewhere already been debunked.” But Aguilar is less enthusiastic about Bugliosi’s “arrogant condescension … [his] conclusions–driven narrative … his errors of fact and interpretation and … his snarky, self–congratulatory tone.”

Reclaiming History was let down also by its length: it comprises one printed volume of 1500 pages and a CD–ROM containing a further 1000 pages. Unsurprisingly, it appears to have sold poorly, and is currently out of print. Part of the book has since been published as Four Days in November (ISBN 0–393–33215–2; also available as an ebook). There is a long and extremely informative review of Bugliosi’s Reclaiming History by James DiEugenio that has occasionally appeared on the www.ctka.net site, and a more concise one by Gaeton Fonzi.

Bonar Menninger, Mortal Error: The Shot That Killed JFK (St. Martin’s Press, 1992; ISBN 0–312–08074–3; available in abridged form as an audio book), offers the most plausible non–conspiratorial account of the assassination. Menninger is a journalist rather than a researcher. He reports the theory of a ballistics expert, Howard Donahue, that President Kennedy was killed accidentally by a Secret Service agent.

Donahue seized on the fact that Kennedy’s head wound was caused by a soft–nosed bullet, a type designed to break into fragments on impact, while the non–fatal wounds were caused by metal–jacketed bullets, which were designed to remain intact on impact. All of the bullet shells discovered on the sixth floor were part of the same batch, and must have contained the same type of bullet, so the fatal shot must have come from a different source. Donahue discovered a photograph, taken a few seconds after the assassination, which shows an automatic rifle being held aloft by one of the Secret Service agents in the car behind Kennedy. That type of rifle was able to fire the correct type of bullet. Ergo, as Menninger would put it, the agent shot Kennedy.

The theory fails for many reasons, not least that:

- of the dozens of nearby witnesses, not one saw or heard the agent fire his gun;
- and, more conclusively, the home movie by Charles Bronson shows that the agent’s gun did not have unobstructed access to Kennedy at the moment of the fatal shot.

The Secret Service agent, George Hickey, applied to sue Menninger and the book’s publishers for libel, claiming that publication went ahead even though Menninger, Donahue and their publisher had been
shown the Bronson film and were aware that it invalidated their theory. Hickey was reported to have settled for a payment out of court.

Although the publishers were no doubt motivated more by the prospect of sales than by a concern with accuracy, it is the behaviour of the media that is noteworthy. As with Case Closed and Reclaiming History, reviews of Mortal Error were mostly entrusted to writers whose knowledge of the case was so weak that they were not aware that Charles Bronson’s film contradicted the whole premise of the book.

To win acceptance by the media in 1964, the Warren Report only needed to clear a very low hurdle. Three decades later, the lone–nut baton had been handed to Case Closed. That book passed the same easy test, but is now too badly hamstrung to do so again.

The print and broadcast media’s overwhelmingly one–sided depiction of the Kennedy assassination has reflected nothing more sinister than its standard identification with established power. Five decades after the event, however, the killing of President Kennedy is perhaps no longer considered to be part of modern history, and no longer subject to all the consequent restrictions on expression. It will be interesting to see how the media cope with the fiftieth anniversary in 2013.

**Media Coverage of the JFK Assassination**

The corporate media’s largely uncritical coverage of the Kennedy assassination has attracted its own rather more critical coverage:

- *The Media and the Kennedy Assassination: the Social Construction of Reality*, a dissertation by Ross Ralston, is discussed here, a location which links to a download in PDF format.
Appendix A
Grassy Knoll Witnesses

Evidence of Shots from the Front

About 40 witnesses to the assassination of President Kennedy claimed either to have heard gunshots from the infamous grassy knoll in the northwest corner of Dealey Plaza, or to have seen smoke or smelled gunpowder in that area.

Interviewing the Dealey Plaza Witnesses

Several of these witnesses were interviewed by newspaper, radio and television reporters immediately after the assassination. The interviews were influential in generating doubt about the lone–gunman theory. Many other interviews have been carried out in the years since the assassination, almost all of them by private researchers.

Examination of photographs and home movies suggests that there were perhaps as many as 600 people in Dealey Plaza at the time of the assassination. Official interviews or statements exist for around 200 of these witnesses. Because the Warren Commission did no investigation of its own, almost all of the witnesses who testified before the Commission were chosen from those who had already made official statements. The other 400 or so were never interviewed officially at all. Few of these missing witnesses were identified, even when the authorities had been informed of their existence (Warren Commission Hearings, vol.15, pp.525f).

In many cases, the witnesses appear not to have been asked about the origin of the shots. Of those who were asked, probably a small majority claimed that the shots came from the general direction of the Texas School Book Depository. A handful of people claimed to have heard shots from both directions. Many had no opinion.

Status of the Dealey Plaza Witness Evidence

Most of the evidence quoted below falls into four categories:

- contemporaneous reports by journalists who were in Dealey Plaza;
- statements to the police or sheriff’s deputies within hours of the assassination;
- statements to the FBI, mostly within a few days of the assassination;
- and interviews by the Warren Commission’s staff attorneys several months after the assassination.

None of the official evidence became publicly available until the Warren Commission’s Hearings and Exhibits were issued in November 1964. Some of it was not published at all, but was placed in the National Archives, and was only discovered at a later date. Access to the evidence was not helped by the fact that the witnesses’ statements and testimony were scattered throughout many of the 26 volumes of the Hearings and Exhibits, none of which contained an index.

There are some curiosities within the evidence:

- Emmett Hudson, the only man identified out of the three standing on the steps leading up to the fence on the grassy knoll, claimed that all the shots came from the general direction of the TSBD (Warren Commission Hearings, vol.7, p.560 and p.564; his earliest statements, however, are ambiguous).
- Buell Wesley Frazier, Billy Lovelady, and Otis Williams, three men who were standing on the front steps of the TSBD, directly underneath the supposed sniper’s nest, claimed that all the shots came from the general direction of the knoll.
- Charles Brehm, who had an excellent view of the assassination, either changed his mind or was misquoted. He was reported in the Dallas Times Herald on the evening of 22 November as thinking that “the shots came from in front of or beside the President.” The FBI two days later stated that “it seemed quite apparent to him that the shots came from one or two buildings back at the corner of Elm and Houston Streets” (Warren Commission Hearings, vol.22, p.837).
- Arnold Rowland thought the shots had come from the knoll, despite already having seen a man in the southwest window of the sixth floor of the TSBD, holding a gun (Warren Commission Hearings, vol.2, pp.171–3).
- Kenneth O’Donnell and David Powers nominated the TSBD in their testimony, but believed in private that shots had come from the knoll.
Dealey Plaza Witnesses

The most complete online record of witnesses in Dealey Plaza is that compiled by Stewart Galanor. It can be found at: [http://www.history-matters.com/analysis/witness/index.htm](http://www.history-matters.com/analysis/witness/index.htm).

Several researchers have tried to determine how many witnesses declared that shots came from the general direction of the knoll, or the TSBD, or both directions, or neither. Because of the frequent imprecision both of the witnesses’ answers and the questions they were asked, it was easy for researchers to impose their own preferences on the figures. Consequently, the totals vary widely. For details, see:

- Harold Feldman, ‘Fifty–One Witnesses,’ *Minority of One, March 1965* (Knoll 51, TSBD 32);
- *HSCA Report, appendix vol.2, p.122* (Knoll 20, TSBD 48);
- Stewart Galanor, *Cover–Up*, Kestrel Books, 1998 (Knoll 52, TSBD 48);
- John McAdams, [http://mcadams.posc.mu.edu/shots.htm](http://mcadams.posc.mu.edu/shots.htm) (Knoll 34, TSBD 56).

The Layout of Dealey Plaza

For online images and maps of Dealey Plaza, see the [Mary Ferrell Foundation website](http://www maryferrell.org). A plan of Dealey Plaza with the locations of known witnesses can be found in Josiah Thompson, *op.cit.*, pp.252f.

Victoria Adams

Victoria Adams was watching the motorcade from a window on the fourth floor of the Texas School Book Depository:

> She believed the sound came from toward the right of the building, rather than from the left and above as it must have been according to subsequent information disseminated by the news services.


> It seemed as if it came from the right below rather than from the left above.

(*Warren Commission Hearings, vol.6, p.388, 7 April 1964*)

Danny Garcia Arce

Danny Arce, a colleague of Lee Oswald, was on the north side of Elm Street, near the TSBD:

> To the best of my knowledge there were three shots and they came from the direction of the railroad tracks near the parking lot at the west end of the Depository Building.


> Mr Ball: Where did you make out the direction of the sound?

> Mr Arce: Yeah, I thought they came from the railroad tracks to the west of the Texas School Book Depository.

> Mr Ball: Now, it sounded to you that the shots came from what direction?

> Mr Arce: From the tracks on the west deal.

> Mr Ball: Did you look back at the building?

> Mr Arce: No, I didn't think they came from there. I just looked directly to the railroad tracks and all the people started running up there and I just ran along with them.

(*Warren Commission Hearings, vol.6, pp.365f, 7 April 1964*)

Virginia Baker (née Rackley)

Virginia Rackley, who got married shortly after the assassination, was standing on the north side of Elm Street close to the main entrance to the TSBD:

> It sounded as though these sounds were coming from the direction of the Triple Underpass, and looking in that direction after the first shot she saw something bounce from the roadway in front of the Presidential automobile and now presumes it was a bullet bouncing off the pavement. ...
Rackley stated that she did not look up at the Texas School Book Depository building since she did not think that the sounds were coming from that building.

(Warren Commission Document 5, pp.66f, 24 November 1963)

Mr Liebeler: Did you have any idea where they [the shots] were coming from?

Mrs Baker: Well, the way it sounded — it sounded like it was coming from — there was a railroad track that runs behind the building — there directly behind the building and around, so I guess it would be by the underpass, the triple underpass, and there is a railroad track that runs back out there.

... Mr Liebeler: And you say there are some railroad tracks back in there; is that right?

Mrs Baker: Yes.

Mr Liebeler: Immediately behind Dealey Plaza away from Elm Street?

Mrs Baker: Yes.

Mr Liebeler: And is that where you thought the shots came from?

Mrs Baker: Yes.

(Warren Commission Hearings, vol.7, p.510, 22 March 1964)

Jane Berry

Jane Berry was standing on the north side of Elm Street a few yards west of the TSBD:

Everyone was very excited and no one seemed to know where the shot had come from. It sounded as if it had been fired from a position west of where she was standing.


Charles Brehm

Charles Brehm was standing with his wife and young son on the south side of Elm Street, just a few yards from President Kennedy at the moment of the fatal shot:

The witness Brehm was shaking uncontrollably as he further described the shooting. “The first shot must not have been too solid, because he just slumped. Then on the second shot he seemed to fall back.”

Brehm seemed to think the shots came from in front of or beside the President. He explained the President did not slump forward as he would have after being shot from the rear. The book depository building stands in the rear of the President’s location at the time of the shooting.

(Dallas Times Herald, 22 November 1963, p.1)

Ochus Campbell

Ochus Campbell, the vice–president of the Texas School Book Depository Company, was standing on the north side of Elm Street, about 30 feet from the front entrance to the TSBD:

Campbell says he ran toward a grassy knoll to the west of the building, where he thought the sniper had hidden.

(Dallas Morning News, 23 November 1963)

Mr. CAMPBELL advised he had viewed the Presidential Motorcade and subsequently heard the shots being fired from a point which he thought was near the railroad tracks located over the viaduct on Elm Street.


I heard shots being fired from a point which I thought was near the railroad tracks located over the viaduct on Elm street. I ... had no occasion to look back at the Texas School Book Depository building as I thought the shots had come from the west.

(Warren Commission Hearings, vol.22, p.638, 19 March 1964)

Faye Chism

Faye and John Chism were standing close to the Stemmons Freeway sign on the north side of Elm Street:
It came from what I thought was behind us.

**John Chism**

I looked behind me, to see whether it was a fireworks display or something. And then I saw a lot of people running for cover, behind the embankment there back up on the grass.

On hearing the second shot he definitely knew the first was not a firecracker and was of the opinion the shots came from behind him.
(Warren Commission Hearings, vol.24, p.525, 18 December 1963)

**Harold Elkins**

Elkins was standing close to the crossroads at Main Street and Houston Street:

I immediately ran to the area from which it sounded like the shots had been fired. This is an area between the railroads and the Texas School Book Depository which is east of the railroads.
(Warren Commission Hearings, vol.19, p.540, 26 November 1964)

**Ronald Fischer**

Fischer was standing on the southwest corner of the crossroads at Houston Street and Elm Street, just opposite the TSBD:

*Mr Belin*: Where did the shots appear to be coming from?

*Mr Fischer*: They appeared to be coming from just west of the School Book Depository Building. There were some railroad tracks and there were some railroad cars back in there.

*Mr Belin*: And they appeared to be coming from those railroad cars?

*Mr Fischer*: Well, that area somewhere.
(Warren Commission Hearings, vol.6, p.195, 1 April 1964)

**Buell Wesley Frazier**

Frazier, who had driven Oswald to work that morning, was standing on the front steps of the TSBD:

*Mr Ball*: Now, then, did you have any impression at that time as to the direction from which the sound came?

*Mr Frazier*: Well to be frank with you I thought it come from down there, you know, where that underpass is. There is a series, quite a few number of them railroad tracks running together and from where I was standing it sounded like it was coming from down the railroad tracks there.

**Dorothy Garner**

Garner was watching the motorcade from a fourth-floor window of the TSBD:

I thought at the time the shots or reports came from a point to the west of the building.

**Jean Hill**

Jean Hill was standing on the south side of Elm Street, just a few yards from President Kennedy as he was shot in the head:

Mrs. Hill stated she heard from four to six shots in all and believes they came from a spot just west of the Texas School Book Depository Building.
(Warren Commission Hearings, vol.25, p.854, 13 March 1964)

*Mrs Hill*: I didn't realize that the shots were coming from the building. I frankly thought they were coming from the knoll.
Mr Specter: Why did you think they were coming from the knoll?

Mrs Hill: That was just my idea where they were coming from.

Mr Specter: Would you draw the knoll on the picture, where you mean by the knoll?

Mrs Hill: This area in front of the Book Depository — it’s right here.

Mr Specter: Just draw me a circle as to where you had a general impression the shots were coming from.

Mrs Hill: This is a hill and it was like they were coming from right in there. ...

Mr Specter: Now, did you have a conscious impression of the source of the first shot that you heard, that is, where it came from?

Mrs Hill: Well, evidently I didn't because the only conscious recollection I have of that ... I had always thought that they came from the knoll. ... As I said, I thought they were coming from the general direction of that knoll.

...

Mr Specter: You just had the general impression that shots were coming from the knoll?

Mrs Hill: Yes.  

(Warren Commission Hearings, vol.6, pp.212f, 24 March 1964)

S. M. Holland

Sam Holland was standing on the railway bridge known as the triple underpass, at the west end of Dealey Plaza:

When they got just about to the Arcade I heard what I thought for the moment was a fire cracker and he slumped over and I looked over toward the arcade and trees and saw a puff of smoke come from the trees and I heard three more shots after the first shot but that was the only puff of smoke I saw. ... But the puff of smoke I saw definitely came from behind the arcade through the trees.


HOLLAND stated that he looked toward the fence to his left to observe anyone that he might see running from this fence but saw no one.

The only unusual thing HOLLAND could recall was an approximate one and one-half to two foot diameter of what he believed was gray smoke which appeared to him to be coming from the trees which would have been on the right of the Presidential car but observed no one there or in the vicinity.

(Warren Commission Document 5, p.49, 24 November 1963)

Mr Holland: I counted four shots and about the same time all this was happening, and in this group of trees — [indicating].

Mr Stern: Now, you are indicating trees on the north side of Elm Street?

Mr Holland: These trees right along here [indicating].

Mr Stern: Let’s mark this Exhibit C and draw a circle around the trees you are referring to.

Mr Holland: Right in there. [Indicating.] ... And a puff of smoke came out about 6 or 8 feet above the ground right out from under those trees. And at just about this location from where I was standing you could see that puff of smoke, like someone had thrown a fire-cracker or something out, and that is just about the way it sounded. ... There were definitely four reports.

Mr Stern: You have no doubt about that?

Mr Holland: I have no doubt about it. I have no doubt about seeing that puff of smoke come out from under those trees either.

(Warren Commission Hearings, vol.6, pp.243f, 8 April 1964)

Ed Johnson

Ed Johnson, a reporter for the Fort Worth Star-Telegram, was in the press bus, a few car-lengths back in the motorcade, and described his experiences in the next day’s paper:

The shots snapped out in the brisk, clear noon air.

Some reporter said, “My God, what’s that? It must be shots.”
The caravan kept wheeling on, picking up speed.
Some of the White House reporters yelled for the bus driver to stop. He kept on going, heading toward the Stemmons Expressway.
Some of us saw little puffs of white smoke that seemed to hit the grassy area in the esplanade that divides Dallas' main downtown streets.

*(Fort Worth Star–Telegram, 23 November 1963, p.2)*

**Dolores Kounas**

Kounas was standing on the south side of Elm Street, opposite the TSBD:

It sounded as though these shots were coming from the Triple Underpass. ... She stated it did not sound like the shots were coming from that [TSBD] direction but rather from the Triple Underpass.


Although I was across the street from the Depository building and was looking in the direction of the building as the motorcade passed and following the shots, I did not look up at the building as I had thought the shots came from a westerly direction in the vicinity of the viaduct.


**Paul Landis**

Paul Landis was a Secret Service agent in the car immediately behind President Kennedy’s car:

My reaction at this time was that the [fatal] shot came from somewhere towards the front.


**Billy Lovelady**

Lovelady was standing on the front steps of the TSBD. A famous photograph by James Altgens showed a man who resembled Lee Oswald in the doorway during the assassination; it is now generally agreed that the man was in fact Lovelady, not Oswald.

I heard several loud reports which I first thought to be firecrackers and which appeared to me to be in the direction of Elm Street viaduct just ahead of the Motorcade. I did not at any time believe the shots had come from the Texas School Book Depository.

*(Warren Commission Hearings, vol.22, p.662, 19 March 1964)*

Mr Ball: Where was the direction of the sound?

Mr Lovelady: Right there around that concrete little deal on that knoll.

Mr Ball: That’s where it sounded to you?

Mr Lovelady: Yes, sir; to my right. ...

Mr Ball: From the underpass area?

Mr Lovelady: Between the underpass and the building right on that knoll.

*(Warren Commission Hearings, vol.6, p.338, 7 April 1964)*

**Austin Miller**

Miller was standing with other railway employees on the triple underpass:

I saw something which I thought was smoke or steam coming from a group of trees north of Elm off the Railroad tracks.


Mr Belin: Where did the shots sound like they came from?

Mr Miller: Well, the way it sounded like, it came from the, I would say from right there in the car. Would be to my left, the way I was looking at him over toward that incline.

*(Warren Commission Hearings, vol.6, p.225, 8 April 1964)*
A.J. Millican

I was standing on the North side of Elm Street, about half way between Houston and the Underpass. ... I heard three shots come from up toward Houston and Elm right by the Book Depository Building, and then immediately I heard two more shots come from the Arcade between the Book Store and the Underpass, and then three more shots came from the same direction only sounded further back.

(Warren Commission Hearings, vol.19, p.486, no date, but filed with a group of similar statements given on 22 November 1963)

Luke Mooney

Mooney, a deputy sheriff, was standing on Main Street, on the edge of Dealey Plaza. He was one of the officers who found the rifle hidden under boxes on the sixth floor.

Mr Ball: Why did you go over to the railroad yard?

Mr Mooney: Well, that was — from the echo of the shots, we thought they came from that direction.


Thomas Murphy

Murphy was standing on the Triple Underpass.

MURPHY said in his opinion these shots came from a spot just west of the Texas School Book Depository Building.


Jean Newman

Jean Newman was standing on the north side of Elm Street, between the TSBD and the knoll:

The first impression I had was that the shots came from my right.


She stated that when she realized the reports were shots she immediately turned and looked up the hill to the North toward the parking lot but did not see anything.


William Newman

William Newman (no relation to Jean Newman) was also standing on the north side of Elm Street, a little further along toward the knoll:

I thought the shot had come from the garden directly behind me, that was on an elevation from where I was as I was right on the curb. I do not recall looking toward the Texas School Book Depository. I looked back in the vicinity [sic] of the garden.


Kenneth O’Donnell and David Powers

Two members of the White House staff, Kenneth O’Donnell and David Powers, were travelling in the Secret Service car immediately behind President Kennedy’s car. O’Donnell testified that the shots came from the rear (Warren Commission Hearings, vol.7, p.448). Powers agreed, but added that “I also had a fleeting impression that the noise appeared to come from the front in the area of the triple overpass” (ibid., p.473).

The politician, Tip O’Neill, claimed in his memoirs that both men had in fact heard shots from the grassy knoll:

I was never one of those people who had doubts or suspicions about the Warren Commission’s report on the president’s death. But five years after Jack died, I was having dinner with Kenny O’Donnell and a few other people at Jimmy’s Harborside Restaurant in Boston, and we got to talking about the assassination.

I was surprised to hear O’Donnell say that he was sure he had heard two shots that came from behind the fence.
“That’s not what you told the Warren Commission,” I said.

“You’re right,” he replied. “I told the FBI what I had heard, but they said it couldn't have happened that way and that I must have been imagining things. So I testified the way they wanted me to. I just didn't want to stir up any more pain and trouble for the family.”

“I can’t believe it,” I said. “I wouldn’t have done that in a million years. I would have told them the truth.”

“Tip, you have to understand. The family — everybody wanted this thing behind them.”

Dave Powers was with us at dinner that night, and his recollection of the shots was the same as O'Donnell's. Kenny O'Donnell is no longer alive, but during the writing of this book I checked with Dave Powers. As they say in the news business, he stands by his story.


Roberta Parker

Parker was standing directly opposite the main entrance to the TSBD:

The shot sounded to her as though it had come from a cement memorial building to the north of the Texas School Book Depository on Elm Street. She looked in that direction but saw nothing that she could relate to the shot. During this time, she heard two additional shots and in looking around, glanced at the Texas School Book Depository building which was directly across Elm from her.

(Warren Commission Document 205, p.504, 16 December 1963)

Frank Reilly

Reilly was standing with other railway workers on the railway bridge at the west end of Dealey Plaza:

He saw two cars turn on Elm toward the underpass and at this time heard three shots which he thought came from the trees west of the Texas School Book Depository.

(Warren Commission Document 205, p.29, 18 December 1963)

Mr Ball: What did you hear?

Mr Reilly: Three shots.

Mr Ball: Where did they seem to come from; what direction?

Mr Reilly: It seemed to me like they come out of the trees.

Mr Ball: What trees?

Mr Reilly: On the north side of Elm Street at the corner up there.

Mr Ball: On the north side of Elm — on what corner?

Mr Reilly: Well, where all those trees are — you've never been down there?

Mr Ball: Yes: I've been there, but you tell me — I want you to tell me because it has to go on the record here and it has to be in writing.

Mr Reilly: Well, it's at that park where all the shrubs is up there — it's to the north of Elm Street — up the slope.

(Warren Commission Hearings, vol.6, p.230, 8 April 1964)

Arnold Rowland

Arnold Rowland was standing on the east side of Houston Street, facing the TSBD:

Mr Specter: Did you have any impression or reaction as to the point of origin when you heard the first noise?

Mr Rowland: Well, I began looking, I didn't look at the building mainly, and as practically any of the police officers there will tell you, the echo effect was such that it sounded like it came from the railroad yards. That is where I looked, that is where all the policemen, everyone, converged on the railroads.

... Mr Specter: Now, as to the second shot, did you have any impression as to the point of origin or source?
Mr Rowland: The same point or very close to it.

Mr Specter: And how about the third shot?

Mr Rowland: Very close to the same position.

...  

Mr Specter: After the shots occurred, did you ever look back at the Texas School Book Depository Building?

Mr Rowland: No; I did not. In fact, I went over toward the scene of the railroad yards myself.

Mr Specter: Why did you not look back at the Texas School Book Depository Building in view of the fact that you had seen a man with a rifle up there earlier in the day?

Mr Rowland: I don't remember. It was mostly due to the confusion, and then the fact that it sounded like it came from this area "C", and that all the officers, enforcement officers, were converging on that area, and I just didn't pay any attention to it at that time.

(Warren Commission Hearings, vol.2, pp.180f, 10 March 1964)

Edgar Smith

Edgar Smith, a police officer, was standing on Houston Street, near the junction with Elm Street:

Mr Smith: I thought when it came to my mind that there were shots, and I was pretty sure there were when I saw his car because they were leaving in such a hurry, I thought they were coming from this area here, and I ran over there and back of it and, of course, there wasn't anything there.

Mr Liebeler: You thought the shot came from this little concrete structure up behind No. 7?

Mr Smith: Yes, sir.

Mr Liebeler: On Commission Exhibit 354?

Mr Smith: Yes.

Mr Liebeler: Toward the railroad tracks there?

Mr Smith: That's true.

(Warren Commission Hearings, vol.7, p.568, 24 July 1964)

Joe Marshall Smith

Like his fellow police officer, Edgar Smith, Joe Marshall Smith (no relation) was at the corner of Elm Street and Houston Street:

...The reporter calling stated he had interviewed Patrolman J. M. Smith who advised that he definitely distinguished the aroma of gunpowder near the underpass. ... He stated he did smell what he thought was gunpowder but stated this smell was in the parking lot by the TSBD Building and not by the underpass. He advised he never at any time went to the underpass and could not advise if there was the smell of gunpowder in the underpass.


I heard the shots and thought they were coming from bushes of the overpass.

(Warren Commission Hearings, vol.22, p.600, 16 July 1964)

Mr Liebeler: Did you have any basis for believing where the shots came from, or where to look for somebody, other than what the lady told you?

Mr Smith: No, sir; except that maybe it was a power of suggestion. But it sounded to me like they may have come from this vicinity here.

Mr Liebeler: Down around the — let's put a No. 5 there [on Commission Exhibit 354] at the corner here behind this concrete structure where the bushes were down toward the railroad tracks from the Texas School Book Depository Building.

Mr Smith: Yes.

Mr Liebeler: Now you say that you had the idea that the shots may have come from up in that area?

Mr Smith: Yes, sir; that is just what, well, like I say, the sound of it.

Forrest Sorrels
Forrest Sorrels, a Secret Service agent, was in the car immediately following the presidential car:

I looked towards the top of the terrace to my right as the sound of the shots seemed to come from that direction.

(Warren Commission Hearings, vol.21, p.548, 28 November 1963)

James Tague
James Tague, the third man wounded in Dealey Plaza, was standing close to the point where Commerce Street meets Main Street, by the triple underpass:

Mr Liebeler: Did you have any idea where these shots came from when you heard them ringing out?

Mr Tague: Yes; I thought they were coming from my left.

Mr Liebeler: Immediately to your left, or toward the back? Of course, now we have other evidence that would indicate that the shots did come from the Texas School Book Depository, but see if we can disregard that and determine just what you heard when the shots were fired in the first place.

Mr Tague: To recall everything is almost impossible. Just an impression is all I recall, is the fact that my first impression was that up by the, whatever you call the monument, or whatever it was — ...

Mr Liebeler: Your impression of where the shots came from was much the result of the activity near No. 7 [on Commission Exhibit 354]?

Mr Tague: Not when I heard the shots.

Mr Liebeler: You thought they had come from the area between Nos. 7 and 5?

Mr Tague: I believe they came from up in here.

Mr Liebeler: Back in the area “C”?

Mr Tague: Right.

Mr Liebeler: Behind the concrete monument here between Nos. 7 and 5, toward the general area of “C”?

Mr Tague: Yes.

(Warren Commission Hearings, vol.7, pp.556f, 23 March 1964)

Roy Truly
Roy Truly, a director and the superintendent of the Texas School Book Depository, was standing with Ochus Campbell on the north side of Elm Street, close to the TSBD. Shortly afterwards, he encountered Lee Oswald in the canteen on the second floor of the TSBD:

Mr Belin: Where did you think the shots came from?

Mr Truly: I thought the shots came from the vicinity of the railroad or the WPA project [the concrete structure] west of the building.


Harry Weatherford
Weatherford, a deputy sheriff, was standing outside the Criminal Court building on Main Street:

I heard a loud report which I thought was a railroad torpedo, as it sounded as if it came from the railroad yard. Thinking, this was a heck of a time for one to go off, then I heard a 2nd report which had more of an echo report and thought to myself, that this was a rifle and I started towards the corner when I heard the 3rd report. By this time I was running towards the railroad yards where the sound seemed to come from.


Seymour Weitzman
Weitzman was one of the police officers who discovered the rifle on the sixth floor of the TSBD. At the time of the shooting, he was on the corner of Main Street and Houston Street:
I ran in a northwest direction and scaled a fence towards where we thought the shots came from.  

(Warren Commission Hearings, vol.24, p.228, 23 November 1963)

Otis Williams

Williams was standing on the front steps of the TSBD:

Just after the Presidential car passed the building and went out of sight over the Elm Street embankment I heard three loud blasts. I thought these blasts or shots came from the direction of the viaduct which crosses Elm Street.  

(Warren Commission Hearings, vol.22, p.683, 19 March 1964)

Mary Woodward

Mary Woodward, a journalist on the *Dallas Morning News*, was standing on the north side of Elm Street, about halfway between the TSBD and the grassy knoll. She wrote about her experience in the following day's paper:

Suddenly there was a horrible, ear–shattering noise coming from behind us and a little to the right.  

(Dallas Morning News, 23 November 1963, p.3)

United States Attorney H. BAREFOOT SANDERS, Dallas, Texas, telephonically advised ASAC KYLE G. CLARK on December 5, 1963, that a reporter for the Dallas “Morning News”, name unrecalled, had advised him that four of the women working in the Society Section of the Dallas “Morning News” were reportedly standing next to Mr. ZAPRUDA [sic] when the assassination shots were fired. According to this reporter, these women, names unknown, stated that the shots according to their opinion came from a direction other than from the Texas School Book Depository (TSBD) Building.  


She stated that her first reaction was that the shots had been fired from above her head and from possibly behind her. Her next reaction was that the shots might have come from the overpass which was to her right. She stated, however, because of the loud echo, she could not say where the shots had come from, other that they had come from above her head.  

(Warren Commission Hearings, vol.24, p.520, 6 December 1963)

Abraham Zapruder

Abraham Zapruder famously filmed the assassination from the top of a concrete pedestal on Elm Street close to the grassy knoll:

According to Mr. Zapruder, the position of the assassin was behind Mr. Zapruder.  


**Mr Zapruder:** I remember the police were running behind me. There were police running right behind me. Of course, they didn't realize yet, I guess, where the shot came from — that it came from that height.

**Mr Liebeler:** As you were standing on this abutment facing Elm street, you say the police ran over behind the concrete structure behind you and down the railroad track behind that, is that right?

**Mr Zapruder:** After the shots?

**Mr Liebeler:** Yes.

**Mr Zapruder:** Yes — after the shots — yes, some of them were motorcycle cops — I guess they left their motorcycles running and they were running right behind me, of course, in the line of the shooting, I guess they thought it came from right behind me.

**Mr Liebeler:** Did you have any impression as to the direction from which these shots came?

**Mr Zapruder:** No, I also thought it came from back of me. Of course, you can't tell when something is in line — it could come from anywhere, but being I was here and he was hit on this line and he was hit right in the head — I saw it right around here, so it looked like it came from here and it could come from there.

**Mr Liebeler:** All right, as you stood here on the abutment and looked down into Elm Street, you saw the President hit on the right side of the head and you thought perhaps the shots had come from behind you?
Mr Zapruder: Well, yes. 

(Warren Commission Hearings, vol.7, pp.571ff, 22 July 1964)

Other Witnesses

A few witnesses made statements more ambiguous than those quoted above, that could be interpreted as supporting shots from the grassy knoll:

2. James Crawford (Warren Commission Hearings, vol.6, p.172)
3. Avery Davis (Warren Commission Hearings, vol.22, p.642)

Not all of the following three witnesses are equally credible, but they all crop up in various accounts of the assassination.

Gordon Arnold

In 1978, the Dallas Morning News reported the claims of Gordon Arnold to have witnessed the assassination. Arnold, a soldier on leave, had apparently:

- been standing close to the fence on the grassy knoll,
- encountered a man who brandished Secret Service credentials,
- and fell to the ground on hearing shots from behind the fence.

Although the existence of the apparently bogus Secret Service agent had been mentioned 15 years earlier by witnesses such as the policemen Joe Marshall Smith and Seymour Weitzman (see Warren Commission Hearings, vol.7, p.107), there is no conclusive evidence that Arnold himself was actually in Dealey Plaza during the assassination. He is not visible in any photographs or films, and none of the witnesses on the knoll mention his presence. He did, however, receive some support from Senator Ralph Yarborough, who was riding in the motorcade. Yarborough contacted the journalist Earl Golz, who had made Arnold’s story public, and told Golz that he had seen a man fall to the ground in the way Arnold had described. Yarborough may have seen Arnold, or he may instead have seen William Newman, who certainly fell to the ground close to the grassy knoll immediately after the fatal shot.

For more about Arnold’s story, see:


Lee Bowers

Lee Bowers was working in the railway control tower north of the car park at the top of the grassy knoll. He was not sure where the sound of the shots came from:

Mr Ball: And were you able to form an opinion as to the source of the sound or what direction it came from, I mean?

Mr Bowers: The sounds came either from up against the School Depository Building or near the mouth of the triple underpass.

Mr Ball: Were you able to tell which?
Mr Bowers: No, I could not.

\textit{(Warren Commission Hearings, vol. 6, p. 287, 2 April 1964)}

Bowers did, however, testify to having seen unusual activity behind the fence on the grassy knoll. A few minutes before the assassination, three unfamiliar cars came into the car park, drove around, and left. One of the drivers appeared to be using a walkie-talkie. More significantly, Bowers appears to claim that two men were standing behind the fence:

Mr Ball: Now, were there any people standing on the high side — high ground between your tower and where Elm Street goes down under the underpass toward the mouth of the underpass?

Mr Bowers: Directly in line, towards the mouth of the underpass, there were two men. One man, middle-aged, or slightly older, fairly heavy-set, in a white shirt, fairly dark trousers. Another younger man, about mid twenties, in either a plaid shirt or plaid coat or jacket.

Mr Ball: Were they standing together or standing separately?

Mr Bowers: They were standing within 10 or 15 feet of each other, and gave no appearance of being together, as far as I knew.

Mr Ball: In what direction were they facing?

Mr Bowers: They were facing and looking up towards Main and Houston, and following the caravan as it came down.

... 

Mr Ball: Did you see any activity in this high ground above Elm after the shot?

Mr Bowers: At the time of the shooting there seemed to be some commotion. ...

Mr Ball: When you said there was a commotion, what do you mean by that? What did it look like to you when you were looking at the commotion?

Mr Bowers: I just am unable to describe rather than it was something out of the ordinary, a sort of milling around, but something occurred in this particular spot which was out of the ordinary, which attracted my eye for some reason, which I could not identify.

Mr Ball: You couldn't describe it?

Mr Bowers: Nothing that I could pinpoint as having happened that —

Mr Ball: Afterwards did a good many people come up there on this high ground at the tower?

\textit{(ibid., pp. 287f)}

And so Joseph Ball changed the subject. Bowers did not supply explicit evidence to the authorities of gunshots from the grassy knoll, but his credible account of two men standing by the fence, and of a ‘commotion’ at the time of the shooting, surely makes him one of the most intriguing eye-witnesses to the assassination.

Shortly before his untimely death in a car crash in 1966, Lee Bowers was interviewed for Mark Lane’s film, \textit{Rush to Judgment}. Extracts from the interview can be found online. According to a transcript of the interview, Bowers suggests that the two men he saw may have been on the steps leading up from Elm Street, rather than behind the fence: “And one of them, from time to time as he walked back and forth, er, disappeared behind a wooden fence which also is slightly to the west of that.” Bowers does, however, give a more detailed description of the ‘commotion’:

At the time of the shooting, in the vicinity of where the two men I have described were, there was a flash of light or, as far as I am concerned, something I could not identify, but there was something which occurred which caught my eye in this immediate area on the embankment. Now, what this was, I could not state at that time and at the time I could not identify it, other than there was some unusual occurrence — a flash of light or smoke or something which caused me to feel like something out of the ordinary had occurred there.

\textbf{Ed Hoffman}

Ed Hoffman, who was deaf and dumb, was standing on Stemmons Freeway, about 200 yards to the west of Dealey Plaza. He claimed to have seen two men in the railway yard behind the fence on the grassy knoll, followed by a puff of smoke among the trees, and finally one of the men passing a rifle to the other, who disassembled it, packed it in a bag, and made his escape while the first man went back to the fence.

For details of Hoffman's account, see:

- James Douglass, \textit{op.cit.}, pp.262–6;
• Ron Friedrich, ‘Ed Hoffman’s Changing Story’, *Kennedy Assassination Chronicles*, vol.1 issue 2, pp.31f, which argues that the apparent inconsistencies in Hoffman’s story are due to his interviewers’ unfamiliarity with American Sign Language.
• M. Duke Lane, ‘Freeway Man’, which argues strongly that Hoffman’s story was largely invented, albeit for understandable reasons.
This press conference was given at Parkland Hospital, Dallas, beginning at 2:16pm on 22 November 1963, just over one hour after President Kennedy had been pronounced dead (see the Minor Notes below for the timing of the event).

The conference was held by two doctors, Dr Malcolm Perry and Dr Kemp Clark, and a member of the White House staff, Wayne Hawks.

Evidence of Conspiracy and Cover–Up

The conference is a significant incident in the John F. Kennedy assassination for two reasons:

• Dr Malcolm Perry stated three times that he considered the wound in Kennedy's throat to be one of entrance, not exit. Dr Perry, who was experienced in interpreting bullet wounds, had inspected the wound before he performed a tracheotomy on the president. A shot in the throat from the front would, of course, both invalidate the single–bullet theory and, when combined with certain uncontroversial items of evidence, prove that at least two gunmen took part in the assassination.

• The evidence contained in the press conference was wilfully ignored by the Warren Commission, which made only a token effort to locate a recording or transcript of the conference. Because it had been widely reported in the media that Dr Perry had made remarks unhelpful to the Commission's preconceived conclusion, Arlen Specter, one of the Commission's leading attorneys, worked hard to get Perry to renounce his initial opinion about the throat wound. In the absence of a corrective record, Perry agreed with Specter that the news reports were inaccurate and that he had not made the remarks attributed to him. Specter's behaviour is documented and analysed in chapter 1 of Roger Feinman's *Between the Signal and the Noise* (available in HTML, EPUB and PDF formats), which also reports the comical efforts of the Warren Commission and the Secret Service in not managing to track down a recording or transcript of the press conference. The typed transcript had been sitting in the White House press office since shortly after the assassination.

Dr Malcolm Perry and the Throat Wound

Dr Perry's three remarks in the press conference:

1. “There was an entrance wound in the neck.”
2. “Which way was the bullet coming on the neck wound? At him?” “It appeared to be coming at him.”
3. “The wound appeared to be an entrance wound in the front of the throat; yes, that is correct.”


Minor Notes

• Although the transcript is marked “3:16 p.m. CST,” the conference was reported by news broadcasts at around 2:35pm CST. The time on the transcript is clearly a typo, and the conference probably began at 2:16. See Feinman, *Between the Signal and the Noise*, chapter 9, for details.

• ‘Tracheostomy’ is an alternative version of ‘tracheotomy.’ The latter is more commonly used these days.

• Malcolm Kilduff, known as ‘Mac,’ was the White House press officer who made the first official statement about President Kennedy's death.

The Transcript

Mr Hawks: Let me have your attention, please. You wanted to talk to some of the attending physicians. I have two of them here, Dr Malcolm Perry, an attending surgeon here at the Parkland Memorial Hospital. He will talk to you first, and then Dr Kemp Clark, the chief neurosurgeon here at the hospital. He will tell you what he knows about it. Dr Perry.

Questioner: Were you in attendance when the President died?

Questioner: Let him tell his story.

Dr Perry: I was summoned to the Emergency Room shortly after the President was brought in, on an
emergency basis, immediately after the President’s arrival. Upon reaching his side, I noted that he was in critical condition from a wound of the neck and of the head. Immediate resuscitative measures —

**Questioner**: Would you go slower?

**Dr Perry**: I noted he was in a critical condition from the wound in the neck and the head.

**Questioner**: Could that be done by one shot?

**Dr Perry**: I cannot conjecture. I don't know.

**Questioner**: A wound of the neck and of the —

**Dr Perry**: — of the head. Immediate resuscitative measures were undertaken, and Dr Kemp Clark, Professor of Neurosurgery, was summoned, along with several other members of the surgical and medical staff. They arrived immediately, but at this point the President’s condition did not allow complete resuscitation.

**Questioner**: What do you mean by “complete resuscitation”?

**Dr Perry**: He was critically ill and moribund at the time these measures were begun.

**Questioner**: Completely ill and what?

**Dr Perry**: Moribund.

**Questioner**: What does that mean?

**Dr Perry**: Near death.

**Questioner**: What was the word you used?

**Dr Perry**: Moribund. Dr Clark arrived thereafter, immediately.

**Questioner**: Could you tell us what resuscitative measures were attempted?

**Dr Perry**: Assisted respiration.

**Questioner**: What is that?

**Questioner**: With what?

**Dr Perry**: Assisted respiration with oxygen and an anesthesia machine, passage of an endotracheal tube.

**Questioner**: Does that mean you stick it in?

**Dr Perry**: Yes, place it in his trachea.

**Questioner**: Spell it for us, please.

**Dr Perry**: E-n-d-o-r-a-c-h-e-a-l. A tracheostomy.

**Questioner**: They did perform a tracheostomy?

**Dr Perry**: Yes.

**Questioner**: Would you spell it?

**Dr Perry**: T-r-a-c-h-e-o-s-t-o-m-y.

**Questioner**: Was there a priest in the room at this time, Doctor?

**Mr Hawks**: The doctor is just telling you about the operation.

**Dr Perry**: Blood and fluids were also given, and an electrocardiograph monitor was attached to record any heart beat that might be present. At this point, Dr Clark was also in attendance.

**Questioner**: What is his name?

**Dr Perry**: Dr Kemp Clark. And Dr Charles Baxter.

**Dr Kemp Clark**: I was called by Dr Perry because the President —

**Questioner**: You are Dr Clark?

**Dr Clark**: I am Dr Clark. — because the President had sustained a brain wound. On my arrival, the resuscitative efforts, the tracheostomy, the administration of chest tubes to relieve any possible —

**Questioner**: Could you slow down a little bit, Doctor, please?

**Dr Clark**: — to relieve any possibility of air being in the pleural space, the electrocardiogram had been hooked up, blood and fluids were being administered by Dr Perry and Dr Baxter. It was apparent that the President had sustained a lethal wound. A missile had gone in or out of the back of his head,
causing extensive lacerations and loss of brain tissue. Shortly after I arrived, the patient, the President, lost his heart action by the electrocardiogram, his heart then had stopped. We attempted resuscitative measures of his heart, including closed chest cardiac massage, but to no avail.

**Questioner**: That was closed chest?

**Dr Clark**: Yes.

**Questioner**: Does that mean external, Doctor, closed?

**Dr Clark**: Yes, We were able to obtain palpable pulses by this method, but, again, to no avail.

**Questioner**: What is palpable?

**Mr Hawks**: What did you ask?

**Questioner**: Palpable?

**Dr Clark**: Palpable.

**Questioner**: Palpable what?

**Dr Clark**: Pulses.

**Questioner**: Doctor, how many doctors were in attendance at the time of the President’s death?

**Questioner**: Doctor, can you tell us how long after he arrived on the Emergency table before he expired? In other words, how long was he living while in the hospital?

**Dr Clark**: 40 minutes, perhaps.

**Dr Perry**: I was far too busy to tell. I didn't even look at the watch.

**Dr Clark**: I would guess about 40 minutes.

**Questioner**: Doctor, can you describe the course of the wound through the head?

**Dr Clark**: We were too busy to be absolutely sure of the track, but the back of his head.

**Questioner**: And through the neck?

**Dr Clark**: Principally on his right side, towards the right side.

**Questioner**: What was the exact time of death, doctor?

**Dr Clark**: That is very difficult to say. We were very busy, and in answer to someone else's question, we had a lot of people in attendance. We elected to make this at 1300.

**Questioner**: You elected?

**Questioner**: What, sir?

**Dr Clark**: We pronounced him at 1300 hours.

**Questioner**: Thirteen of?

**Mr Hawks**: 1:00 o'clock.

**Questioner**: Can you describe his neck wound?

**Dr Clark**: I was busy with his head wound. I would like to ask the people who took care of that part to describe that to you.

**Questioner**: What was the question?

**Dr Perry**: The neck wound, as visible on the patient, revealed a bullet hole almost in the mid line.

**Questioner**: Would you demonstrate?

**Dr Perry**: In the lower portion of the neck, in front.

**Questioner**: Can you demonstrate, Doctor, on your own neck?

**Dr Perry**: Approximately here (indicating).

**Questioner**: Below the Adam's apple?

**Dr Perry**: Below the Adam's apple.

**Questioner**: Doctor, is it the assumption that it went through the head?

**Dr Perry**: That would be on conjecture on my part. There are two wounds, as Dr Clark noted, one of the neck and one of the head. Whether they are directly related or related to two bullets, I cannot say.

**Questioner**: What was the entrance wound?
Dr Perry: There was an entrance wound in the neck. As regards the one in the head, I cannot say.

Questioner: Which way was the bullet coming on the neck wound? At him?

Dr Perry: It appeared to be coming at him.

Questioner: And the one behind?

Dr Perry: The nature of the wound defies the ability to describe whether it went through it from either side. I cannot tell you that. Can you, Dr Clark?

Dr Clark: The head wound could have been either the exit wound from the neck or it could have been a tangential wound, as it was simply a large, gaping loss of tissue.

Questioner: That was the immediate cause of death — the head wound?

Dr Clark: I assume so; yes.

Questioner: There is a rumor that Lyndon Johnson had a heart attack, and I would like to check that out.

Dr Clark: I have no information.

Mr Hawks: I don't believe these gentlemen were in attendance with the Vice President.

Questioner: Where was he when this was going on?

Mr Hawks: That is not the question you should put to this doctor.

Questioner: Can you tell us where he is?

Mr Hawks: I can't now, but Mr Kilduff will be available later and we will take those details then.

Questioner: We can't hear you.

Mr Hawks: They are asking where the Vice President was, but I don't know at the moment. That is not the proper question to put to these gentlemen. They were busy with the President at the time.

Questioner: Where is Mrs Kennedy?

Mr Hawks: I don't know that detail either. As you might suspect, we were all busy around here.

Questioner: Can't we clear this up just a little more? In your estimation, was there one or two wounds? Just give us something.

Dr Perry: I don't know. From the injury, it is conceivable that it could have been caused by one wound, but there could have been two just as well if the second bullet struck the head in addition to striking the neck, and I cannot tell you that due to the nature of the wound. There is no way for me to tell.

Questioner: Doctor, describe the entrance wound. You think from the front in the throat?

Dr Perry: The wound appeared to be an entrance wound in the front of the throat; yes, that is correct. The exit wound, I don't know. It could have been the head or there could have been a second wound of the head. There was not time to determine this at the particular instant.

Questioner: Would the bullet have had to travel up from the neck wound to exit through the back?

Dr Perry: Unless it was deviated from its course by striking bone or some other object.

Questioner: Can't we clear this up just a little more? In your estimation, was there one or two wounds? Just give us something.

Dr Perry: I don't know. From the injury, it is conceivable that it could have been caused by one wound, but there could have been two just as well if the second bullet struck the head in addition to striking the neck, and I cannot tell you that due to the nature of the wound. There is no way for me to tell.

Questioner: Doctor, describe the entrance wound. You think from the front in the throat?

Dr Perry: The wound appeared to be an entrance wound in the front of the throat; yes, that is correct. The exit wound, I don't know. It could have been the head or there could have been a second wound of the head. There was not time to determine this at the particular instant.

Questioner: Would the bullet have had to travel up from the neck wound to exit through the back?

Dr Perry: Unless it was deviated from its course by striking bone or some other object.

Questioner: Doctor, can you give us your ages, please?

Dr Perry: I am 34.

Questioner: You are Doctor who?

Dr Perry: Perry.

Mr Hawks: This is Dr Malcolm Perry, attending surgeon, and this is Dr Kemp Clark, chief of neurosurgery at this hospital.

Questioner: How old are you, sir?

Dr Clark: 38.

Questioner: Is that C-l-a-r-k?

Dr Clark: Yes.

Questioner: Can you tell us whether the autopsy will be performed here or elsewhere?

Dr Perry: I do not have that information.
Mr Hawks: I don't know either.
Questioner: Will there be one?
Mr Hawks: I don't know that.
Questioner: Where is the President's body?
Mr Hawks: I couldn't tell you.
Questioner: Was the President ever conscious after the bullet struck him?
Dr Perry: No, not while I was in attendance.
Questioner: How much blood was used?
Dr Perry: I don't know. There was considerable bleeding.
Questioner: How soon did you see him after he got in?
Questioner: Did you have to send for blood?
Dr Perry: Blood was sent for and obtained; yes.
Questioner: Where?
Dr Perry: From our Blood Bank.
Questioner: Here in the hospital?
Dr Perry: Here in the hospital.
Questioner: How much was used?
Dr Perry: I can't tell you that.
Questioner: How much blood?
Dr Perry: I don't know.
Questioner: Doctor, were the last rites performed in the Emergency Room?
Dr Perry: Yes.
Questioner: Yes, they were?
Mr Hawks: Yes, they said they were. Kilduff told you, too.
Questioner: Which room was this? What is the room like?
Dr Perry: Emergency Operating Room No. 1.
Questioner: How far from the door is that, and which way?
Dr Clark: Straight in from the Emergency Room entrance, at the back of the hospital, approximately 40 feet.
Questioner: Approximately what?
Mr Hawks: Forty feet from the emergency entrance.
Questioner: The first floor?
Dr Clark: The ground floor.
Questioner: How many doctors and nurses were in attendance at the time of death?
Dr Perry: There were at least eight or ten physicians at that time.
Questioner: At least eight or ten physicians?
Dr Perry: Yes.
Questioner: Did you think him mortally wounded at the time you first examined him, or did you think there was no possibility of saving his life at that point?
Dr Perry: No, I did not.
Dr Clark: No, sir.
Questioner: Did you say there were eight or ten doctors or doctors and nurses?
Dr Clark: Eight or ten doctors.
Questioner: Can we get that straight, Doctor? Did you say you did not think there was any possibility of saving his life when you first looked at him?
Dr Clark: That is what I said; yes.

Questioner: How long had he been in before you saw him, sir?

Dr Clark: This I don't know because I was not looking at my watch.

Questioner: Who was the first doctor who saw him, and how long before he got there?

Dr Clark: Just a matter of a few seconds.

Dr Perry: I arrived there shortly after his admission. I can't tell you the exact time because I went immediately and he had just been admitted and I walked in the room. I don't know the exact time. I was in quite a hurry.

Questioner: Were any members of the family or others in the room besides the doctors, in the Emergency Room?

Dr Perry: I am afraid I was not aware of that. I was quite too busy to notice.

Mr Hawks: We will have to get those details from Mac.

Questioner: Do you have any new details about our plans, what you are going to do?

Mr Hawks: I can't until I get a reading from you fellows. For instance, you have a new President.

Questioner: Do we? Was he sworn in?

Mr Hawks: Well, he went somewhere to get sworn in. I assume he is sworn in at this time, but I wasn't in attendance. Obviously, you are going to have a new President. Let's put it that way.

Questioner: Where is he going to be?

Mr Hawks: That is what I am trying to find out. Mac is with him, trying to get the details, and he will call me or come in here. We will try to find out.

Dr Perry: Can we go now?

The Press: Thank you, Doctors.

Mr Hawks: Your plans, what do you want to do?

Questioner: First, is there anything more about Mrs Kennedy?

Mr Hawks: Let's do some “supposing” because we need some planning for your press plans.

Questioner: How about Mrs Kennedy? Has she gone back to Washington, or is she going?

Mr Hawks: That is what Mac is trying to find out now. This takes a lot of doing.

Questioner: Can we stay here with the new President?

Mr Hawks: If you want to stay here with the new President, if he stays here. I don't know that he is going to stay here. That is why I want to “suppose” here for a minute.

Questioner: Let's put it on the basis of what the new President does. If he stays, we stay; and if he goes, we go.

Mr Hawks: Suppose the body goes back and the new President stays? Do some of you want to stay, or go?

Questioner: Stay with the new President.

Mr Hawks: All right, that is what I wanted to find out. You know, there are buses and planes and things like that.

Questioner: I know I won't be going back in any case. Can I get my luggage back here? How do we get luggage on the press plane off of there?

Mr Hawks: If we decide to spend the night here, we will get the luggage here. Don't worry about it.

Questioner: We have luggage in the wire car, but God knows where it is.

Questioner: Where will the next briefing be, here or where?

Mr Hawks: Right here, as far as I know. This is where Mac said he could come back to.
The Sibert and O'Neill Report

Two FBI agents, James Sibert and Francis O'Neill, attended the autopsy of President Kennedy. Their report is presented below, along with a memorandum in which they confirmed several of their observations.

The Significance of the Report

The Sibert and O'Neill Report is significant to the study of President Kennedy's assassination in several ways:

- it is the only contemporaneous eye-witness account of events at the autopsy;
- it strongly contradicted certain elements of the case against Lee Harvey Oswald;
- it illustrated the treatment of evidence by the Warren Commission and various investigative agencies;
- and it helped to generate an influential, though highly implausible, conspiracy theory involving the surgical alteration of President Kennedy's body.

The Single-Bullet Theory

The FBI agents' account contains several observations about the location, angle and depth of President Kennedy's back wound which, if accurate, would invalidate the Warren Commission's single-bullet theory:

- The bullet wound "was below the shoulders and two inches to the right of the middle line of the spinal column," a location consistent with the bullet holes in the president's shirt and jacket but too low to be consistent with the single-bullet theory.
- "This opening was probed by Dr. HUMES with the finger, at which time it was determined that the trajectory of the missile entering at this point had entered at a downward position of 45 to 60 degrees." A bullet entering at a downward angle could not have come out through the throat, as the single-bullet theory demanded.
- "Further probing determined that the distance travelled by this missile was a short distance inasmuch as the end of the opening could be felt with the finger." It became known several years later that the pathologists had been forbidden, presumably by one or more of their military superiors, to dissect the back and throat wounds (see Appendix L, 'Pierre Finck: Dissecting JFK's Wounds,' pp.120ff below). Such dissection would almost certainly have confirmed or denied the possibility that a single bullet had passed through President Kennedy's body and had caused both wounds.

Evidence that Two Types of Bullet Were Used

Sibert and O'Neill stated that "inasmuch as no complete bullet of any size could be located in the brain area and likewise no bullet could be located in the back or any other area of the body as determined by total body X-Rays and inspection revealing there was no point of exit, the individuals performing the autopsy were at a loss to explain why they could find no bullets."

The chief pathologist, Dr James Humes, was told by the FBI agents during the autopsy that an intact bullet had been discovered on a stretcher at Parkland Hospital. Humes concluded that this bullet must have worked its way out of President Kennedy's back during his treatment.

The presence of dozens of tiny bullet fragments in the president's skull and brain indicated that the wound to his head had been caused by one or more soft-nosed bullets, and not by metal-jacketed bullets such as those associated with the shells that had been discovered on the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository.

The FBI and the Warren Commission

Sibert and O'Neill's observations became the basis of the FBI's report into the assassination, which remains the Bureau's official verdict on the crime. It contradicts several important aspects of the final version of the autopsy report, which was rewritten after Oswald's murder. In particular, the pathologists claim in their report that during the autopsy they had deduced a link between President Kennedy's back and throat wounds. The agents make it clear in their memorandum that this was not the case.
In common with other important documents that contradicted the Commission’s conclusions, such as the Parkland Hospital press conference transcript, the Sibert and O’Neill Report was deliberately ignored, and was neither quoted in the Warren Report nor published in the 26 volumes of Hearings and Exhibits. The document was placed in the National Archives, where it was discovered in 1966 by Harold Weisberg.

Neither Sibert nor O’Neill was interviewed by the Warren Commission. Both agents gave interviews to the House Select Committee on Assassinations in the late 1970s and to the Assassination Records Review Board in the early 1990s, in which they again contradicted important elements of the lone-assassin argument.

**Body Alteration Theory**

The Sibert and O’Neill Report’s use of the phrase “it was also apparent that a tracheotomy had been performed, as well as surgery of the head area, namely, in the top of the skull” led to the theory, elaborated by David Lifton in his book, Best Evidence, that President Kennedy’s body had been surgically altered before the autopsy in order to conceal evidence of shots from in front. For an alternative interpretation, see Roger Feinman, Between the Signal and the Noise, chapter 1 (available in HTML, EPUB and PDF formats).

In an affidavit submitted to the House Select Committee on Assassinations in 1978, James Sibert explained that the pathologists revised their initial suspicions of “surgery of the head area”:

> When the body was first observed on the autopsy table, it was thought by the doctors that surgery had possibly been performed in the head area and such was reflected in my notes made at the time. However, this was determined not to be correct following detailed inspection and when the piece of bone found in the limousine was brought to the autopsy room during the latter stages of the autopsy.  

**Minor Notes**

Sibert and O’Neill, or their typist, made several mistakes with people’s names, mostly of those attending the autopsy:

- The commanding officer at Bethesda was Admiral C.B. Galloway, not Holloway.
- President Kennedy’s personal doctor was Admiral Burkley, not Berkley.
- The radiologist was John H. Ebersole, not James.
- The assistant pathologist was J.T. Boswell, not Bozwell.
- The X-ray technician was Jerrol F. Custer, not Crester.
- The Secret Service agent who had taken custody of a bullet at Parkland Hospital was Richard Johnsen with an ‘e’, not Johnson with an ‘o’.

FBI terminology:

- **FD 302** is the FBI’s term for a standard report form, such as that used by Sibert and O’Neill.
- **SA**, or Special Agent, is the term for any FBI agent.
- **Agent in Charge** is the senior FBI official in a local office.

**About the Documents**

Sibert and O’Neill dictated their report on Tuesday 26 November 1963, four days after the assassination. A summary of their observations was contained in a teletype to FBI headquarters a few hours after the autopsy: Assassination Records Review Board Medical Document 149. Their memorandum was written on 29 June 1966.

Autopsy of Body of President John Fitzgerald Kennedy

Date: 11/26/63

At approximately 3 p.m. on November 22, 1963, following the President’s announced assassination, it was ascertained that Air Force One, the President’s jet, was returning from Love Field, Dallas, Texas, flying the body back to Andrews Air Force Base, Camp Springs, Maryland. SAS FRANCIS X. O’NEILL, JR. and JAMES W. SIBERT proceeded to Andrews Air Force Base to handle any matters which would fall within the jurisdiction of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, inasmuch as it was anticipated that a large group of both military and civilian personnel assigned to the Base would congregate at Base Operations to witness the landing of this flight.

Lt. Col. ROBERT T. BEST, Director of Law Enforcement and Security, advised the President’s plane would arrive at 5:25 p.m. Subsequently, Col. BEST advised that the plane would arrive at 6:05 p.m.

At approximately 5:55 p.m. agents were advised through the Hyattsville Resident Agency that the Bureau had instructed that the agents accompany the body to the National Naval Medical Center, Bethesda, Maryland, to stay with the body and to obtain bullets reportedly in the President’s body.

Immediately agents contacted Mr. JAMES ROWLEY, the Director of the U.S. Secret Service, identified themselves and made Mr. ROWLEY aware of our aforementioned instruction. Immediately following the plane’s landing, Mr. ROWLEY arranged seating for Bureau agents in the third car of the White House motorcade which followed that ambulance containing the President’s body to the Naval Medical Center, Bethesda, Maryland.

On arrival at the Medical Center, the ambulance stopped in front of the main entrance, at which time Mrs. JACQUELINE KENNEDY and Attorney General ROBERT KENNEDY embarked from the ambulance and entered the building. The ambulance was thereafter driven around to the rear entrance where the President’s body was removed and taken into an autopsy room. Bureau agents assisted in the moving of the casket to the autopsy room. A tight security was immediately placed around the autopsy room by the Naval facility and the U.S. Secret Service. Bureau agents made contact with Mr. ROY KELLERMAN, the Assistant Secret Service Agent in Charge of the White House Detail, and advised him of the Bureau’s interest in this matter.

He advised that he had already received instructions from Director ROWLEY as to the presence of Bureau agents. It will be noted that the aforementioned Bureau agents, Mr. ROY KELLERMAN, Mr. WILLIAM GREER and Mr. WILLIAM O’LEARY, Secret Service agents, were the only personnel other than medical personnel present during the autopsy.

The following individuals attended the autopsy:

- Adm. C.B. HOLLOWAY, U.S. Navy, Commanding Officer of the U.S. Naval Medical Center, Bethesda;
- Adm. BERKLEY, U.S. Navy, the President’s personal physician;
- Commander JAMES J. HUMES, Chief Pathologist, Bethesda Naval Hospital, who conducted autopsy;
- Capt. JAMES H. STONER, JR., Commanding Officer, U.S. Naval Medical School, Bethesda;
- Mr. JOHN T. STRINGER, JR., Medical photographer;
- JAMES H. EBERSOLE;
- LLOYD E. RAINES;
- J.T. BOZWELL;
- J.G. RUDNICKI;
- PAUL K. O’CONNOR;
- J.C. JENKINS;
- JERROL R. CRESTER;
- EDWARD F. REED;
- JAMES METZLER.

During the course of the autopsy, Lt. Col. P. FINCK, U.S. Army Armed Forces Institute of Pathology, arrived to assist Commander HUMES in the autopsy. In addition, Lt. Cmdr. GREGG CROSS and Captain DAVID OSBORNE, Chief of Surgery, entered the autopsy room.

Major General WEHLE, Commanding Officer of U.S. Military District, Washington, D.C., entered the autopsy room to ascertain from the Secret Service arrangements concerning the transportation of the President’s body back to the White House. AMC CHESTER H. BOWERS, U.S. Navy, visited the autopsy room during the final stages of such to type receipts given by FBI and Secret Service for items obtained.
At the termination of the autopsy, the following personnel from Gawler’s Funeral Home entered the autopsy room to prepare the President’s body for burial:

- JOHN VAN HAESEN
- EDWIN STROBLE
- THOMAS ROBINSON
- Mr. HAGEN

Brigadier General GODFREY McHUGH, Air Force Military Aide to the President, was also present, as was Dr. GEORGE BAKEMAN, U.S. Navy.

Arrangements were made for the performance of the autopsy by the U.S. Navy and Secret Service.

The President’s body was removed from the casket in which it had been transported and was placed on the autopsy table, at which time the complete body was wrapped in a sheet and the head area contained an additional wrapping which was saturated with blood. Following the removal of the wrapping, it was ascertained that the President’s clothing had been removed and it was also apparent that a tracheotomy had been performed, as well as surgery of the head area, namely, in the top of the skull. All personnel with the exception of medical officers needed in the taking of photographs and X-Rays were requested to leave the autopsy room and remain in an adjacent room.

Upon completion of X-Rays and photographs, the first incision was made at 8:15 p.m. X-Rays of the brain area which were developed and returned to the autopsy room disclosed a path of a missile which appeared to enter the back of the skull and the path of the disintegrated fragments could be observed along the right side of the skull. The largest section of this missile as portrayed by X-Ray appeared to be behind the right frontal sinus. The next largest fragment appeared to be at the rear of the skull at the juncture of the skull bone.

The Chief Pathologist advised approximately 40 particles of disintegrated bullet and smudges indicated that the projectile had fragmentized while passing through the skull region.

During the autopsy inspection of the area of the brain, two fragments of metal were removed by Dr. HUMES, namely, one fragment measuring 7 x 2 millimeters, which was removed from the right side of the brain. An additional fragment of metal measuring 1 x 3 millimeters was also removed from this area, both of which were placed in a glass jar containing a black metal top which were thereafter marked for identification and following the signing of a proper receipt were transported by Bureau agents to the FBI laboratory.

During the latter stages of this autopsy, Dr. HUMES located an opening which appeared to be a bullet hole which was below the shoulders and two inches to the right of the middle line of the spinal column.

This opening was probed by Dr. HUMES with the finger, at which time it was determined that the trajectory of the missile entering at this point had entered at a downward position of 45 to 60 degrees. Further probing determined that the distance travelled by this missile was a short distance inasmuch as the end of the opening could be felt with the finger.

Inasmuch as no complete bullet of any size could be located in the brain area and likewise no bullet could be located in the back or any other area of the body as determined by total body X-Rays and inspection revealing there was no point of exit, the individuals performing the autopsy were at a loss to explain why they could find no bullets.

A call was made by Bureau agents to the Firearms Section of the FBI Laboratory, at which time SA CHARLES L. KILLION advised that the Laboratory had received through Secret Service Agent RICHARD JOHNSON a bullet which had reportedly been found on a stretcher in the emergency room of Parkland Hospital, Dallas, Texas. This stretcher had also contained a stethoscope [sic] and pair of rubber gloves. Agent JOHNSON had advised the Laboratory that it had not been ascertained whether or not this was the stretcher which had been used to transport the body of President Kennedy. Agent KILLION further described this bullet as pertaining to a 6.5 millimeter rifle which would be approximately a 25 calibre rifle and that this bullet consisted of a copper alloy full jacket.

Immediately following receipt of this information, this was made available to Dr. HUMES who advised that in his opinion this accounted for no bullet being located which had entered the back region and that since external cardiac massage had been performed at Parkland Hospital, it was entirely possible that through such movement the bullet had worked its way back out of the point of entry and had fallen on the stretcher.

Also during the latter stages of the autopsy, a piece of the skull measuring 10 x 6.5 centimeters was brought to Dr. HUMES who was instructed that this had been removed from the President’s skull. Immediately this section of skull was X-Rayed, at which time it was determined by Dr. HUMES that one corner of this section revealed minute metal particles and inspection of this same area disclosed a
chipping of the top portion of this piece, both of which indicated that this had been the point of exit of the bullet entering the skull region.

On the basis of the latter two developments, Dr. HUMES stated that the pattern was clear — that the one bullet had entered the President’s back and had worked its way out of the body during external cardiac massage and that a second high velocity bullet had entered the rear of the skull and had fragmented prior to exit through the top of the skull. He further pointed out that X-Rays had disclosed numerous fractures in the cranial area which he attributed to the force generated by the impact of the bullet in its passage through the brain area. He attributed the death of the President to a gunshot wound in the head.

The following is a complete listing of photographs and X-Rays taken by the medical authorities of the President’s body. They were turned over to Mr. ROY KELLERMAN of the Secret Service. X-Rays were developed by the hospital, however, the photographs were delivered to Secret Service undeveloped:

- 11 X-Rays
- 22 4 x 5 color photographs
- 18 4 x 5 black and white photographs
- 1 roll of 120 film containing five exposures

Mr. KELLERMAN stated these items could be made available to the FBI upon request. The portion of the skull measuring 10 x 6.5 centimeters was maintained in the custody of Dr. HUMES who stated that it also could be made available for further examination. The two metal fragments removed from the brain area were hand carried by SAs SIBERT and O’NEILL to the FBI Laboratory immediately following the autopsy and were turned over to the SA KURT FRAZIER.

Sibert and O’Neill: Memorandum

Date: 6/29/66
From: SAs FRANCIS X. O’NEILL, JR. and JAMES W. SIBERT
Subject: ASSASSINATION OF PRESIDENT JOHN F. KENNEDY, 11/22/63
DALLAS, TEXAS
MISCELLANEOUS — INFORMATION CONCERNING

The following information is being submitted to the file as a matter of record.

During of [sic] 5/30/66–6/3/66 Bureau supervisor KENNETH RAUPACH, telephonically contacted SA JAMES SIBERT at the Hyattsville Resident Agency advising that a “Special” was being conducted at the Bureau in connection with an article which appeared in the newspapers relating to events that took place during the autopsy on 11/22/63 at the Navy Medical Training Center, Bethesda, Maryland.

Mr. RAUPACH asked if any member of the KENNEDY family had appeared in the autopsy room during the time that the autopsy was in progress making a request that the findings of such autopsy be kept confidential. He was advised that at no time during the autopsy did either ROBERT F. KENNEDY or the President’s wife appear at the autopsy room and that it was understood that these two individuals were in the tower at the Medical Center. RAUPACH was advised that one of the Senior Medical Officers had made the statement prior to the termination of the autopsy that “what had gone on in this room tonight should remain confidential and should not be discussed outside of that room”.

RAUPACH also questioned as to whether or not the measurements as set forth in FD 302s submitted by SAs SIBERT and O’NEILL had actually been measurements furnished by the Pathologist or had been represented conclusions [sic] reached by the Agents. He was informed that all figures set forth in such FD 302 had been obtained from the Pathologist performing the autopsy.

Later in the week a telephone call was received from the Bureau supervisor FLETCHER THOMPSON, who advised that he had additional questions pertaining to captioned matter and stated that he desired to know whether or not at least one agent was present in the autopsy room during the time that the autopsy was in progress and until it was completed. He was advised that such was the case and that if one agent was out of the room it was understood and followed that the other agent was present at all times and that at no time were both agents out of this room from the time that the autopsy began until it was terminated.

Mr. THOMPSON also asked if the Pathologist conducting the autopsy had made any mention of a bullet passing out of the neck at the point that the tracheotomy had been performed [sic] at Parkland Hospital, at Dallas, Texas. He was advised that no such statement was made and that in fact the Pathologist was quite concerned concerning injury in the back and could not find a point of exit for this bullet neither could he find the projectile. Mr. THOMPSON was further advised that at that time Agent SIBERT had telephonically contacted SA CHARLES L. KILLIAN in the Firearms Section at the
Bureau at which time it had been ascertained that a bullet had been found on a stretcher in the Parkland Hospital and this information was relayed to the Pathologist conducting the autopsy who stated that in all probability this accounted for no bullet being found in the body in the back region and that such had probably been worked out by cardiac massage which had been performed when the President was on a stretcher at Parkland Hospital.

Mr. THOMPSON again asked if any member of the KENNEDY family had requested that the results of the autopsy be maintained confidential and was informed that no mention had been made by any members of the Military or other personnel attending the autopsy, that the KENNEDY family had requested that the results of the autopsy be held in confidence, however one of the Senior Members had stated that and cautioned individuals in attendance at the autopsy that this matter should not be discussed after leaving this room.

On June 10, 1966 ASAC JOHN J. McDERMOTT of the WFO telephonically contacted SA O’NEILL and advised that he had been requested by JAMES MALLOY, Number One Man of Division 6, to contact either SA O’NEILL or SA SIBERT and ascertain whether or not any member of the KENNEDY Official Party, who were at the Bethesda Naval Hospital on November 22, 1963, had requested that the results of the autopsy performed on the body of the President be maintained secret.

Mr. McDERMOTT was advised that no member of the official KENNEDY party entered the autopsy room nor did any member of the official party request that the findings of the autopsy be maintained secret.

He was advised that the Admiral in charge of the hospital at the conclusion of the autopsy requested all members who had attended the autopsy to keep the findings of the autopsy confidential.

ASAC McDERMOTT further inquired whether at any time both SA SIBERT or SA O’NEILL were out of the autopsy room. He was advised that at no time did SAs SIBERT and O’NEILL leave the autopsy room together. At all times during the course of the autopsy one of the agents was present.

ASAC McDERMOTT also asked whether the information contained in the FD 302s submitted by SAs SIBERT and O’NEILL concerning the autopsy were the conclusions of the Agents and all was actual information obtained from the Pathologist who are [sic] in attendance at the autopsy. Mr. McDERMOTT was advised that the agents submitted no conclusions of their own and that all information furnished in the FD 302 was obtained from the Pathologists who were in attendance at the autopsy.

Mr. McDERMOTT further was advised that the agents assisted in carrying in the Presidential casket into the autopsy room and were present in attendance at all times until the autopsy was complete and the morticians were preparing the body for burial.
Appendix D
Katzenbach: Memo to Moyers

The assassination of President Kennedy not only removed the head of state but also incapacitated the head of the Justice Department, Robert Kennedy. Nicholas Katzenbach, the Deputy Attorney General, was to play an important role in the early development of official responses to the assassination.

Katzenbach wrote this memo by hand on the evening of Sunday 24 November, a few hours after Lee Harvey Oswald had been shot dead by Jack Ruby. A typed version was prepared the following morning and sent to Bill Moyers, an assistant to President Johnson.

Katzenbach set down ideas that had been discussed within the White House over the previous two and a half days. He pointed out that:

- Conspiracy theories about the assassination had already started to circulate.
- Some sort of official report should be issued to counteract these theories.

Some of Oswald’s activities in Mexico City a few weeks before the assassination had generated two opposing conspiracy theories:

- either the Soviet or Cuban regimes were behind the assassination,
- or elements within the US had manipulated events to blame those regimes.

There were suspicions that Oswald had been working for one side or the other. Many aspects of Oswald’s career were to remain hidden for years, but enough information had already come to light to cast doubt on the sincerity of his pro–communist public persona.

Although Oswald had been proclaimed the lone assassin, there was substantial disbelief among both domestic and foreign observers. This disbelief was quickly recognised to be harmful to established US political institutions.

Whatever the real story behind the assassination, the only acceptable political solution was that Oswald had acted alone and with no political or ideological motive. The question of Oswald’s guilt or innocence was not a consideration.

Katzenbach hoped that a report by the FBI into the assassination would be sufficient to contain public scepticism. Even before the entirely inadequate FBI report (Warren Commission Document 1) was complete, the news media felt that it needed a stronger, more objective source of information if it was to perform its task of convincing the public that Oswald had acted alone (see e.g. Alsop to Johnson, White House Telephone Transcripts, 25 November 1963, 10:40am, LBJ Library, Austin, Texas; Appendix E, pp.86ff below). A few days after this memo was written, Katzenbach’s suggestion was adopted, and the Warren Commission was established.

More Information
The memo is located in the FBI HQ JFK Assassination File, 62–109060–18. A scan of the typed version in PNG format can be found at http://www.maryferrell.org/mffweb/archive/viewer/showDoc.do?absPageId=756877.

For more about the political context and implications of Katzenbach’s memo, see the sources mentioned in Chapter 13, ‘Further Reading,’ pp.47ff above.

Memorandum for Mr Moyers
It is important that all of the facts surrounding President Kennedy’s Assassination be made public in a way which will satisfy people in the United States and abroad that all the facts have been told and that a statement to this effect be made now.

1. The public must be satisfied that Oswald was the assassin; that he did not have confederates who are still at large; and that the evidence was such that he would have been convicted at trial.
2. Speculation about Oswald’s motivation ought to be cut off, and we should have some basis for rebutting thought that this was a Communist conspiracy or (as the Iron Curtain press is saying) a right–wing conspiracy to blame it on the Communists. Unfortunately the facts on Oswald seem about too pat — too obvious (Marxist, Cuba, Russian wife, etc.). The Dallas police have put out statements on the Communist conspiracy theory, and it was they who were in charge when he was shot and thus silenced.

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3. The matter has been handled thus far with neither dignity nor conviction. Facts have been mixed with rumour and speculation. We can scarcely let the world see us totally in the image of the Dallas police when our President is murdered.

I think this objective may be satisfied by making public as soon as possible a complete and thorough FBI report on Oswald and the assassination. This may run into the difficulty of pointing to inconsistencies between this report and statements by Dallas police officials. But the reputation of the Bureau is such that it may do the whole job.

The only other step would be the appointment of a Presidential Commission of unimpeachable personnel to review and examine the evidence and announce its conclusions. This has both advantages and disadvantages. It [sic] think it can await publication of the FBI report and public reaction to it here and abroad.

I think, however, that a statement that all the facts will be made public property in an orderly and responsible way should be made now. We need something to head off public speculation or Congressional hearings of the wrong sort.

Nicholas deB. Katzenbach
Deputy Attorney General
Appendix E

Lyndon Johnson’s Phone Call to Joe Alsop

President Kennedy’s assassination was not a federal crime. Just like any murder, it came under the jurisdiction of the county in which it occurred: in this case, Dallas County.

By Monday, 25 November, two investigations had been set up:

- Waggoner Carr, the attorney general of Texas, would lead a state court of inquiry into the murder.
- The FBI was investigating the wider aspects of the assassination, and was due to present a report to President Johnson within days.

Early eye–witness reports of shots from more than one direction, combined with news of Lee Harvey Oswald’s activities in Mexico City, had generated suspicions that the JFK assassination had been a conspiracy. Oswald’s murder by Jack Ruby, broadcast live on television the previous day, had greatly amplified these suspicions.

Washington insiders recognised that conspiracy theories posed a threat to political institutions. The acting Attorney General, Nicholas Katzenbach, wrote a memo (see Appendix D, pp.84f above) stressing that “the public must be satisfied that Oswald was the assassin; that he did not have confederates who are still at large; and that the evidence was such that he would have been convicted at trial.” Katzenbach proposed “the appointment of a Presidential Commission of unimpeachable personnel to review and examine the evidence and announce its conclusions.”

President Johnson would eventually accept Katzenbach’s proposal. He managed to reduce the Texas investigation to a formality, and on 29 November he established the Warren Commission as the only official inquiry into the assassination.

Documents made public many years later reveal the extent to which senior figures in the print and broadcast media were involved in shaping the official response to the assassination. One such figure was the syndicated newspaper columnist, Joe Alsop. A telephone conversation between Alsop and Johnson is reproduced below.

The conversation gives an insight into Johnson’s juggling of the various investigatory options: the Texas court of inquiry, the FBI report, and Katzenbach’s proposed presidential commission. It also gives an insight into the relationship between the media and the government:

- The importance of the media to the presidency was such that a president would take a phone call from a member of the public on the morning of his predecessor’s funeral.
- Alsop uses what appears to be outrageous flattery, but which may simply reflect his identification with the needs of governmental institutions: “you’re going to make a marvelous … well, you’ve already made a marvelous start … you haven’t put a damned foot one–quarter of an inch wrong … and I’ve never seen anything like it, you’ve been simply marvelous.” Similar remarks found their way into newspaper editorials, and were later applied to the Warren Report.
- The media were centrally involved in creating policy. Alsop tries to persuade Johnson of the need for the results of the criminal investigation to be sanctified by a number of august figures. He mentions that he has recently spoken on this subject to several influential people, including: Nicholas Katzenbach; Dean Acheson, the former Secretary of State; Fred Friendly, the president of CBS; and Bill Moyers, an assistant to Johnson.
- Both Johnson and Alsop assume that the role of the media is to persuade the general public of the government’s point of view. In Alsop’s words, “what I’m really honestly giving you is public relation[s] advice.”

A scan of the original typescript in format can be found at [http://www.maryferrell.org/mffweb/archive/viewer/showDoc.do?docId=838](http://www.maryferrell.org/mffweb/archive/viewer/showDoc.do?docId=838).
Phone Call Transcript

Monday 25 November, 1963, 10:40am

Johnson: Joe?
Alsop: Yes, Mr. President?
Johnson: I appreciate very much your calling ...
Alsop: Well, you know what I feel about you and you know how I ... well, I put it all into the letter ...
Johnson: ... he has ordered or will order during the day, probably right after the funeral, a state court of inquiry headed by the Attorney General which he will have associated with him one or two of the outstanding civil liberties jurists in the country, perhaps Jarwarski [sic: Leon Jaworski] who represented the Attorney General in the 5th Circuit negro case or some of the trial lawyers of America or Dean Story, or ...
Alsop: You mean, somebody from outside of Texas?
Johnson: No, they're going to have FBI from outside Texas, but this is under Texas law and they take all the involvements and we don't send in a bunch of carpet-baggers ... that's the worse thing he could do right now ...
Alsop: You think so ...
Johnson: I know ... well, we've got the FBI doing anything that ... if there's any question about Texas operation, they've got an FBI that's going to the bottom of it and direct with the Attorney General ... but paralleling that is the blue ribbon state board of inquiry headed by the brilliant Attorney General and associated with him somebody like say John Garwood, Will Clayton's son-in-law, who was a brillian Supreme Court Justice that's retired ... somebody like Roberts did at Pearl Harbor ... and that's what the Attorney General is doing ... now, if we have another Commission, hell, you're going to have people running over each other and everybody agreed ... now I know that some of the lawyers ... they thought of the blue ribbon commission first, the Justice, and we just can't have them lobbying them against the President, when he makes these decisions. We decided that the best thing to do, number one to put the FBI in full force, number two to put the State in full force ...
Alsop: Nobody ... nobody ... Mr. President, is lobbying me, I lay awake all night ...
Johnson: They're not lobbying you, they're lobbying me ... last night. I spent the day on it ... I had to leave Mrs. Kennedy's side at the White House and call and ask the Secret Service and FBI to proceed immediately ... I spent most of my day on this thing, yesterday. I had the Attorney General from Texas fly in here ... I spent an hour and a half with him yesterday evening ... I talked to the Justice Department lawyers and to the FBI and the FBI is of the opinion that the wisest, quickest, ablest, most effective way to go about it is for them to thoroughly study it and bring in a written report to the Attorney General at the earliest possible date which they've been working on since 12:30 yesterday. Number one ... and they have information that is available to no-one ... that has not been presented thus far and so forth ... Number two ... to parallel that, we're having a blue ribbon court of inquiry ...
Alsop: In Texas?
Johnson: In Texas ... where this thing occurred ...
Alsop: Mr. President, just let me give you my political judgment on the thing. I think you've done everything that could probably be done ...
Johnson: We just don't want to be in a position ... I'll make this one more statement and then I'm through ... I want to hear you ... we don't want to be in the position of saying that we have come in to a state other than the FBI ... that they pretty well accept ... but some outsiders have told them that their integrity is no good and that we're going to have some carpetbag trials ... we can't haul off people from New York and try them in Jackson, Mississippi ... and we can't haul off people from Dallas and try them in New York ...
Alsop: I see that, Mr. President ... but let me ...
Johnson: It is their constitutional right ... go ahead ... now ...
Alsop: Le me make one suggestion because I think this covers ... I think this bridges the gap which I believe and Dean Acheson believes still exists ... being ... and Bill Moyers is the only person I've talked to about it ... and Friendly is going to come out tomorrow morning with a big thing about a ... a blue ribbon commission which he thought of independently ... it isn't Justice Department lawyers who are carrying on this ... it's just things happened thought of by a lot people and you thought of more than ...
more details than anyone else ... and I'm sure you're right except there's one missing piece ... I suggest
that you announce that as you do not want the Attorney General to have the clean, full, responsibility
of reporting on his own brother's assassination, that you have authorised the three jurists and I would
suggest the Texas jurists and two non–Texan jurists to review all the evidence by the FBI and produce a
report to the nation for the nation ... and after the investigation is completed ... so that the country will
have the story judicially reviewed, outside Texas and if you tell Bill Moyers to call up Friendly and if
you'll get out a special announcement this afternoon, you're going to make a marvelous ... well, you've
already made a marvelous start ... you haven't put a damned foot one–quarter of an inch wrong ... and
I've never seen anything like it, you've been simply marvelous in the most painful circumstances but I
do feel that there is that much of a gap and I'm sure that if Moyers calls Friendly, you have a terrific
support from the Washington Post and from the whole of the rest of the press instantly ...

Johnson: I'll ruin both procedures we've got, though ...

Alsop: No you won't ... no you won't ... just use the procedures you've got and add to those procedures a
statement saying that "when the FBI has completed its work, when it has completed its work ... as you
do not wish to inflict on the Attorney General the painful task of reviewing the evidence concerning
his own brother's assassination ... you have asked two or three, including I would include the best
judge on the Texas bench ... American jurists beyond, or individuals, Dean Acheson, for example, two
or three individuals beyond any possible suspicion as to their independence and impartiality, to draw
up a written report giving to the public everything of the FBI that is relevant’ and then you will have
this written report ... which is not Texas which tells the whole story which is based on the FBI evidence ...
it doesn't need to use the things that the FBI says can't be used ... and yet will carry absolute
conviction and will just be that little extra added to the admirable machinery that you've already got
that will carry complete conviction ...

Johnson: My lawyers, though, Joe, tell me that the White House must not ... the President ... must not
inject himself into local killings ... and ...

Alsop: I agree with that ... but in this case it does happen to be the killing of the President ... and the
thing is ... I am not suggesting issue ...

Johnson: I know that ...

Alsop: Mind you, mind you, Mr. President, I'm not talking about an investigative body, I am talking
about a body which will take all the evidence the FBI has amassed when they have completed their
inquiry and produce a public report on the death of the President. That, I think, you see, that is not an
interference in Texas ...

Johnson: No, but it's ...

Alsop: Wait a second, now ... that is a way to transmit to the public, without breach of confidence ...
and in a way that will carry absolute conviction of what the FBI has turned up ...

Johnson: Why can't the FBI transmit it?

Alsop: Because no–one ... again ... on the left they won't believe the FBI ... and the FBI doesn't write
very well ...

Johnson: You mean Nick Katzenbach?

Alsop: Well, I just wouldn't put it on Bobby and Nick Katzenbach ... I'd have it outside ... I think it's
unfair to put it on Bobby ... it is his own brother's death ...

Johnson: Not going to touch it on Bobby ... we're putting it on the finest jurists in the land ... former
head of the American Bar Association ... that's number one that we're putting it on ... then we're
putting it on the top investigative agency and asking them to write a report ...

Alsop: I'm not ... I'm not suggesting that you appoint an additional investigating commission ... I'm
just suggesting that if you want to carry absolute convictions ... this very small addition to the
admirable machinery that we already have ... will help you and I believe that it will [unintelligible] the
imagination of the country and be a very useful, happy thing ... and the man asks if you have two
seconds ... this afternoon ... for example ... ask Dean Acheson he's the man to ask ... I see all the
arguments you make and you're dead right and I'm not ... my conception is completely wrong ... but I
do think that this additional feature is needed ...

Johnson: I talked to ... I guess, after midnight last night ...

Alsop: Well, I know how you must have been concerned ...

Johnson: the ablest, the truest civil liberties lawyer in this town in my judgment ... the man that's
made the best arguments before the Supreme Court and it was his judgment the worst mistake we
could make ... getting trapped ...
Alsop: And, I now see exactly how right you are and how wrong I was about this idea of a blue ribbon commission ...

Johnson: Now, you see, Katzenbach suggested that and that provoked it ... the lawyers and the council just hit the ceiling ... said, my God Almighty ...

Alsop: I see ... I see ... I see that you're right and he was wrong ... what I do ...

Johnson: Then I called back to Katzenbach and I thought he accepted ...

Alsop: Well, I don't know anything about Katzenbach ... I haven't talked to him for three weeks ... but what I am suggesting is not at all what Katzenbach suggested ... I am suggesting simply a device ...

Johnson: Well, let me talk to Acheson and ...

Alsop: for summing up the result of the FBI inquiry in a way that will be completely coherent, detailed, and will carry unchallengeable convictions and this carrying conviction is just as important as carrying on the investigation ... in the right way ... and I worry about this Post editorial ... I'd like you to get ahead of them ...

Johnson: And, I worry about the Post, period ... but ...

Alsop: Well, I do too ... but I'd like you to get ahead of them and if you have ... if you make this decision and have Moyers call Friendly or Kay instead of being ... well, you know ... this is what we ought to do ... this is what ought to be done and then what you do being denounced as inadequate, they'll be put so hard and will do you a tremendous piece and I'm sure you will have the strongest possible support ... it will be thought that everything has been done that needs doing and ... but I do think ... my own judgment is that there is that little missing piece ... and, Dean may disagree and you talk to him ...

Johnson: I'll talk to him and ...

Alsop: And, I hate to interfere, sir ... I only dare to do so because I care so much about you ...

Johnson: I know that, Joe ...

Alsop: And I have the deepest faith in you and I think you've been right and I've been wrong ... as to the general conception ...

Johnson: It's not a question ... it's not really my thinking ... I'm not enough experienced ...

Alsop: I'm really ... what I'm really honestly giving you is public relation advice and not legal advice ...

Johnson: Well ... I'm not bounded ... I don't have a definite civil liberties picture that some of the folks that have worked on this with me ... I had a lawyer left my house around midnight ... and spent, I guess, three or four hours going over this thing from A to Z ... after the Attorney General was called in here yesterday afternoon ... and after the FBI was put on it ... after we told Secret Service to make available everything they had ... and, we thought, that this was the best way to handle it ...

Alsop: Well, Mr. President ... I repeat ... I must not keep you because you'll be late getting into your trousers ... but I repeat ... I think your decisions have been 100% right and I was wrong ... from the public relations standpoint and from the standpoint of carrying conviction ... there is that missing key which is easy to supply without infringing upon Texas feelings or sovereignty ...

Johnson: Thank you, my friend. Bye ...

Alsop: Goodbye ...
Appendix F
Carolyn Arnold's FBI Statements

Carolyn Arnold, a secretary working for the Texas School Book Depository, provided support for Lee Harvey Oswald's alibi, that he was on the first (i.e. ground) floor of the at the time of President Kennedy's assassination.

Statements to the FBI

Arnold was interviewed twice by the FBI:

- The Bureau's report of its first interview, four days after the assassination, stated that as Arnold waited outside the TSBD to see the president, she noticed Oswald just inside the building, close to the front door, at about 12:15.
- In March 1964, J. Lee Rankin of the Warren Commission asked the FBI to interview every employee of the TSBD again, asking each of them an identical and very limited set of questions. In her second statement, Carolyn Arnold maintained that she did not leave the building until about 12:25.

FBI copies of both statements are reproduced below, along with an internal FBI document that clarifies the time mentioned in Arnold's later statement.

The Timing of the Encounter with Oswald

The FBI reported that Carolyn Arnold saw Oswald after she had left the TSBD. According to the first account, she had left the building by 12:15; according to the second, she left at 12:25. The first statement, which she was not given the opportunity to check, is likely to be less reliable than the second, which she was required to sign.

Both of Carolyn Arnold’s statements, but especially the second, corroborate the accounts of two employees, James “Junior” Jarman and Harold Norman, who indirectly attested to Oswald's presence on the first floor at “between 12:20 and 12:25,” in Jarman’s words.

A Gunman Was on the Sixth Floor

A sighting of Oswald on the first floor at either of these times would seriously undermine the Warren Commission's account, which was obliged to have Oswald on the sixth floor, assembling his rifle and his sniper’s nest, since before 12:15. There are specific problems associated with Oswald being anywhere other than the sixth floor at either time:

- The motorcade, which was running about five minutes late, was supposed to pass the TSBD at about 12:25. Any gunman intending to shoot President Kennedy from the sixth floor would surely have been in place by this time.

Earl Golz Interviews Carolyn Arnold

In an interview with the journalist Earl Golz in 1978, Carolyn Arnold claimed that “she saw Oswald in the 2nd–floor lunchroom as she was on her way out of the depository to watch the presidential motorcade .... She left the building at 12:25pm.” (Earl Golz, ‘Was Oswald in Window?,’ Dallas Morning News, 26 November 1978, p.13A; available as PDF).

Golz quotes her as saying that Oswald “was sitting there ... in one of the booth seats on the right-hand side of the room as you go in. He was alone as usual and appeared to be having lunch. I did not speak to him but I recognized him clearly.” She explicitly denied that her sighting of Oswald took place near the front doors: “Why would I be looking back inside the building? That doesn’t make any sense to me.”

When and Where Did Carolyn Arnold See Lee Oswald?

Carolyn Arnold watched the motorcade alongside colleagues with whom she shared an office. One of these colleagues, Virgie Rackley, specifies that “at about 12:15pm ... she left her office” (Warren Commission Document 5, p.66). If the group left together, it is likely that Carolyn Arnold's first statement correctly records the time of her sighting of Oswald as about 12:15, even though the location was incorrect.
Arnold’s phrase, “booth seats,” could refer to either the second-floor lunch room or the first-floor domino room, both of which contained padded benches “on the right-hand side of the room as you go in” (for photographs of the interior of the TSBD, see Warren Commission Documents 81 and 496). The second-floor room is more likely, however:

- she and her colleagues shared an office on the second floor, next to the lunch room;
- their most direct route out of the building would not have taken them past the domino room;
- there was a stronger reason for her to visit the second-floor lunch room, which contained running water and a vending machine, than the domino room, which contained only tables and chairs.

There is other evidence that Oswald was in the second-floor lunch room at around this time. In a statement to the Sheriffs Department, Eddie Piper, a colleague of Oswald’s, claimed that he was on the first floor when, “at 12:00 Noon, this fellow Lee says to me, ‘I’m going up to eat’” (Warren Commission Hearings, vol.19, p.499).

### Oswald’s Movements During the Assassination

If Carolyn Arnold’s revised account, with its detailed and forceful identification of Oswald, is accurate, Oswald’s movements at the time of the assassination would have been as follows:

1. Shortly after mid-day, Oswald went from the first floor to the second-floor lunch room.
2. Oswald was there at about 12:15, when he was seen by Carolyn Arnold.
3. Shortly afterwards, he went downstairs to the domino room, and saw James Jarman and Harold Norman at around 12:25.
4. At about 12:31 he went back up to the second-floor lunch room to obtain a soft drink. At the entrance to the lunch room, Oswald encountered a police officer, Marrion Baker, and the building supervisor, Roy Truly.

### The Authorities and Carolyn Arnold

The FBI’s version of Arnold’s second interview contains a trivial and obvious typo: A.M. for P.M. The Bureau’s account of her first interview contains more serious inaccuracies:

- the area of the TSBD where Carolyn Arnold saw Lee Harvey Oswald,
- and the strength of her recognition of him.

She was not the only witness who questioned the reliability of the FBI’s version of their statements. Arnold Rowland, for example, pointed out several errors to the Warren Commission and mentioned that the FBI agents “just didn’t seem interested at all” in evidence that contradicted the lone-gunman account (Warren Commission Hearings, vol.2, pp.182–5).

The Warren Commission treated Carolyn Arnold as it treated many other awkward witnesses. She was not called to testify before the Commission. Neither of her statements was published in the Warren Commission’s Report or in its 26 volumes of Hearings and Exhibits. The Commission discounted her evidence and that of Eddie Piper, and concluded that “Charles Givens … was the last known employee to see Oswald inside the building prior to the assassination … at 11:45am” (Warren Report, p.143). Carolyn Arnold’s five colleagues from the Texas School Book Depository who stood with her as the motorcade passed, and who could have commented on the reliability of her account, were also ignored.

### Statement to FBI, 26 November 1963

Mrs. R. E. ARNOLD, Secretary, Texas School Book Depository, advised she was in her office on the second floor of the building on November 22, 1963, and left that office between 12:00 and 12:15 PM, to go downstairs and stand in front of the building to view the Presidential Motorcade. As she was standing in front of the building, she stated she thought she caught a fleeting glimpse of LEE HARVEY OSWALD standing in the hallway between the front door and the double doors leading to the warehouse, located on the first floor. She could not be sure that this was OSWALD, but said she felt it was and believed the time to be a few minutes before 12:15 PM.

She stated thereafter she viewed the Presidential Motorcade and heard the shots that were fired at the President; however, she could furnish no information of value as to the individual firing the shots or any other information concerning OSWALD, whom she stated she did not know and had merely seen him working in the building.

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She stated thereafter she viewed the Presidential Motorcade and heard the shots that were fired at the President; however, she could furnish no information of value as to the individual firing the shots or any other information concerning OSWALD, whom she stated she did not know and had merely seen him working in the building.

on 11/26/1963 at Dallas, Texas

File # DL 89–43

by Special Agent Richard E. Harrison

(Warren Commission Document 5, p.41)
Statement to FBI, 18 March 1964

I, Mrs. R. E. (Carolyn) Arnold, hereby freely and voluntarily make the following statement to E. J. Robertson who has identified himself as a Special Agent of the F.B.I.

My name is Carolyn Arnold and I am married to R. E. Arnold. I reside at 3325 South Tyler Street, Dallas, Texas. I am 20 years of age, born June 1, 1943, at Memphis, Tenn. I am a white female, and am employed by the Texas School Book Depository as a Secretary.

On November 22, 1963, at the time President Kennedy was shot, I was standing in front of the Texas School Book Depository Building. I was with Mr. O. V. Campbell, 7120 Twin Tree Lane, Dallas; Mrs. L. C. (Bonnie) Richey, 220 South Marsalis, Apt. 117, Dallas; Mrs. Barney (Betty) Dragoo, 2705 West Brooklyn, Dallas; Mrs. Don (Virgie) Baker née Rackley, 3600½ Live Oak, Dallas; and Miss Judy Johnson, 915 Sunnyside, Dallas, at the time President Kennedy was shot.

I did not see Lee Harvey Oswald at the time President Kennedy was shot.

On the morning of November 22, 1963, I do not remember seeing any stranger in the building housing the Texas School Book Depository.

I left the Texas School Book Depository Building at about 12:25 PM, November 22, 1963, and never returned to this building on that date.

I have read the above statement consisting of one and one-half pages and it is true and correct to the best of my knowledge.

Mrs. R. E. (CAROLYN) ARNOLD

Witnesses:

- E. J. ROBERTSON, Special Agent, FBI, Dallas, Texas, 3/18/64
- THOMAS T. TRETTIS, Jr., Special Agent, FBI, Dallas, Texas, 3/18/64

(FBI Radiogram Document 706, p.7)

FBI Radiogram, 31 March 1964

TO DALLAS (89–43)

FROM DIRECTOR FBI (62–109060)

ASSASSINATION OF PRESIDENT JOHN FITZGERALD KENNEDY, NOVEMBER TWENTY–TWO, NINETEEN SIXTY–THREE, MISCELLANEOUS INFORMATION CONCERNING.

RE BUREAU AIRTLE MARCH SIXTEEN, LAST AND YOUR AIRTLES MARCH TWENTY–FIVE AND TWENTY–EIGHT, LAST RELATING TO COMMISSION'S REQUEST FOR SIGNED STATEMENTS FROM INDIVIDUALS KNOWN TO HAVE BEEN IN TEXAS SCHOOL BOOK DEPOSITORY BUILDING ON NOVEMBER TWENTY–TWO, NINETEEN SIXTY–THREE.

BEFORE STATEMENTS CAN BE DISSEMINATED TO COMMISSION, FOLLOWING CORRECTIONS NECESSARY:

STATEMENT OF MRS. R. E. PAREN CAROLYN UNPAREN ARNOLD, PARAGRAPH SIX, LINE TWO, TIME INDICATED AS TWELVE TWENTY–FIVE A.M., SHOULD BE QUOTE P.M. UNQUOTE. IF THIS IS TYPO, BUREAU WILL HANDLE.

STATEMENT OF VIRGINIA H. BARNUM DOES NOT DISCLOSE HOME ADDRESS.

STATEMENTS OF MRS. R. A. REID AND MRS. ROBERT E. PAREN PAULINE SANDERS, SR., PARAGRAPH THREE EACH STATEMENT DISCLOSES DATE OF ACTIVITY AS NOVEMBER TWENTY–TWO NINETEEN SIXTY–FOUR. SINCE THIS DATE IS OF PRIMARY CONCERN, IT MUST BE CORRECTED.

STATEMENT OF JOYCE MAURINE STANSBERY PARAGRAPH SIX, LINE TWO SECOND WORD MISSPELLED, BUREAU WILL HANDLE IF THIS IS TYPO.

AFTER CORRECTIONS MUST BE IMMEDIATELY HANDLED EITHER BY ADVICE TO THE BUREAU OR BY OBTAINING NEW CORRECT STATEMENTS FROM INDIVIDUALS INDICATED. HANDLE IMMEDIATELY SO DISSEMINATION TO PRESIDENT'S COMMISSION CAN BE ACCOMPLISHED.

Note continued:

Commission by letter 3/16/64 requested signed statements be obtained from every person known to have been in Texas School Book Depository Building on 11/22/63. Each statement must contain six
specified items. Dallas has obtained 75 signed statements and above corrections as indicated necessary before dissemination can be made. As soon as necessary information and data is obtained, from Dallas, appropriate dissemination to Commission will be made.

(FBI HQ JFK Assassination File 62-109060-55)
Appendix G

Memo: Was Oswald an FBI Agent?

One of the first matters to be considered by the Warren Commission was also one of the most sensitive: an allegation that Lee Harvey Oswald, the only official suspect in the assassination of President Kennedy, had been a paid undercover agent of the FBI or the CIA.

Stories had already emerged that Soviet officials had met Oswald in Mexico City a few weeks before the assassination. These stories had generated competing conspiracy theories that blamed either the Soviets or the US security system for the killing. The Warren Commission was established specifically in order to counteract these conspiracy theories.

J. Lee Rankin, the Warren Commission’s General Counsel, was told in January 1964 by a reliable source that it was common knowledge among journalists in Texas that Oswald had regularly received $200 per month from the FBI. If Oswald had indeed been secretly employed by a federal agency, the Commission would of course have found it almost impossible to make a convincing case that he had acted alone. Rankin and Earl Warren were determined to silence the rumour.

The matter was discussed at an emergency meeting of the Commission on 22 January 1964. Two days later, Rankin and Warren met officials from Texas, who repeated the FBI rumour and mentioned other rumours about a connection between Oswald and the CIA. According to FBI interviews with one of the officials, Rankin swore them to secrecy. At the next meeting of the Warren Commission, on 27 January, Rankin discussed the FBI rumour but did not mention Oswald’s alleged connection with the CIA.

Secrecy was extended to the records of the various meetings. Part of the 22 January meeting took place off the record, and the stenographer’s notes of the remainder of the meeting were destroyed. A tape recording survived only by chance. No stenographer was present at the 24 January meeting; the only record was Rankin’s memo, which is reproduced below. These documents only came to light many years later, and were released to the public as the result of litigation under the Freedom of Information Act.

Some of the details of these rumours were almost certainly false. The FBI numbers attributed to Oswald, S172 or S179, did not follow the normal pattern for paid informants, which was: an abbreviation for the agent’s local office (e.g. DL for Dallas, or NO for New Orleans) followed by an arbitrary four-digit number, and finally ‘S’ if the informant provided information on security-related matters. Alonso Hudkins, the journalist at the centre of the affair, later claimed that he had invented the numbers. The CIA number, 110669, did follow that agency’s normal pattern.

Whatever the basis for these particular rumours, there is strong circumstantial evidence (see Chapter 9, ‘The Career of Lee Harvey Oswald,’ pp.29ff above) that Oswald had been an undercover agent of the federal government, at least while he was:

- a defector to the Soviet Union between 1959 and 1962, and
- a duplicitous pro- and anti-Castro activist in New Orleans during the summer of 1963.

About J. Lee Rankin’s Memorandum

The most comprehensive account of the memorandum and the Warren Commission’s treatment of the rumours can be found in Gerald D. McKnight, Breach of Trust: How the Warren Commission Failed the Nation and Why (University Press of Kansas, 2005), pp.128–147. The book contains a transcript of Rankin’s memo on pp.366–8, from which the transcript below was taken.

Although the memorandum is undated, it was created between 24 January 1964, the date of the meeting, and 27 January, the date when Lee Rankin and Earl Warren were to bring up the subject with the other members of the Commission.

References

- Rankin’s memorandum for the files is CIA document 487–195A, Record Copy 201–0289248. Many of Rankin’s Warren Commission files are held at the National Archives.
- Transcripts of the Warren Commission’s sessions can be found here: http://www.maryferrell.org/mfweb/archive/docset/getList.do?docSetId=1007.
- For the FBI’s interviews with Hudkins and the Texas officials, see FBI HQ Oswald File 105–82555–100.
Memorandum for the Files

From: Mr J. Lee Rankin, General Counsel  
Subject: Rumors that Oswald was an undercover agent

Allegations have been received by the Commission to the effect that Lee Harvey Oswald was an undercover agent for the Federal Bureau of Investigation or the Central Intelligence Agency prior to the assassination of President Kennedy on November 22, 1963. This memorandum reviews these allegations and summarizes the action taken to date by the Commission.

On Wednesday, January 22, 1964, I received a telephone call from Waggoner Carr, Attorney General of Texas. Mr Carr stated that he had received on a confidential basis an allegation to the effect that Lee Harvey Oswald was an undercover agent for the Federal Bureau of Investigation since September of 1962, and that he had been paid $200.00 a month from an account designated as No. 179. Mr Carr indicated that this allegation was in the hands of the press and defense counsel for Ruby and suggested that his information came ultimately from District Attorney Henry Wade, although he stated that he had not discussed this matter directly with Wade.

After a discussion with the Chairman of the Commission and Mr Leon Jaworski, I contacted Attorney General Carr. I asked the Attorney General to contact District Attorney Wade and try to ascertain more definitely the source of this allegation. At the request of the Chairman of the Commission, I also asked Mr Carr to ask Wade and his assistant, Bill Alexander, to come to Washington as soon as possible to discuss this matter.

A meeting of the Commission was called for 5:30pm on Wednesday, January 22, 1964. All members of the Commission were present with the exception of John J. McCloy and Senator Richard B. Russell. This specific allegation was discussed in detail by the Commission. It was recognized by all members of the Commission that, although this allegation was probably not accurate, this matter had to be regarded seriously by the Commission. It was agreed that the Commission would have to take whatever action necessary to pursue this matter to final conclusion. During the meeting efforts were made to contact Attorney General Carr again. When he was contacted, Attorney General Carr stated that the District Attorney Wade had been unable or unwilling to specify the source of this allegation in more detail. He informed me that he and Messrs Wade, Alexander, Jaworski, and Storey would come to Washington the next day.

On Thursday, January 23, 1964 Secret Service Report No. 767 was brought to my attention. This report is dated January 23, 1964 and summarizes an interview by Agent Bertram with Houston Post reporter Alonso H. Hudkins III. A pertinent paragraph of the report reads as follows:

> On December 17, Mr Hudkins advised that he had just returned from a weekend in Dallas, during which time he talked to Allen Sweatt, Chief Criminal Division, Sheriff’s Office, Dallas. Chief Sweatt mentioned that it was his opinion that Lee Harvey Oswald was being paid $200 a month by the FBI as an informant in connection with their subversive investigation. He furnished the alleged informant number assigned to Oswald by the FBI as "Sr72".

The report concludes with the request that Chief Allen Sweatt of the Dallas Sheriff’s office be interviewed regarding the above allegation. Upon being informed by representatives of the Secret Service that this subsequent interview had not yet taken place, I requested that it be done immediately.

On Friday, January 24, 1964, the Chairman of the Commission and I met with Attorney General Carr, District Attorney Wade, Assistant District Attorney Alexander, Mr Jaworski and Dean Storey. We reviewed the situation to date. District Attorney Wade and others of the Texas representatives stated that the rumors to the effect that Oswald was an undercover agent were widely held among representatives of the press in Dallas. They stated also that Mr Belli, attorney for Jack L. Ruby, was familiar with these allegations. Wade stated he was also aware of an allegation that Oswald was an informant for the CIA and carried Number 10669.

District Attorney Wade and Alexander stated that the sources for these allegations or rumors were several reporters, including Houston Post reporter Hudkins. They did not pinpoint Hudkins as being the source of this information, but they did not name any other individual reporters. They both indicated that they would not vouch for the integrity or accuracy of these reporters. They did inform us that this information was not disclosed in chambers during the bail hearing on Monday, January 20, 1964. District Attorney Wade stated that, based on his experience as an FBI agent during the years 1939–1943, he did not think that the number would be either a payroll or voucher number carried on the Bureau records. He suggested that the records are not kept that way and would not show the name of the informed, who would probably be paid by the FBI in cash. He further stated that in his
experience it was customary for the agent to carry the informer on his books as a number.

There was a general discussion regarding other information disclosed in the investigative reports which lend some degree of credibility to these allegations. Among other matters discussed at the meeting, the following were stressed:

- the use by Oswald of Post Office boxes;
- use by Oswald of aliases;
- the lengthy 2-hour interview conducted by the FBI of Oswald in August of 1962;
- interviews conducted by Special Agent Hosty in Dallas regarding Oswald’s whereabouts and the failure to notify Secret Service of this information;
- the comment after the assassination of Special Agent Hosty that Oswald had contacted two known subversive agents about 15 days before the assassination;
- Oswald had Special Agent Hosty’s car license and telephone numbers in his notebook;
- Oswald’s mother has stated that her son was an agent for the FBI or some other agency;
- Special Agent Hosty was transferred from Dallas two weeks after the assassination.

The Chief Justice decided to present the results of this meeting to the entire Commission on Monday, January 27, 1964 and decided to propose tentatively that necessary inquiries be made concerning these allegations and that this memorandum be prepared for the record.

On the evening of Friday, January 24, 1964, a member of my staff was informed by representatives of Secret Service that Allen Sweatt, Chief of the Criminal Division of the Sheriff’s office in Dallas, had been interviewed regarding the allegations made in Secret Service Report No. 767. According to this oral report, Sweatt stated that he received the allegation from Mr. Alexander in District Attorney Wade’s office. He also mentioned Houston Post reporter Hudkins as a source of the information. When Sweatt was informed that the number in a similar allegation was 179 rather than 172, as he had indicated initially, Sweatt indicated that he would accept 179 as the correct number. Secret Service Inspector Kelley expressed his view that Hudkins was not very reliable, based on previous unfounded reports which he had furnished to Secret Service.
Appendix H
Edgewood Arsenal Bullet Tests

The Warren Commission authorised ballistics tests to be carried out by the Department of Defense at Edgewood Arsenal in Maryland. Excerpts from the report on these tests, *Wound Ballistics of 6.5–mm Mannlicher–Carcano Ammunition*, CRDLR 3264, by Alfred G. Olivier and Arthur J. Dziemian, are given below.

Also included below is the text of a letter from Dr Joseph Dolce, a senior scientist at Edgewood Arsenal, commenting on the Warren Commission's treatment of the evidence provided by the scientists.

The Warren Commission's account of the assassination of President Kennedy required that all of the non-fatal wounds to Kennedy and Governor John Connally were caused by one specific bullet that had apparently been discovered on a stretcher at Parkland Hospital.

For the commission's case to be credible, it was necessary that one bullet had entered the president's back, exited through his throat, entered Connally's back close to his right armpit, smashed several inches of one rib, exited the right side of his chest, broken the bone at his wrist, and lodged itself in his left thigh: the single-bullet theory. If all of these injuries had not been caused by only one bullet, the assassination could not plausibly have been carried out by only one gunman.

It was also necessary that Commission Exhibit 399, the bullet apparently discovered on the stretcher, was the bullet that had caused all the injuries. The CE 399 bullet had been fired from the rifle that had been found in the Texas School Book Depository, and thus must have been involved in the assassination in some way. If CE 399 was not the single bullet that had caused all the non-fatal injuries:

- CE 399 must have been planted on the stretcher while Governor Connally was undergoing emergency surgery,
- or CE 399 must have been entered into evidence dishonestly at a later date.

The commission's case was made difficult by the fact that this bullet was in almost pristine condition: it was slightly flattened at the base, and it possessed a few scratches, but it was otherwise undamaged. The commission was obliged to demonstrate that this amount of damage to the bullet was consistent with the amount of damage caused to the victims, and in particular to the broken bones suffered by Governor Connally.

In a general way, the results of the tests were helpful to the Warren Commission. Bullets of the type found on the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository could have caused the known injuries to Governor Connally. They could have caused the substantial injury to President Kennedy's skull. Fragments from this type of bullet could have caused the reported damage to the car.

In other ways, the tests were less helpful. The large number of tiny metallic fragments in the president's skull, which are visible in the X-rays from the autopsy, do not appear to have been replicated in the tests. Such fragmentation is typical of soft-nosed bullets, and not of the metal-jacketed type found in the TSBD. More importantly, all the bullets that had been fired into ribs and wrist bones were more deformed than the CE 399 bullet.

Two photographs in particular were inimical to the commission's case:

- *Figure A14*, on page 35 of the report, depicts four of the ten bullets that had been fired into the wrist bones of human cadavers. All are substantially more deformed than CE 399.
- *Figure A22*, on page 44, shows two bullets: one that had been fired into a goat's rib, and one that had been fired into a block of gelatin. The former was noticeably flattened, while the latter was in a similar state to CE 399.

For comparison, photographs of CE 399 from various angles can be found at [http://www.maryferrell.org/wiki/index.php/Photos_-_NARA_Evidence_-_Magic_Bullet](http://www.maryferrell.org/wiki/index.php/Photos_-_NARA_Evidence_-_Magic_Bullet).

The Department of Defense had supplied twenty documents to the Warren Commission. In 1965, these documents were evaluated before being placed in the National Archives. All were released apart from the Edgewood Arsenal test report, *Wound Ballistics of 6.5–mm Mannlicher–Carcano Ammunition*. The report was withheld until ten years after the assassination, when it was released to the public as the result of a law suit under the Freedom of Information Act.

Dr Joseph Dolce's Letter

At the time of the assassination, Dr Joseph Dolce had been the US Army's most senior expert in wound
ballistics. He had participated in informal discussions with members of the Warren Commission staff, but was not called to offer his opinion for the record. When the House Select Committee on Assassinations reviewed the case, Dolce wrote to his senator, offering to appear before the committee. His letter is reproduced below.

As well as questioning the Warren Commission’s decision to ignore his evidence, Dolce made several pertinent points:

- The two doctors whose evidence the commission did take, Olivier and Dziemian, did not testify in accordance with their experimental findings.
- Exit wounds are invariably larger than entrance wounds, as was the case with all ten of the Edgewood Arsenal experiments on human wrists. The larger wound on Connally’s wrist, however, was assumed to be the entrance wound.
- The pathologists at the autopsy should have dissected the bullet’s supposed path through the president’s neck.
- The CE 399 bullet could not have caused so much damage and remained virtually intact: “one bullet striking the President’s neck, the Governor’s chest and wrist, should be badly deformed, as our experiments at the Edgewood Arsenal proved.”

About the Edgewood Arsenal Report

The report contains several questionable assumptions that do not affect the validity of the results. For example:

- It was assumed that only three shots were fired, all of them by Lee Oswald.
- The stretcher on which a bullet was found was probably not that of Governor Connally, according to the testimony of Darrell Tomlinson, who discovered the bullet: Warren Commission Hearings, vol. 6, pp. 130ff.
- More fundamentally, CE 399 was probably not the bullet that was found on that stretcher. See Gary Aguilar and Josiah Thompson, ‘The Magic Bullet: Even More Magical Than We Knew’ at history-matters.com.
- A bullet almost certainly entered President Kennedy’s upper back, not his neck.
- The entrance wound in the president’s skull was assumed to be close to the external occipital protuberance, as the pathologists claimed. Study of the Zapruder film later revealed that the angle of the president’s head at the moment of impact was such that a bullet entering at this low point and exiting at the top of the head could not have come from the sixth floor of the TSBD.

Location and Discussion of the Documents

The report is now stored at the National Archives. A scan in PNG format is available online at http://www.maryferrell.org/mffweb/archive/viewer/showDoc.do?docId=62296.

Dr Joseph Dolce’s letter is also at the National Archives (NARA RIF no: 180–10084–10430). A scan is available online at: http://www.maryferrell.org/mffweb/archive/viewer/showDoc.do?docId=99785.

For a detailed discussion of the Edgewood Arsenal tests and the Warren Commission’s treatment of the evidence, see:


Excerpts and Links

The excerpts from the report, below, omit material that is irrelevant to the Warren Commission’s case: the path of the bullets through flesh, the amount of energy spent, and the effects of temperature. Links are given to the photographic evidence contained in the report. Dolce’s letter is reproduced in full.
Wound Ballistics of 6.5-mm Mannlicher–Carcano Ammunition

By Alfred G. Olivier and Arthur J. Dziemian

Introduction (p.7)

Under the authority of Executive Order No. 11130, signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson, which states that “All Executive departments and agencies are directed to furnish the Commission with such facilities, services and cooperation as it may request from time to time,” the President’s Commission on the Assassination of President John F. Kennedy requested that these Laboratories conduct a series of experiments designed to simulate, if possible, the wounds received by President Kennedy and Governor Connally on 22 November 1963. It was hoped that information might be obtained that could relate the three shots that were reported to be fired to the wounds received by the President and the Governor.

For these experiments the rifle used by the assassin (Commission exhibit 139, serial no. C2766 was used [figure A1, appendix A (all figures, A1 through A24, are in appendix A)]). The ammunition used for these experiments was the 160-gr, 6.5-mm, Mannlicher–Carcano–type ball, manufactured by Western Cartridge Company, East Alton, Illinois (figure A2, part A). The lot number was WCC 6000 (figure A2, part B). This is believed to be the same type of ammunition used by the assassin. These bullets have a gilding metal jacket, whereas the Italian–made military ammunition uses steel–jacketed bullets.

Procedures (p.8)

Experimental procedures were divided into six general categories as follows:

- tissue–retardation studies,
- shots at gelatin–filled and coated human skulls,
- shots at human–cadaver arms,
- shots at the ribs of anesthetized goats,
- energy studies in 20% gelatin tissue models,
- and effects of ammunition temperature upon velocity.

Procedures: Human–Skull Study (p.9)

The human–skull studies were conducted to see if the 6.5-mm Mannlicher–Carcano bullet would inflict massive skull wounds, such as the President received. A full–jacketed blunt–nosed bullet of this type tends to be very stable and should not cause such massive wounds unless the nose of the bullet were to flatten or deform severely, causing rapid slowdown with a resultant increase in kinetic–energy expenditure within the cranium. Before conducting these tests, the experimenters were of the opinion that only an unstable bullet or a soft–nosed hunting bullet could produce such damage.

Procedures: Human–Arm Study (p.10)

For this study, amputated arms from human cadavers were used in an attempt to simulate the wrist wound received by Governor Connally. Ten arms were used for these tests.

The operative record, as dictated by Dr. Charles Gregory in the Commission report, located the entrance wound “on the dorsal aspect of the right wrist over the junction of the distal fourth of the radius and the shaft.” He further stated that it “was approximately 2 cm in length and rather oblique with the loss of tissue with some considerable contusion at the margins of it.” The doctor located the exit wound “along the volar surface of the wrist about 2 cm above the flexion crease of the wrist and in the midline.” The operative report does not mention the site of the exit wound, but Dr. Gregory later stated that it was a very small slit that was almost obscured by one of the creases on the volar surface of the wrist.

The cadaver wrists used for this study were positioned (figure A6) so that the path of the projectiles through the wrists would be the same as the one through the wrist of the Governor. The distance from rifle to target for these studies was 70 yd, as this was believed to be about the distance from the assassin to Governor Connally if the Governor had been struck by a second shot after President Kennedy had been struck by the first. Velocity–recording screens were placed behind the wrists (figure A6) to record the exit velocities of the bullets. The bullets were recovered from cotton waste and polyethylene foam. An average striking velocity for this distance was obtained just before the arm shooting commenced.
Results: Human–Skull Study (p.14)

Three shots were fired to determine the striking velocity of the bullet at 90 yd. The recorded velocities were 1,790, 1,833, and 1,854 ft/sec. The average striking velocity at this distance was 1,826 ft/sec.

Ten skulls were shot at this range, and extensive damage was produced in each instance. The bullets broke up to a greater or lesser degree in at least nine of the skulls. This was determined by recovered fragments (figure A9) and radiographs (figure A10). Figures A11 and A12 show some of the typical skull damage produced by this bullet. A piece of unclipped goat skin that was used to cover the target area on one of the skulls is shown in figure A13.

Results: Human–Arm Study (pp.14–15)

Five shots were fired to determine the striking velocity of the bullet at 70 yd. The average striking velocity for this distance was 1,858 ft/sec. Exit velocities were obtained for 7 of the 10 shots. The average exit velocity was 1,776 ft/sec, giving an average velocity loss, through the wrist, of only 82 ft/sec.

A most interesting finding from this series of shots was the comparative sizes of the entrance and exit wounds. In every instance the exit wound was larger than the entrance wound. The average size of the entrance wound for the 10 shots was 0.7 by 3.3 cm, the longer dimension being caused by the acute striking angle of the bullet. The average size of the 10 exit wounds was 2.0 by 6.7 cm. In contrast, the entrance wound in the Governor's wrist was described as being larger than the exit wound. It is quite certain that the larger of the Governor's wrist wounds was the entrance wound for the following reasons:

• because fibers from his suit were found in this area;
• because of the small slit–like nature of the other wound, indicating a low velocity;
• and because it would be impossible for the Governor to orient his wrist in such a fashion that the wounds would be reversed without holding his arm in such a position that it would be easily noticeable in the movie films of the shooting.

Figure A14, parts A and B, shows some of the recovered bullets. The bullets in part A are more flattened than those in part B, because the former hit the hard cortical bone of the shaft, and the latter hit nearer the epiphysis, where the cortical bone thins out and the softer cancellous bone is present.

Figures A15 and A16 show some typical wrist wounds produced by this bullet. In every instance, the wounds that were produced in the wrists of the cadavers were larger than the wound of Governor Connally's wrist.

Results: Goat–Thorax Study (pp.15–16)

Of the 13 goats that were wounded, 7 received fractured ribs from direct hits and 2 received fractured ribs from near misses. Because of the obliquity at which the bullets struck the goats, five of the animals had larger entrance wounds than exit wounds. In two animals, the bullets made long superficial lacerations with no definite entrance and exit holes. In only one animal, goat no. 12965, did the bullet strike and pass along the rib in a manner similar to the one that wounded Governor Connally. This goat received a comminuted fracture along 13 cm of the rib’s length (figures A19, parts A and B, and A20) as compared to the 10–cm–long comminuted fracture of the Governor’s rib. The goat’s lung (figure A21, part A) was wounded, and two small bone chips were found in the lung. The diaphragm had a laceration (figure A21, part B) from which four bone chips were removed at autopsy.

Figure A22 shows this bullet after recovery from cotton waste and polyethylene foam. For comparison, figure A22 also shows a bullet that struck a gelatin block at a similar velocity and was then caught in the same material. This latter bullet is relatively undeformed. The bullet that was recovered from Governor Connally’s stretcher was flattened somewhat but not as much as was the one from the goat. The pristine bullet that struck the goat lost 265 ft/sec velocity in passing through the animal. The bullet that struck the Governor, if pristine, would have lost about 400 ft/sec velocity because of the thicker torso. It would have lost much more if the bullet was yawing somewhat when it hit the Governor. The bullet that passed through the goat was yawing badly, perhaps tumbling end over end, when it struck the velocity–recording screen about a foot behind the goat (figure A23).

Discussion: Human–Arm Study (pp.17–18)

The human–arm study revealed several interesting facts.

1. The average velocity loss through the wrist for the seven shots for which exit velocities were obtained was only 82 ft/sec.
2. For the 10 cadaver wrists, the entrance wound was smaller than the exit wound in every instance. Governor Connally’s wrist had a larger entrance wound than exit wound.
3. The damage done to the cadaver wrists was greater than was the damage done to the wrist of Governor Connally.

4. The bullets that struck the bones in the cadaver wrists were deformed on the front end (figure A14). The bullet found on Governor Connally's stretcher was slightly deformed but the front end was not deformed.

From the preceding facts, it can be deduced that the bullet that struck the Governor's wrist was probably yawing (larger entrance wound than exit wound) and was probably traveling at a much reduced velocity, because even though yawing it did less damage (and suffered less deformation) than would a high-velocity, pristine bullet.

Another wound not mentioned before was a small wound in the Governor's thigh. This was described as a shallow puncture wound. This wound was compatible with a nearly spent bullet, but not one traveling at a high speed, as were the bullets that exited the wrists of the cadavers.

**Discussion: Goat-Thorax Study (p.18)**

In only 1 of the 13 goats that were used for these tests was the path of the bullet along the rib similar to the one that wounded the Governor. In both instances the bullet did not enter the pleural cavity but grazed the rib, throwing secondary bone fragments into the pleural cavity. The only striking difference between the two shots was that the bullet that was recovered after passing through the goat was flatter than was the bullet that was recovered from the Governor's stretcher. Possibly, the bullet that struck Governor Connally struck at a slower velocity, because of passage through the President's neck, than the one that hit the goat.

**Conclusions (p.20)**

The results indicated that the wounds sustained by the President and by Governor Connally, including the massive head wound of the President, could be produced by the above type of bullet and rifle.

Tissue-retardation studies showed that the bullet that wounded the President in the neck had enough remaining velocity to account for all of the Governor's wounds. If it had struck the car, the damage would have been very evident and much greater than the slight damage that was found on the windshield.

Shots at human skulls demonstrated that this stable, blunt-nosed, military bullet was capable of inflicting massive head wounds. Some of the recovered bullet fragments greatly resembled those that were found in the President's car. It was probably a fragment of this type that damaged the windshield.

It is more difficult to draw a firm conclusion from shots at the goat thorax. The wound received by Governor Connally could have been produced by either the shot that hit President Kennedy in the neck or by a separate shot. If it was a separate shot, then the bullet that hit the President in the neck must be accounted for.

The bullet that struck Governor Connally in the wrist was probably the same bullet that produced the chest wound and subsequently produced the small wound in the thigh. The comparative sizes of entrance and exit wounds, the amount of bone damage, and the lack of bullet deformation all indicate that the wrist was struck by a tumbling bullet traveling at a reduced velocity.

**My Thoughts re President J. F. Kennedy Assassination**

By Joseph R. Dolce, MD, FACS

I am the Chief Consultant for the US Army in wound ballistics at the Edgewood Arsenal and Aberdeen Proving Ground in Maryland. I have been dealing with high velocity missiles for the Army for the past twenty-five years and I feel that there are no forensic pathologists in this country who have had the experience I have had with this type of missile. The forensic pathologist in civilian life, deals primarily with homicides caused by slow velocity missiles.

I appeared before the investigating team of the Warren Commission at the VA Building in Washington, D.C. on April 21, 1964. At that time, I reviewed all the X-rays and Zapruder film along with Governor Connaley [sic], his wife and his doctors. At that time, Governor Connaley sat on my right, while reviewing the Zapruder films and he (Governor Connaley) specifically told me, that he did not know that his wrist was injured until he reacted fully from anesthesia [sic] and noted a plaster cast on his right hand and forearm — but, in an interview with Life magazine — he goes on to say how his wrist was injured.

I am disturbed as to why I was not asked by the Warren Commission to give final testimony, even
though Doctors Olivier and Dzimean [sic], to whom I serve as their Consultant were called, to give
final testimony. I had advised these doctors to conduct certain experiments at Edgewood — which
they did — and their findings were not consistent with their testimony.

Dr. Olivier accepts Dr. Gregory’s impression of what was the entrance and what was the exit wounds of
Connaley’s right wrist, in spite of the fact, that his experiments on ten (10) cadaver wrists proved just
the opposite — yet, he is willing to accept the conclusions of Gregory, who has no wound ballistic
experience. This is extremely important, as he then tries to fit the yaw and the tumbling effects to
coincide with Gregory’s interpretations — this is wrong and this is the part of the investigation that
has been criticized so bitterly in medical circles. Personally, I strongly believe that the wrist wound in a
separate and distinct wound made by one of the shots by Oswald. Also — this bullet is not deformed
and yet, the bullets that struck the cadaver wrists are badly deformed, and these same bullets did not
go through a neck or through a chest wall. In the experiments on ten cadaver wrists, all the exit wounds
are larger than the entrance wounds — this is a known fact — yet, Dr. Olivier chose to accept Gregory’s
thoughts of Connaley’s wound as just the opposite.

I feel that the first bullet fired by Oswald went through the President’s neck and caused him to
become paralyzed even though the bullet did not strike the spine. This is due to the fact that you can
have an injury to the spinal cord with high velocity missiles without the missiles striking the cord,
because of the large temporary cavity produced by high velocity missiles. I can demonstrate and prove this fact by several films which we have developed at the Edgewood Arsenal. The autopsy should
have included a section of the cervical spinal cord, which I am sure would have demonstrated a
hemorrhage.

I am convinced that the one bullet theory is wrong, because of the fact, that one bullet striking the
President’s neck, the Governor’s chest and wrist, should be badly deformed, as our experiments at the
Edgewood Arsenal proved. There never was a bullet in Governor Connaley’s left thigh, but just a small
fragment which I feel came from the third bullet which struck J.F.K. in the head. My testimony on the
one bullet theory are [sic] clearly written in Dr. Thompson’s book — “Six Seconds in Dallas” on pages
152 and 206.

I feel that the sequence of the bullets is as follows:

1. The first bullet went through JFK’s neck and this is the so-called pristine bullet
2. The second bullet went through Governor Connaley’s chest and wrist and the film clearly
demonstrates Connaley’s wrist against his chest wall. I feel that this is the bullet that is missing
3. The third bullet struck JFK in the head and one fragment of this bullet struck Connaley in the left
thigh and also struck the windshield of the car

I feel that Oswald was the sole assassin who fired the three shots.

This is not an unusual deduction with high velocity missiles and we are compounding this
investigation because it happens to be the President of the U.S. who was assassinated.

I have waited so long to express my thoughts, because I did not realize that the testimony given by my
colleagues at Edgewood, was so different from what we had discussed and proved by experiments at
Edgewood.

I am in the private practice of General Surgery & trauma and have had a great deal of experience in my
private practice with gun shot wounds, also I served 37 years in the U.S. Army and Army reserves and
have had wide experience with wounds caused by high velocity missiles.

I am a retired colonel of the U.S. Army Medical Corps.

I am a board certified surgeon and a Fellow and the American College of Surgeons and also, the Army’s
ballistics expert and I feel that I should be given the opportunity to express my thoughts before a
responsible group of people.

I have been awarded the following decorations for my work in Wound Ballistics

1. The Distinguished Civilian Service Medal — the Army’s highest civilian service award
2. The Legion of Merit — the Army’s fifth highest military award.

Joseph R. Dolce, M.D. F.A.C.S.
Appendix I

The Liebeler Memorandum

Wesley J. Liebeler was one of the Warren Commission's senior attorneys. He had interviewed several important witnesses, including Silvia Odio and Abraham Zapruder. This internal memorandum contains his comments about a draft version of chapter 4 of the Warren Report.

Some of Liebeler's comments are trivial, to do with smoothing the rough edges of an unpolished document, but others raise serious questions about the Warren Commission's case against Lee Harvey Oswald. Especially noteworthy are Liebeler's remarks about:

- the unreliability of Helen Markham, the main witness to the murder of Officer Tippit,
- and the fact that almost all of the Commission's expert marksmen were unable to reproduce the feat of a hypothetical sixth-floor lone assassin.

Many of the important points raised by Liebeler were not dealt with by the time the Report was published, and were brought to public attention by several of the early critics of the Warren Report.

Liebeler's memorandum, along with many other Warren Commission documents, was placed in the National Archives. It was overlooked for many years until Howard Roffman made use of it in his book, Presumed Guilty, in the mid-1970s.

The memorandum was first published in full by the House Select Committee on Assassinations as JFK Exhibit no.36 in its appendix, volume 11, pp.224-232, a scan of which is available in PNG format at http://www.maryferrell.org/mffweb/archive/viewer/showDoc.do?absPageId=39830.

The page numbers quoted by Liebeler do not correspond to those in the published Warren Report.

HSCA JFK Exhibit no. 36: Memorandum re Galley Proofs of Chapter IV of the Report

From: Wesley J. Liebeler
September 6, 1964

I set forth below comments on the galley proofs of chapter IV of the report, a copy of which I obtained from Mr Redlich on September 4, 1964. Other comments and suggestions are set forth in the margin of the galley itself.

Purchase of the Rifle by Oswald

1. On galley page 30, query if the name “Hidell” was stamped on the membership application blanks of the New Orleans branch, FPCC.
2. The text near the top of page 30 gives the impression that the name Hidell was stamped on all of the New Orleans Chapter’s printed literature. It was not. Oswald stamped his own name on some of it.

Oswald’s Palmprint on the Rifle Barrel

1. Query if the palmprint provides additional evidence of ownership of the rifle as is stated. The most it does is show that Oswald had possession of the rifle at some time. It does not show that he owned it.
2. Second paragraph states that Lt. Day determined the wood, SR [sic] wooden stock was too rough to take prints “from visual examination.” Day does not say that in his testimony. While it is a minor point, he just said that he noted it was too rough. For all I know he may have reached that conclusion by feeling the stock.
3. It may be noted here that the conclusion for the section on rifle ownership, that appears on galley page 32, states that the presence of the palmprint on the rifle shows that Oswald “had disassembled it.” That conclusion is not warranted from the existence of the palmprint on the rifle. The conclusion that Oswald handled the rifle while it was disassembled is justified.
4. The palmprint section must be changed to reflect the latest findings of the FBI that the palmprint had to have been lifted from the barrel because of the marks that appear on the lift that correspond to those on the rifle barrel itself.

Fibers on the Rifle

1. I think this section is written a little too strongly considering the record. For example, there is no footnote after the statement that the Commission found no credible evidence that Oswald used the
rifle between September 23 and the assassination. Furthermore, even if he did not “use” it, he might very well have handled it at some time during that period. Also, Stombaugh was not able to estimate the period of time within which the fibers were placed on the rifle, but much of the language in the section is designed to bring one to the conclusion that they were put there on the day of the assassination, even though that is not said.

2. In the last sentence of the section, it is not the Commission’s conclusion that provides proof, it is the fact that the fibers most probably came from Oswald’s shirt. Also, does that show that he “owned” the rifle, or just that he or someone that wore the shirt had handled the rifle at some time?

Photograph of Oswald with Rifle

1. It is interesting to note that the conclusion to the ownership section, on page 32, states that “a photograph taken in the yard of Oswald’s apartment showed him holding this rifle.” That statement appears in the conclusion in spite of the fact that Shaneyfelt specifically testified that he could not make a positive identification of the rifle that Oswald was holding in the picture, and in spite of the fact that the Commission was not able to conclude, in the discussion of this subject on page 31, that Oswald was holding the assassination weapon in the picture.

Rifle Among Oswald’s Possessions

1. I do not believe there is any real authority for the proposition that Oswald sighted through the telescopic sight on the porch in New Orleans. Marina Oswald first said she did not know what he did with the rifle out on the porch, and then was led into a statement which might be thought to support the instant proposition. It is not very convincing.

2. On the top of page 32 it is stated that Ruth and Michael Paine “both noticed the rolled-up blanket in the garage throughout the time that Marina Oswald was living in their home.” I am sure the record will not support that statement, a rather important one, too. I recall that there was a period of time before the assassination that neither of them saw the blanket. I have always had the opinion that there was a gap in the proof as to the rifle being continuously in the garage, one that probably could not be filled. It cannot be filled by ignoring it. The conclusion is even worse when it states that “the rifle was kept among Oswald’s possessions from the time of its purchase until the day of the assassination.” I do not think the record provides any real evidence to support that broad statement. The fact is that not one person alive today ever saw that rifle in the Paine garage in such a way that it could be identified as that rifle.

The Curtain Rod Story

1. The report states that Frazier was surprised when Oswald asked for a ride on November 21, 1963. I am not able to find anything in the record to support that statement.

2. The last paragraph of this section is misleading when it attempts to show the falsity of the curtain rod story by stating that Oswald’s room at 1026 North Beckley had curtains, and does not take account of the fact that Frazier specifically testified that Oswald said he wanted the curtain rods to put in an apartment. This takes on added significance when we remember that Oswald was talking about renting an apartment so that his family could live in Dallas with him. That aspect of the problem should be specifically treated if we are going to mention the fact that his roominghouse had curtains.

The Long and Bulky Package

1. The last sentence states: “Frazier could easily have been mistaken when he stated that Oswald held the bottom of the bag cupped in his hand, or when he said that the upper end was tucked under the armpit.” On the very next page of the galleys, in the discussion of the prints that appeared on the paper bag, it is stated that the palmprint was “found on the closed end of the bag. It was from Oswald’s right hand in which he carried the long package as he walked from Frazier’s car to the building.”

2. I am advised that the palmprint is right on the end of the bag, just where it would be if Oswald had carried it cupped in his hand. If we say in the discussion of prints that that print was put on the bag when he carried it to the TSBD (which we don’t quite do) and if the print is where it would be if he carried it cupped in his hand, then we must face up on the preceding page and admit that Frazier was right when he said that is the way Oswald carried it. If the print story is right and the implication left there as to when the print was put on the bag is valid, Frazier could not have been mistaken when he said Oswald carried the bottom of the bag cupped in his hand.
Scientific Evidence Linking Rifle and Oswald to Paper Bag

1. The section on fibers in the bag is very thin. The most that can be said is that there was a possibility that the fibers came from the blanket. The FBI expert would not even state that such was probable.

Conclusion

1. I am at a loss to know why the fact that Oswald apparently failed to turn out Ruth Paine's garage light is mentioned in the conclusion.

Palmprints and Fingerprints on Cartons and Paper Bag

1. The problem of all the unidentified prints has already been discussed. The FBI has been requested to conduct additional investigation to attempt to identify those prints. The results of that investigation must be incorporated in the report.

2. This section emphasized the freshness of one palmprint on one carton. That palmprint was the only one of 28 prints that could be developed by powder as opposed to a chemical process. As a result it was held to have been placed on the carton recently, within from 1 to 3 days prior to the time it was developed. The inference may be drawn from the present language of this section that all of the other prints, which could be developed only through a chemical process because the cartons had already absorbed them, must have been older than the palmprint. Thus, it could be argued that Oswald's other prints had to have been placed on the cartons at least a day before they were developed and perhaps as much as 3 days before. While there may be some reason within the realm of fingerprint technology why that is not so, it does not appear in the report.

3. Under those circumstances, the presence of Oswald's other prints, which must be treated pari passu with the prints of others on the cartons, seems to have very little significance indeed. This relates to the prints on one of the Rolling Readers cartons near the window, the existence of which is emphasized by stating that they “take on added significance” because of the work being done on the sixth floor. The report also states that the Commission placed “great weight on the fingerprint and palmprint identifications.” I don’t think we should say that in any event. We certainly should not until we deal with the problem of the apparent age of Oswald’s other prints and the presence of all those unidentified prints.

4. The report states that it is “significant that none of the prints on the cartons could be identified as the prints of a warehouse employee.” It also states that those employees “like Oswald, might have handled the cartons” — presumably in the ordinary course of business. The fact that Oswald was the only employee whose prints appeared on the cartons does not help to convince me that he moved them in connection with the assassination. It shows the opposite just as well.

5. It is also difficult to tell just what happened to all of the cartons or who developed what prints. While it appears that all four cartons were forwarded to the FBI, some confusion is created by the later statement that the right palmprint on the box on the floor next to the three near the window was also sent to the FBI. Why was that necessary if the carton had already been sent? The use of the passive voice in the second sentence of the second full paragraph on page 35 of the galleys leaves open the question of who developed the prints.

Eyewitness Identification of Assassin

1. There is a duplication of a long quote from Brennan’s testimony that also appears at page 15 of the galleys, the first page of chapter 3. It does not seem to be needed in both places. If left the way it is, the form as to omitted material should be standardized.

2. Following that quote it says that Brennan’s description “most probably” led to the radio alert sent out to police in which the assassin was described. Can’t this be more definite? One of the questions that has been raised is the speed with which theassin was described, the implication being that Oswald had been picked out as a patsy before the event. The Dallas police must know what led to the radio alert and the description. If they do we should be able to find out. If they do not know, the circumstances of their not knowing should be discussed briefly.

3. On page 36 it says that at 1:29pm the police radio reported that the description of the suspect in the Tippit shooting was similar to the description which had been given by Brennan in connection with the assassination. On page 46 it is stated that it was unlikely that any officer said anything like “Kill the President, will you?” The reason given is that the officers did not know “that Oswald was a suspect in the killing of the President.” But they very likely had heard the police radio note that the description of the two were similar and they may have drawn their own conclusions. The statement on page 46 should be taken out or qualified.

4. There should be a picture of the inside of the Texas School Book Depository sixth floor showing the low window sills and a reference to that picture in connection with the discussion of Brennan’s
testimony that he saw the man standing.
5. Query if we need such a long paragraph on Euins’ testimony merely to conclude that it is
inconclusive as to the identity of the man in the window.
6. In the last sentence of the second to the last paragraph in the section it says that Altgens’ picture was
taken about 2 seconds “after the shot which entered the back of the President’s neck.” We should say
after that shot was fired or heard or something. The sentence is not a good one as it now stands.

Oswald’s Actions in Building after Assassination

1. I do not think the description of the Baker–Oswald sequence is sufficiently clear. I am confused as to
how many entrance doors there are to the vestibule, even though after a close reading there appear to
be only two, the one connecting to the second floor landing and the one connecting to the lunch
room. It is also not clear whether Baker saw Oswald through the window in the vestibule/landing
door, or whether that door was still open as is implied by Baker’s testimony. Mention of the window
previously, however, implies Baker saw Oswald through the window. It does not seem likely that
Oswald would still have been visible through the window if the door had already closed, although
that depends on how fast the door closes, which is something I would like to know. What kind of a
stairway is it that someone coming up can see nothing at the top of the landing? Truly may in fact
have seen Oswald if the latter had just come down the stairs from the third floor as Truly was coming
up from the second.

2. I think additional effort should be made with the writing and a picture of the view coming up to the
second floor and a diagram or other pictures of the landing and vestibule area would be a good idea.

3. The first sentence in the third from the last paragraph on galley page 38 leaves a false inference
concerning Oswald’s presence on the sixth floor. It should be rewritten along the following lines:
“The fact that Oswald could not have come down in the elevators, the only other possible means of
descent, is shown by their movements after the time Baker and Truly tried to use them to go up in
the building.”

4. In the same paragraph, the statement that both elevators occupy the same shaft is not clear. It would
be better to say: “both elevators, which operate adjacently in the same shaft.”

5. Last paragraph on page 38 (galley), the testimony of the employees as set forth in that paragraph is
also consistent with Oswald having been in Ethiopia at the time of the assassination, or with his
having used the elevators to get down from the sixth floor. Since those employees did not see either
Oswald or Dougherty, their testimony says nothing on the point under discussion. The whole
paragraph should be cut.

6. The next two paragraphs, the first two on galley page 39, are a complete mystery to me. When I left
the bottom of page 38 I was looking for additional testimony showing that Oswald came down the
stairs and not the elevator. I still do not understand, however, how the fact that Victoria Adams came
down the stairs before or after Oswald did shows that Oswald came down the stairs. If the idea is to
show that Adams was not on the stairway when Oswald was, I am not convinced by the analysis or
speculation in these two paragraphs. Furthermore, if that is the idea it is not clearly set forth. How
about a first sentence like: “Victoria Adams testified that she came down the stairway, within about 1
minute after the shots, from the fourth floor to the first floor where she encountered two depository
employees — Bill Shelley and Billy Lovelady. If Miss Adams was on the stairway at that time, the
question is raised as to why she did not see Oswald....”

7. In the conclusion: I do not see how the Commission can possibly state that “fingerprint and
palmprint evidence establishes that at some time Oswald arranged the cartons in the window.” That
evidence establishes that at some time Oswald handled one of the three cartons in the window, as
suggested above, probably prior to the assassination by at least 1–3 days. That evidence establishes
with equal validity that perhaps about 20 other persons “arranged the cartons in the window.”

Oswald’s Movements after Leaving Depository Building

1. The description of Oswald’s bus ride sequence is very confusing and wholly unable to stand by itself
without a map. Even if we include a map, which I assume we will, the text should be clear enough to
stand by itself. The basic problem is that there is no indication of the relationship of various
intersections to each other. It should be simple enough to set forth the relationships between St.
Paul and Elm, Field and Elm, and Poydras and Lamar.

2. There also seems to be a mistake in description of directions. I don’t see how Oswald could walk
west on Elm and board a bus that was heading back in the direction of the depository and which was
also traveling west. Somebody had to have gone east. (Oswald.)

3. The second to last full paragraph on galley page 40 is not very clear as to what all those buses actually
do and what they are supposed to do. I have set forth suggested clarifying changes in the margin of
the galley.

4. On galley page 41 the terms “lineup” and “showup” are used interchangeably. It should be one or the
other throughout. I have always thought it was lineup.

5. There are direct quotes in the first paragraph on galley page 42 for which there are no footnotes. It is
my understanding that there are to be footnotes for each direct quote and that there is to be
uniformity on this point throughout the report.

Description of the Shooting

1. References here to what the Dallas police radio ordered Tippit to do should be qualified to indicate
the material being set forth. This should be done at least until we have cleared up the problems with
the transcript and recordings, if we have not already done so.
2. There are no footnotes at all in the last paragraph of this section.

Eyewitnesses

1. There is more confusion between lineups and showups at the top of galley page 43.
2. As to any attempt to explain Mrs. Markham's description (so-called) of Oswald as having bushy hair
by showing the world a picture of Oswald “taken at the time of his arrest,” I suggest that even the
slowest of readers would imagine that their hair might be in an uncombed state — which is the
suggested explanation of the bushy condition — after they had fought with a dozen policemen in an
attempt to resist arrest. In fact Pizzo exhibit 453-C, the evidence for this proposition, shows Oswald
with cuts and bruises on his face. I don't think Mrs. Markham's testimony needs much comment and
neither does her statement to Lane. Any attempt such as is presently in the report will merely play
into Lane's hands and make the Commission look naive.
3. Query statement that Markham's identification was mostly from his face. I think she was all over the
lot on that one.

Murder Weapon

1. Why don't we take a sentence or two and explain why the bullets fired from the revolver were smaller
than the barrel? There is no way to tell from this report now and an obvious question is raised as to
why.
2. There is an unclear sentence in the middle of the third paragraph of this heading which states: “Also,
the bullets were mutilated.” Which ones?
3. The paragraph dealing with the number of shots fired and the manufacture of the cases and the
slugs seems to me to be an exercise in pedantry, and possibly subject to error. Is it not possible that a
Winchester-Western slug could have been fired from a Remington-Peters case? Even if not, why
leave ourselves open to question when it does not really matter how many shots were fired, as
between four or five.
4. The last paragraph of this heading needs some footnotes, either in or out.

Ownership of the Revolver

1. The first sentence refers to “this type of revolver.” I think it would be better to say “the type of
revolver that was used to kill Patrolman Tippit.”

Oswald's Jacket

1. The second paragraph of this heading needs some footnotes.
2. There are inconsistencies in the description of Commission exhibit 162. The same problem occurred
above, when an exhibit was described sometimes as “exhibit —” and at others as “Commission
exhibit —.” A little thing, but why not do it right.
3. This conclusion to this heading reaches the crushing result that “Oswald disposed of his jacket as he
fled from the scene of the Tippit killing.” I submit that that is really not the conclusion we worked
toward. Why not: “Those facts strongly support the finding that it was Lee Harvey Oswald who
killed Patrolman Tippit and then fled through the parking lot adjoining Jefferson Boulevard,
disposing of his jacket as he did so.”

Oswald's Arrest

1. At first I was surprised to learn that Johnny Calvin Brewer knew that a patrolman had been shot
when Oswald walked by his place of business, less than eight blocks from the point of the Tippit
killing which Oswald apparently left as fast as he could.
2. Then I was surprised to learn that the police radio did not send out information about the suspect
being in the Texas Theater until 1:45, about 30 minutes after the police first heard of the Tippit
killing from Benavides over Tippit's radio. What were Oswald and Brewer doing during this 30 minutes? Oswald was strangely inactive during this period, considering all that he had done in the 45 minutes following the assassination.

3. While I know that I will be thought mad to suggest that some editing be done on this chapter, consider the following sentence that appears on galley page 46: “As Oswald, handcuffed, was led from the theatre, he was, according to McDonald, ‘cursing a little bit and hollering police brutality’ as he was led handcuffed from the theatre.”

4. Here compare the note above concerning page 36 that the police radio had noted the similarity of the descriptions between the man wanted for the assassination and the man wanted for the Tippit killing, by the time Oswald was arrested at the theater. It could be, therefore, that some of the officers suspected that the man they were arresting was wanted in connection with the assassination.

Statements of Oswald During Detention

1. There are entirely too many subheadings under this general heading. None are really necessary. We reach the sublime when we have one whole heading for one short, four sentence paragraph. They should all be cut out and the whole discussion comprehended under the above general title.

2. In the paragraph on denial of rifle ownership appears the statement “small bore .22 rifle.” That is redundant, since I presume we do not mean to distinguish from large bore .22 rifles. It should probably just read: “.22 caliber rifle.”

3. The second to last sentence in that paragraph needs a footnote.

Shooting of Maj. Gen. Edwin A. Walker

1. There is no footnote after the sentence concerning the 15-year-old boy who saw two men leave the area.

2. Same after the statement that a friend of Walker gave information to the police about the two men snooping around. Also that statement is not correct. Walker gave the information to the police.

3. No footnote after statement re results of private investigation.

4. No footnote after statement that the note was in the “Book of Useful Advice.”

5. The second full paragraph on page 48 assumes a lot of knowledge about Oswald’s movements and about the Paines that the reader had not gotten anywhere yet, except in the first chapter narrative. A few extra words as suggested in the margin of the galley might improve things considerably. Furthermore, the first sentence needs a footnote, as does the entire next paragraph, which has not one footnote to its name.

6. In the paragraph on photographs, a footnote is needed after the first sentence. The second sentence must be changed because at present it implies that Oswald told Marina about the notebook or rather showed it to her when he returned the night after the attack. She stated in her testimony in July that she did not see what was in the notebook until 3 days after the attack and there is nothing in her early testimony that I know about to support the proposition now in the report.

7. Statement that Oswald apparently destroyed the notebook should be changed in order to reflect fact that he did destroy it, and at the suggestion of his wife.

8. Second to last sentence in photographs section must be changed to indicate that Oswald did not bury his rifle in some bushes, but rather that he may have hidden it there.

9. Query usage of “ballistics” in first paragraph of “Firearms Identification” section. Same as to last paragraph thereof.

10. Under “Corroboration by Marina Oswald” we learn for the first time about a postponement of the attempt to kill Walker. There is no mention of from when, what the circumstances of the postponement were, what happened to the rifle in the meantime, et cetera. It should be set forth, since there is no mention of it above, as I recall.

Oswald's Rifle Capability

1. The purpose of this section is to determine Oswald's ability to fire a rifle. The third word at the top of page 50 of the galleys, which is apparently meant to describe Oswald, is “marksman.” A marksman is one skilled at shooting at a mark; one who shoots well. Not only do we beg the question a little, but the sentence is inexact in that the shot, which it describes, would be the same for a marksman as it would for one who was not a marksman. How about: “The assassin's shots from the easternmost window of the south side of the Texas School Book Depository were at a slow-moving target proceeding on a downgrade virtually straight away from the assassin, at a range of 177 to 266 feet.”

2. The last sentence in the first paragraph on galley page 50 should indicate that the slope of Elm Street is downward.

3. The section on the nature of the shots deals basically with the range and the effect of a telescopic sight. Several experts conclude that the shots were easy. There is, however, no consideration given here to the time allowed for the shots. I do not see how someone can conclude that a shot is easy or
hard unless he knows something about how long the firer has to shoot, that is, how much time is allotted for the shots.

4. On nature of the shots — Frazier testified that one would have no difficulty in hitting a target with a telescopic sight, since all you have to do is put the crosshairs on the target. On page 51 of the galleys, however, he testified that shots fired by FBI agents with the assassination weapon were “a few inches high and to the right of the target … because of a defect in the scope.” Apparently no one knows when that defect appeared, or if it was in the scope at the time of the assassination. If it was, and in the absence of any evidence to the contrary one may assume that it was, putting the crosshairs on the target would clearly have resulted in a miss, or it very likely would, in any event. I have raised this question before. There is a great deal of testimony in the record that a telescopic sight is a sensitive proposition. You can’t leave a rifle and scope laying around in a garage underfoot for almost 3 months, just having brought it back from New Orleans in the back of a station wagon, and expect to hit anything with it, unless you take the trouble to fire it and sight the scope in. This would have been a problem that should have been dealt with in any event, and now that it turns out that there actually was a defect in the scope, it is perfectly clear that the question must be considered. The present draft leaves the Commission open to severe criticism. Furthermore, to the extent that it leaves testimony suggesting that the shots might not have been so easy out of the discussion, thereby giving only a part of the story, it is simply dishonest.

5. Why do we have a statement concerning the fact that Oswald’s Marine records show that he was familiar with the Browning automatic rifle, .45 caliber pistol and 12-gage [sic] riot gun? That is completely irrelevant to the question of his ability to fire a rifle, unless there is evidence that the same skills are involved. It is, furthermore, prejudicial to some extent.

6. Under the heading “Oswald’s Rifle Practice Outside the Marines” we have a statement concerning his hunting activities in Russia. it says that he joined a hunting club, obtained a license and went hunting about six times. It does not say what kind of a weapon he used. While I am not completely familiar with the record on this point, I do know for a fact that there is some indication that he used a shotgun. Under what theory do we include activities concerning a shotgun under a heading relating to rifle practice, and then presume not to advise the reader of the fact?

7. The statements concerning Oswald’s practice with the assassination weapon are misleading. They tend to give the impression that he did more practicing than the record suggests that he did. My recollection is that there is only one specific time when he might have practiced. We should be more precise in this area, because the Commission is going to have its work in this area examined very closely.

8. On the top of galley page 51 we have that statement about Oswald sighting the telescopic sight at night on the porch in New Orleans. I think the support for that proposition is thin indeed. Marina Oswald first testified that she did not know what he was doing out there and then she was clearly led into the only answer that gives any support to this proposition.

9. I think the level of reaching that is going on in this whole discussion of rifle capability is nicely shown by the fact that under the heading of rifle practice outside the Marine Corps appears the damning statement that “Oswald showed an interest in rifles by discussing that subject with others (in fact only one person as I remember it) and reading gun magazines.”

10. I do not think the record will support the statement that Oswald did not leave his Beckley Avenue roominghouse on one of the weekends that he was supposedly seen at the Sports Dome Rifle Range.

11. There is a misstatement in the third paragraph under rapid fire tests when it says “Four of the firers missed the second shot.” The preceding paragraph states that there were only three firers.

12. There are no footnotes whatsoever in the fifth paragraph under rapid fire tests and some rather important statements are made which require some support from someplace.

13. A minor point as to the next paragraph — bullets are better said to strike rather than land.

14. As I read through the section on rifle capability it appears that 15 different sets of three shots were fired by supposedly expert riflemen of the FBI and other places. According to my calculations those 15 sets of shots took a total of 93.8 seconds to be fired. The average of all 15 is a little over 6.2 seconds. Assuming that time is calculated commencing with the firing of the first shot, that means the average time it took to fire the two remaining shots was about 6.2 seconds. That comes to about 3.1 seconds for each shot, not counting the time consumed by the actual firing, which would not be very much. I recall that chapter 3 said that the minimum time that had to elapse between shots was 2.25 seconds, which is pretty close to the one set of fast shots fired by Frazier of the FBI.

15. The conclusion indicates that Oswald had the capability to fire three shots with two hits in from 4.8 to 5.6 seconds. The conclusion at its most extreme states that Oswald could fire faster that the Commission experts fired in 12 of their 15 tries. If we are going to set forth material such as this, I think we should set forth some information on how much training and how much shooting the experts had and did as a whole. The readers could then have something on which to base their judgments concerning the relative abilities of the apparently slow firing experts used by the Commission and the ability of Lee Harvey Oswald.

16. The problems raised by the above analyses should be met at some point in the text of the report. The
The present discussion of rifle capability shows that expert riflemen could not fire the assassination weapon that fast. Only one of the experts managed to do so, and his shots, like those of the other FBI experts, were high and to the right of the target. The fact is that most of the experts were much more proficient with a rifle than Oswald could ever be expected to be, and the record indicates that fact, according to my recollection of the response of one of the experts to a question by Mr. McCloy asking for a comparison of an NRA master marksman to a Marine Corps sharpshooter.

17. The present section on rifle capability fails to set forth material in the record tending to indicate that Oswald was not a good shot and that he was not interested in his rifle while in the Marine Corps. It does not set forth material indicating that a telescopic sight must be tested and sighted in after a period of nonuse before it can be expected to be accurate. That problem is emphasized by the fact that the FBI actually found that there was a defect in the scope which caused the rifle to fire high and to the right. In spite of the above the present section takes only part of the material in the record to show that Oswald was a good shot and that he was interested in rifles. I submit that the testimony of Delgado that Oswald was not interested in his rifle while in the Marines is at least as probative as Alba’s testimony that Oswald came into his garage to read rifle — and hunting — magazines.

18. To put it bluntly that sort of selection from the record could seriously affect the integrity and credibility of the entire report.

19. It seems to me that the most honest and the most sensible thing to do given the present state of the record on Oswald’s rifle capability would be to write a very short section indicating that there is testimony on both sides of several issues. The Commission could then conclude that the best evidence that Oswald could fire his rifle as fast as he did and hit the target is the fact that he did so. It may have been pure luck. It probably was to a very great extent. But it happened. He would have had to have been lucky to hit as he did if he had only 4.8 seconds to fire the shots. Why don’t we admit instead of reaching and using only part of the record to support the propositions presently set forth in the galleys. Those conclusions will never be accepted by critical persons anyway.

General Comment

1. The above was written without having the footnotes to the chapter, a considerable disadvantage when one would like to check the accuracy and precision of statements made in the text.

2. The placements of footnotes is not consistent within the chapter, nor with the general rule that there are to be footnotes after all direct quotes. Many times there are no footnotes where it appears to me that there should be.

3. Form as to omitted material should be checked. The form of citations to the appendix is not consistent with chapter 3 or internally.

4. I forgot to mention that some question might be raised when the public discovers that there was only one eyewitness to the Tippit killing, that is, one person who saw Oswald kill him. All the rest only saw subsequent events. Mrs. Markham is nicely buried there, but I predict not for long.
Questioning the Single–Bullet Theory

The Warren Commission's verdict about President Kennedy's assassination was far from unanimous. Three of the Commission's seven members expressed doubts about the Warren Report's lone-assassin theory. All three were career politicians who represented southern states:

- Senator John Sherman Cooper of Kentucky;
- Congressman Hale Boggs of Louisiana;
- and Senator Richard Russell of Georgia.

Russell's dissent was the most vocal, and is captured in a phone conversation with President Johnson late on 18 September 1964, a few hours after the Commission's final executive session. A transcript of the relevant part of the conversation is reproduced below, along with the official minutes of the 18 September meeting.

The episode illustrates several interesting aspects of the workings of the Commission and the creation of the Warren Report.

The Warren Commissioners and the Warren Report

Contrary to received belief, the Commissioners had only a small role in the production of the Warren Report. Over the ten months of the Commission's existence, they held only 13 meetings, not all of which were fully attended. The day-to-day administration was under the control of the former Solicitor General, J. Lee Rankin. The Commission had a staff of around 30 attorneys, who:

- made almost every decision about which witnesses to interview, and which questions to ask;
- performed most of the interviews: of the 552 witnesses who submitted evidence to the Warren Commission, only 94 testified in person with one or more Commissioners present;
- and wrote the final report.

Richard Russell himself attended fewer hearings than any other Commissioner. As a dedicated white supremacist, he preferred to spend his time in opposing the Kennedy administration's civil rights legislation, which was slowly making its way through the Senate in 1964.

Russell's Objections to the Single–Bullet Theory

One witness whose testimony Russell did hear in person was that of Governor John Connally. Russell was impressed by Connally's insistence that he and President Kennedy had not been hit by the same bullet (Warren Commission Hearings, vol.4, pp.135f).

The Warren Report was ready to be sent to the printers when Russell demanded a special meeting of the Commissioners, during which he set out his objections to the central element of the case against Oswald, the single-bullet theory.

As he explained to Johnson, “They were trying to prove that the same bullet that hit Kennedy first was the one that hit Connally, went through him and through his hand, his bone, into his leg and everything else. … The commission believes that the same bullet that hit Kennedy hit Connally. Well, I don’t believe it.” Johnson, presumably out of politeness, replied, “I don’t either.” Russell’s fellow dissenter at the 18 September meeting, Senator John Cooper, wrote that “it seems to me that Governor Connally’s statement negates such a conclusion.”

The Shot that Wounded James Tague

Russell also pointed out the implausibility of the notion that a gunman could be skillful enough to hit Kennedy twice, yet so incompetent that he missed completely with the shot that wounded James Tague, who was standing almost 100 yards from the president's car: “Well, a man that’s a good enough shot to put two bullets right into Kennedy, he didn't miss that whole automobile.”

Tague's deposition (Warren Commission Hearings, vol.7, pp.552–57) had been taken by one of the staff attorneys, Wesley Liebeler, with no Commissioners present. It is conceivable that Russell was unaware that the missed shot was an undisputed fact rather than merely a suggestion put forward by the attorneys who had dreamt up the single-bullet theory. In Russell's words: “according to their theory, he not only
Defusing Richard Russell's Dissent

The purpose of the Warren Report, as outlined in Nicholas Katzenbach's memo (see Appendix D, pp.84f above), was to help the news media to convince the public “that Oswald was the assassin [and] that he did not have confederates who are still at large.” It was clearly felt that for the report's conclusions to be convincing, the Commissioners needed to be seen to be unanimous.

The Warren Commission's General Counsel, Lee Rankin, managed to defuse the senators' criticism while preserving the illusion of unanimity. The final Report acknowledged that “the possibility of others being involved with either Oswald or Ruby cannot be rejected categorically” (Warren Report, p.22), but had only this to say about Russell's and Cooper's objections:

Although it is not necessary to any essential findings of the Commission to determine just which shot hit Governor Connally, there is very persuasive evidence from the experts to indicate that the same bullet which pierced the President's throat also caused Governor Connally's wounds. However, Governor Connally's testimony and certain other factors have given rise to some difference of opinion as to this probability but there is no question in the mind of any member of the Commission that all the shots which caused the President's and Governor Connally's wounds were fired from the sixth floor window of the Texas School Book Depository.

(ibid., p.19)

J. Lee Rankin and the Warren Commission's Records

More sinister was Rankin's treatment of the record of the 18 September meeting. Although a stenographer appeared to be present, the official written record of the meeting did not take the form of a verbatim transcript, as was the case with the other sessions, but was merely a list of trivial procedural items. The document is reproduced below.

No hint was given of Russell's and Cooper's arguments with Rankin and Earl Warren, or of the discussions that, according to Russell's conversation with Johnson, took place about the wording of the Report's conclusions. Russell had prepared two written statements, neither of which found their way into the record.

This was not the only example of manipulation of the records of the Warren Commission. After the 22 January 1964 meeting that dealt with the rumours that Oswald was associated with the FBI or CIA (see Appendix G, pp.94ff above), the stenographer's notes were destroyed. It is possible that the stenographer at the 18 September meeting was not even genuine; Ward and Paul, the firm that had supplied stenographers for all the Warren Commission's witness hearings and executive sessions, did not submit an invoice for the final session.

In later years, Rankin himself seems to have entertained the possibility that the assassination was the result of a conspiracy. He became critical of the FBI when he learned about the bureau's destruction of Oswald's note threatening to blow up the FBI office in Dallas, and of the CIA when its alliance with mobsters became public knowledge. See Jim DiEugenio, 'J. Lee Rankin, Conspiracist?,' Probe, vol.4 no.4 (May–June 1997).

More Information

Physical copies of many presidential phone calls are available from the National Archives. Unofficial digital copies of this call can be found online.

A high-quality digital recording and transcript of this phone call will no doubt be issued in due course by the University of Virginia's Presidential Recordings Program.

Russell's unpublished personal papers can be found in the Richard B. Russell Memorial Library at the University of Georgia, Athens. John Cooper's dissent is contained in his own unpublished papers, which can be found at the University of Kentucky, Lexington.

For more about Richard Russell's criticism of the Warren Commission, see:


For the running of the Commission and the attendance of its members, see Edward Epstein, Inquest: The Warren Commission and the Establishment of Truth, Viking Press, 1966, and McKnight, op.cit..
Johnson to Russell Phone Call Transcript, 18 September, 1964

Russell: That danged Warren Commission business, it whupped me down so. We got through today. You know what I did? I ... got on the plane and came home. I didn't even have a toothbrush. I didn't bring a shirt. ... Didn't even have my pills, antihistamine pills to take care of my emphysema.

Johnson: Why did you get in such a rush?

Russell: Well, I was just worn out, fighting over that damned report.

Johnson: Well, you ought to have taken another hour and gone to get your clothes.

Russell: No, no. They were trying to prove that the same bullet that hit Kennedy first was the one that hit Connally, went through him and through his hand, his bone, into his leg and everything else. Just a lot of stuff there. I hadn't, couldn't, didn't hear all the evidence and cross-examine all of them. But I did read the record ... I was the only fellow there that ... suggested any change whatever in what the staff got up. This staff business always scares me. I like to put my own views down. But we got you a pretty good report.

Johnson: Well, what difference does it make which bullet got Connally?

Russell: Well, it don't make much difference. But they said that ... the commission believes that the same bullet that hit Kennedy hit Connally. Well, I don't believe it.

Johnson: I don't either.

Russell: And so I couldn't sign it. And I said that Governor Connally testified directly to the contrary, and I'm not going to approve of that. So I finally made them say there was a difference in the commission, in that part of them believed that that wasn't so. And of course if a fellow was accurate enough to hit Kennedy right in the neck on one shot and knock his head off in the next one ... and he's leaning up against his wife's head ... and not even wound her ... why, he didn't miss completely with that third shot. But according to their theory, he not only missed the whole automobile, but he missed the street! Well, a man that's a good enough shot to put two bullets right into Kennedy, he didn't miss that whole automobile. ... But anyhow, that's just a little thing, but we ...

Johnson: What's the net of the whole thing? What's it say? That Oswald did it, and he did it for any reason?

Russell: Well, just that he was a general misanthropic fellow, that he had never been satisfied anywhere he was on earth ... in Russia or here. And that he had a desire to get his name in history and all. I don't think you'll be displeased with the report. It's too long, but it's a ... whole volume.

Johnson: Unanimous?

Russell: Yes, sir. I tried my best to get in a dissent, but they'd come round and trade me out of it by giving me a little old thread of it.

Warren Commission Executive Session

Washington, D.C.,
Friday, September 18, 1964

The President's Commission met pursuant to call at 10:00 a.m. in the Hearing Room, Fourth Floor, 200 Maryland Avenue, Northeast, Washington, D.C., Chief Justice Earl Warren, presiding.

Present:

• Chief Justice Earl Warren, Chairman
• Senator Richard B. Russell, Member
• Senator John Sherman Cooper, Member
• Representative Gerald R. Ford, Member
• Representative Hale Boggs, Member
• Allen W. Dulles, Member
• John J. McCloy, Member
• J. Lee Rankin, General Counsel

The Chairman: The Commission will be in order.

The Commission has a number of matters to consider and decide in preparation for the completion of
It was suggested by one of the Commissioners that it would be helpful to Members of the Commission if they each had a page proof of Chapter I of the proposed Report as soon as it is obtained from the Public Printer for their examination. The General Counsel was thereupon instructed to make arrangements for delivery of such page proof to each of the Commissioners promptly upon receipt of the same from the Public Printer.

A Motion was made, seconded and carried that there be provided 100 copies of the Report and Hearings bound in buckram for the Commissioners to distribute as they may determine and that in addition 500 copies of just the Report be provided for such distribution.

A Motion was made, seconded and carried that leather bound copies of the Report and Hearings with the names of the proposed recipients stamped on them in gold be provided for the President and such persons as he might select, for members of the Kennedy family in accordance with the direction from the White House, and for the Commissioners.

A Motion was made, seconded and carried that one set of the Report and Hearings with the proposed recipient’s name stamped in gold be furnished each of the staff members who have been with the Commission a substantial period of time in the work of the investigation and preparation of the Report.

The General Counsel was asked to furnish each of the Commissioners a list of the employees of the Commission with their addresses and that this be supplied to each Commissioner as soon as it can be furnished after the Report has been published.

Discussion was had regarding Chapters III and IV of the proposed Report. The General Counsel was instructed to use care that the proposed conclusions concerning such chapters, as they were set forth in Chapter I, not contain any conflict.

A Motion was made, seconded and carried that the General Counsel proceed to make arrangements to provide for the return of President Kennedy’s clothes which are referred to in the Report to Mrs. Kennedy. It is also directed that this be done as soon as it can be accomplished after the Report is published and still adequately protect the determinations of the Commission as set forth in the Report. Furthermore, that the return of such apparel be subject to an arrangement whereby such clothing will be available if and when necessary to support the work the Commission has done, presumably upon mutual agreement of the Chairman and the widow or members of the Kennedy family.

A Motion was made, seconded and carried that the Chairman hereby be appointed to act with full and complete authority so as to promptly proceed with whatever steps are necessary and proper to liquidate and close up the affairs of the Commission and that during such period of liquidation and final determination of the Commission’s activities, the Chairman shall have full power and authority to call the Commission into session at any time that he may see fit, and shall do so upon the request of any Commissioner.

A Motion was made, seconded and carried that the General Counsel be authorized to proceed to make arrangements, subject to the approval of the Chairman, to return to interested parties who have furnished documentary and other evidence to the Commission all of such materials when their retention is no longer necessary to adequately protect the Report of the Commission or when duplicate or other conformed copies will be fully adequate. That in taking such action the General Counsel consult with the Federal Bureau of Investigation and other interested persons and agencies whenever necessary and proper.

A Motion was made, seconded and carried that as soon as all of the exhibits and other records of the Commission which are to be published have been printed and made available to the public, all of the remaining materials and records of the Commission shall be delivered to the National Archives to be held in perpetuity for the use and benefit of the people of the United States in accordance with federal laws and regulations.

A Motion was made by Representative Ford that a letter dated September 10, 1964, of Representative Pillion of Buffalo, New York, directed to the Commission, together with a copy of the interview of the Federal Bureau of Investigation with said Representative, be published in the Hearings of the Commission. After some discussion, the Chairman declared the Motion lost for lack of a second.

A Motion was made, seconded and carried that pictures of the Commission be procured and that a total of 100 copies be made available for the Commissioner’s [sic] use and that one copy of such Commission picture be provided for each staff member.

The General Counsel stated that in excess of 2100 exhibits had been made out of Commission documents that had been called to the attention of the Commissioners in the preparation of the Commission’s Report. He further reported that these had been used as citations in support of various
The General Counsel reported various items of the expenses and budget of the Commission during its months of operation and after discussion a motion was made, seconded and carried that the budget and expenses of the Commission as reported by Mr. Rankin be approved, subject to his furnishing a general financial statement for the period from November 29, 1963, to an estimated date of October 31, 1964. Such statement shall describe the salaries, travel, equipment rent and similar general categories, with the total obligations and total estimated cost, this approval to be subject to such financial statement being furnished to each of the Commissioners and their having an opportunity to direct such inquiries as they may care to to [sic] the General Counsel about specific items.

The Chairman then announced that an appointment had been made for the Commission to deliver its Report Volume to the President on September 24, 1964, at 11:00 a.m., at the White House. The Hearings Volumes will be delivered to the White House as soon as they are all published. All Commissioners stated that they would plan to attend that proceeding.

There being nothing further to come before the Commission, the meeting was adjourned.
Appendix K
CIA and Warren Report Critics

The CIA's Attitude to Critics

The CIA did not approve of those who questioned the official verdict on President Kennedy's assassination. The publication of the first wave of critical books, such as Sylvia Meagher's *Accessories After the Fact* and Harold Weisberg's *Whitewash*, led the CIA in 1967 to produce an internal document which stated its concerns and suggested ways to counteract the critics.

The document was released in 1977 as the result of a request under the Freedom of Information Act for access to Lee Harvey Oswald's CIA file, no. 201–289248. The document is reproduced below.

CIA's Use of 'Propaganda Assets' in the Media

The document proposes that the CIA should "discuss the publicity problem with liaison and friendly elite contacts (especially politicians and editors)" and "employ propaganda assets to ... refute the attacks of the critics. Book reviews and feature articles are particularly appropriate for this purpose." Attached to the document were examples of the CIA's "useful background material for passing to assets."

One of the more remarkable aspects of the JFK assassination has been the sharp contrast between:

- on the one hand, the print and broadcast media's heavy bias toward the lone–gunman account,
- and, on the other hand, the strong rejection of that account by the general population and, perhaps even more so, by knowledgeable writers. The CIA document claimed in 1967 that "46% of the American public did not think that Oswald acted alone." In 1976, the figure was 81%.

Much of the media's behaviour can be explained by simple institutional analysis, without needing to invoke corruption or conspiracy. The media's coverage of political events is necessarily influenced by its identification with established political institutions, and in some cases by its owners' membership of such institutions. Nevertheless, the CIA's widespread use of full–time and freelance employees within the media, sometimes known as *Operation Mockingbird*, surely influences any story in which the CIA's reputation might be directly affected.

The extent of the CIA's influence over the media became clear with the publication of the Church Committee's findings in 1976:

The CIA currently maintains a network of several hundred foreign individuals around the world who provide intelligence for the CIA and at times attempt to influence opinion through the use of covert propaganda. These individuals provide the CIA with direct access to a large number of newspapers and periodicals, scores of press services and news agencies, radio and television stations, commercial book publishers, and other foreign media outlets.

(*Church Committee, Book I, p.455*).

For a detailed account, see Carl Bernstein, 'CIA and the Media,' *Rolling Stone*, 20 October 1977. One of the CIA's assets, according to Bernstein, was Joseph Alsop, who telephoned President Johnson on the morning of President Kennedy's funeral, offering advice about the best way to promote the lone–gunman account (see Appendix E, pp.86ff above).

Lee Harvey Oswald and the CIA

The document acknowledged the danger posed by rumours that Oswald had been associated in some way with the CIA. Although there is no definitive documentary proof of such an association, Oswald’s career as a defector who was welcomed back to the USA, and his close links to both pro– and anti–Castro activists in New Orleans, provide strong circumstantial evidence that he was not the mixed–up loner that the document claims him to have been.

Two connections between the CIA and Oswald did not become known to the public until many years later, and presumably were unknown to the author of the document:

- Elements within the CIA knew about Oswald’s impersonation in Mexico City a few weeks before the assassination, and possessed “a keen interest in Oswald on a need–to–know basis,” in the words of one of the CIA officers involved (see Jefferson Morley, 'What Jane Roman Said, part 3' at history–matters.com). The impersonation implied a sinister association between Oswald and the Soviet regime, and led directly to the official adoption of the lone–gunman theory as the only
politically acceptable solution to the assassination.

• An anti–Castro group, the Directorio Revolucionario Estudiantil, with whom Oswald had had dealings in New Orleans immediately before the Mexico City incident, was substantially funded by the CIA. The Agency’s public–relations activities continued into the 1970s, when George Joannides, who had been in charge of the project, became the CIA’s liaison with the House Select Committee on Assassinations. Joannides ensured that the HSCA did not find out about the DRE’s connection with the CIA (see Chapter 9, ‘The Career of Lee Harvey Oswald,’ pp.29ff above).

Threats to Political Institutions

The CIA document claims that “the members of the Warren Commission were naturally chosen for their integrity, experience and prominence. They ... were deliberately drawn from all sections of the country.” In his 16 Questions on the Assassination, the critic Bertrand Russell had pointed out that the opposite was the truth. The members of the Warren Commission were drawn from a very limited section of the country, and were chosen precisely because their institutional allegiances meant that they could be trusted not to ask too many awkward questions.

The document recognises that criticism of the Warren Commissioners’ “rectitude and wisdom tend[s] to cast doubt on the whole leadership of American society,” and, by extension, the CIA itself.

The Church Committee reported unfavourably on the CIA’s performance in providing information to the Warren Commission, and specifically criticised the Agency’s unwillingness to inform the Warren Commission of:

• Oswald’s apparent undercover work in New Orleans,
• and the repeated attempts to assassinate Fidel Castro by an alliance of the CIA and certain mafia leaders.

About the Document

CIA document 1035–960 is available at the National Archives: no. 104–10009–10022.

A scan in PNG format is available at http://www.maryferrell.org/mffweb/archive/viewer/showDoc.do?absPageld=567348. Included are the eight background documents.

Countering Criticism of the Warren Report

To: Chiefs, Certain Stations and Bases

From: Chief, WOVIEW

1. Our Concern. From the day of President Kennedy’s assassination on, there has been speculation about the responsibility for his murder. Although this was stemmed for a time by the Warren Commission report (which appeared at the end of September 1964), various writers have now had time to scan the Commission’s published report and documents for new pretexts for questioning, and there has been a new wave of books and articles criticizing the Commission’s findings. In most cases the critics have speculated as to the existence of some kind of conspiracy, and often they have implied that the Commission itself was involved. Presumably as a result of the increasing challenge to the Warren Commission’s Report, a public opinion poll recently indicated that 46% of the American public did not think that Oswald acted alone, while more than half of those polled thought that the Commission had left some questions unresolved. Doubtless polls abroad would show similar, or possibly more adverse results.

2. This trend of opinion is a matter of concern to the U.S. government, including our organization. The members of the Warren Commission were naturally chosen for their integrity, experience and prominence. They represented both major parties, and they and their staff were deliberately drawn from all sections of the country. Just because of the standing of the Commissioners, efforts to impugn their rectitude and wisdom tend to cast doubt on the whole leadership of American society. Moreover, there seems to be an increasing tendency to hint that President Johnson himself, as the one person who might be said to have benefited, was in some way responsible for the assassination. Innuendo of such seriousness affects not only the individual concerned, but also the whole reputation of the American government. Our organization itself is directly involved: among other facts, we contributed information to the investigation. Conspiracy theories have frequently thrown suspicion on our organization, for example by falsely alleging that Lee Harvey Oswald worked for us. The aim of this dispatch is to provide material countering and discrediting the claims of the conspiracy theorists, so as to inhibit the circulation of such claims in other countries. Background information is supplied in a classified section and in a number of unclassified attachments.

3. Action. We do not recommend that discussion of the assassination question be initiated where it
is not already taking place. Where discussion is active, addressees are requested:

1. To discuss the publicity problem with liaison and friendly elite contacts (especially politicians and editors), pointing out that the Warren Commission made as thorough an investigation as humanly possible, that the charges of the critics are without serious foundation, and that further speculative discussion only plays into the hands of the opposition. Point out also that parts of the conspiracy talk appear to be deliberately generated by Communist propagandists. Urge them to use their influence to discourage unfounded and irresponsible speculation.

2. To employ propaganda assets to answer and refute the attacks of the critics. Book reviews and feature articles are particularly appropriate for this purpose. The unclassified attachments to this guidance should provide useful background material for passing to assets. Our play should point out, as applicable, that the critics are (i) wedded to theories adopted before the evidence was in, (ii) politically interested, (iii) financially interested, (iv) hasty and inaccurate in their research, or (v) infatuated with their own theories. In the course of discussions of the whole phenomenon of criticism, a useful strategy may be to single out Epstein's theory for attack, using the attached Fletcher Knebel article and Spectator piece for background. (Although Mark Lane's book is much less convincing than Epstein's and comes off badly where confronted by knowledgeable critics, it is also much more difficult to answer as a whole, as one becomes lost in a morass of unrelated details.)

4. In private to media discussions not directed at any particular writer, or in attacking publications which may be yet forthcoming, the following arguments should be useful:

1. **No significant new evidence** has emerged which the Commission did not consider. The assassination is sometimes compared (e.g., by Joachim Joesten and Bertrand Russell) with the Dreyfus case; however, unlike that case, the attacks on the Warren Commission have produced no new evidence, no new culprits have been convincingly identified, and there is no agreement among the critics. (A better parallel, though an imperfect one, might be with the Reichstag fire of 1933, which some competent historians (Fritz Tobias, A.J.P. Taylor, D.C. Watt) now believe was set by Van der Lubbe on his own initiative, without acting for either Nazis or Communists; the Nazis tried to pin the blame on the Communists, but the latter have been more successful in convincing the world that the Nazis were to blame.)

2. Critics usually overvalue particular items and ignore others. They tend to place more emphasis on the recollections of individual witnesses (which are less reliable and more divergent — and hence offer more hand–holds for criticism) and less on ballistics, autopsy, and photographic evidence. A close examination of the Commission's records will usually show that the conflicting eyewitness accounts are quoted out of context, or were discarded by the Commission for good and sufficient reason.

3. Conspiracy on the large scale often suggested would be impossible to conceal in the United States, esp. since informants could expect to receive large royalties, etc. Note that Robert Kennedy, Attorney General at the time and John F. Kennedy's brother, would be the last man to overlook or conceal any conspiracy. And as one reviewer pointed out, Congressman Gerald R. Ford would hardly have held his tongue for the sake of the Democratic administration, and Senator Russell would have had every political interest in exposing any misdeeds on the part of Chief Justice Warren. A conspirator moreover would hardly choose a location for a shooting where so much depended on conditions beyond his control: the route, the speed of the cars, the moving target, the risk that the assassin would be discovered. A group of wealthy conspirators could have arranged much more secure conditions.

4. Critics have often been enticed by a form of intellectual pride: they light on some theory and fall in love with it; they also scoff at the Commission because it did not always answer every question with a flat decision one way or the other. Actually, the make–up of the Commission and its staff was an excellent safeguard against over–commitment to any one theory, or against the illicit transformation of probabilities into certainties.

5. Oswald would not have been any sensible person's choice for a co–conspirator. He was a "loner," mixed up, of questionable reliability and an unknown quantity to any professional intelligence service.

6. As to charges that the Commission's report was a rush job, it emerged three months after the deadline originally set. But to the degree that the Commission tried to speed up its reporting, this was largely due to the pressure of irresponsible speculation already appearing, in some cases coming from the same critics who, refusing to admit their errors, are now putting out new criticisms.

7. Such vague accusations as that “more than ten people have died mysteriously” can always be explained in some natural way e.g.: the individuals concerned have for the most part died of natural causes; the Commission staff questioned 488 witnesses (the FBI
interviewed far more people, conducting 25,000 interviews and reinterviews), and in such a large group, a certain number of deaths are to be expected. (When Penn Jones, one of the originators of the “ten mysterious deaths” line, appeared on television, it emerged that two of the deaths on his list were from heart attacks, one from cancer, one was from a head-on collision on a bridge, and one occurred when a driver drifted into a bridge abutment.)

5. Where possible, counter speculation by encouraging reference to the Commission’s Report itself. Open-minded foreign readers should still be impressed by the care, thoroughness, objectivity and speed with which the Commission worked. Reviewers of other books might be encouraged to add to their account the idea that, checking back with the Report itself, they found it far superior to the work of its critics.

CLAYTON P. NURNAD
DESTROY WHEN NO LONGER NEEDED
1 April 1967
(CIA no. 1035-960)
President Kennedy's Autopsy

The assassination of President Kennedy remains a mystery partly because the nature of his wounds remains a mystery. This in turn is due largely to problems with the president's autopsy, which took place at Bethesda Naval Hospital Center, a military teaching institution near Washington:

- The autopsy was carried out by three pathologists, all of them middle-ranking military officers whose only practical experience of forensic autopsies was a one-week course taken by one of the pathologists ten years earlier.
- The room in which they worked was crowded with a variety of non-medical onlookers, several of whom were giving orders to the pathologists.
- The written records from the autopsy are incomplete, and perhaps corrupt. The original autopsy report was deliberately destroyed by Dr James Humes, the senior pathologist, after the murder of Lee Oswald. The rewritten autopsy report includes measurements and other data that do not exist in the pathologists' surviving notes and diagrams.
- The photographic record is incomplete. The pathologists and photographers recalled ordering and taking photographs which appear no longer to exist.

Pierre Finck's Testimony in New Orleans

Although all three pathologists testified under oath before several official inquiries, there was only one occasion on which any of their testimony was seriously questioned. In the criminal trial of Clay Shaw in New Orleans in 1969, one of the pathologists, Dr Pierre Finck, was cross-examined by an assistant district attorney, Alvin Oser. His testimony, part of which is reproduced below, is remarkable for two reasons:

- He states that senior military officers had taken an active part in proceedings, and he implies that they were in charge of the autopsy.
- He admits, after trying hard to avoid the question, that the pathologists were forbidden to dissect the president's back and throat wounds and the connecting tissue.

JFK's Back and Throat Wounds

Dissecting the wounds was a basic procedure, and would almost certainly have determined whether the president's non-fatal injuries had been caused by one or more bullets, and from which direction or directions the bullet or bullets had come.

The autopsy took place several hours after President Kennedy's assassination and Lee Oswald's arrest. It was widely known at the time of the autopsy that Oswald had been inside the Texas School Book Depository, almost directly behind the president, during the shooting. The broadcast media had already reported the claims of eye-witnesses that shots had come from more than one direction (see Appendix A, 'Grassy Knoll Witnesses,' pp.58ff above), as well as a press conference at Parkland Hospital, during which one of the doctors who had treated the president claimed that the throat wound had been caused by a shot from the front (see Appendix B, 'Parkland Hospital Press Conference,' p.72ff above).

Those in charge of the autopsy would surely have been aware that President Kennedy's wounds may have been caused by more than one gunman, and that dissecting the wounds was likely to resolve the question one way or the other. Their refusal to allow the dissection can only reasonably be interpreted as a fear of discovering definitive evidence of conspiracy.

Evidence of Oswald's impersonation in Mexico City (see Chapter 7, 'A Little Incident in Mexico City,' pp.23ff above), which implies that Oswald either had associates or was impersonated without his knowledge, did not reach Washington until several hours after the conclusion of the autopsy. Pierre Finck's testimony indicates that the high-ranking military officers who appeared to control the autopsy were already aware of the need to promote the lone-assassin explanation.

The Sibert and O'Neill Report

One aspect of Dr Finck's testimony is open to question. He agreed with the revised version of the autopsy report, which stated that the pathologists had concluded during the autopsy that one bullet had caused both the back and throat wounds.
This was contradicted by the two FBI agents who attended the autopsy. James Sibert and Francis O'Neill informed the pathologists during the latter stages of the autopsy that a bullet had been retrieved from Parkland Hospital. In their report and in a later memorandum, the agents maintained that the pathologists were satisfied that this bullet had fallen out of the president's back during emergency cardiac massage. The Sibert and O'Neill Report (see Appendix C, pp.78ff above) was not made public until after Dr Finck had testified in New Orleans.

Official Disapproval of Finck

Another of the pathologists, J. Thornton Boswell, revealed three decades later that the Justice Department was greatly concerned by Finck's testimony. Carl Eardley, the Deputy Assistant Attorney General, got in touch with Boswell:

He was really upset. He says, "J, we got to get somebody in New Orleans quick. Pierre is testifying, and he's really lousing everything up." ... They showed me the transcript of Pierre's testimony for the past couple of days, and I spent all night reviewing that testimony. And it was this bit about the general. Jim [Humes, the chief pathologist] said, "Who's in charge here?" And when they asked Pierre in court who supervised and ran the autopsy, he says, "Some Army general."

(Boswell's testimony to the Assassination Records Review Board, pp.208ff)

Further Information

For more about President Kennedy's autopsy, see the sources mentioned in Chapter 14, 'Medical Evidence,' pp.50ff above.

One or two trivial adjustments have been made for clarity. The original typescript uses the terms 'Q.' and 'Mr. Oser', and 'A.' and 'The Witness'. These have been standardised as 'Mr. Oser' and 'Col. Finck'. The context makes it more appropriate to employ Finck's military title than his medical title.

A scan of the original typescript in PNG format can be found at http://www.maryferrell.org/mffweb/archive/viewer/showDoc.do?absPageId=169482.

Excerpts from the Transcript

**Mr Oser**: How many other military personnel were present at the autopsy in the autopsy room?

**Col. Finck**: The autopsy room was quite crowded. It is a small autopsy room, and when you are called in circumstances like that to look at the wound of the President of the United States who is dead, you don't look around too much to ask people for their names and take notes on who they are and how many there are. I did not do so. The room was crowded with military and civilian personnel and federal agents, Secret Service agents, FBI agents, for part of the autopsy, but I cannot give you a precise breakdown as regards the attendance of the people in that autopsy room at Bethesda Naval Hospital.

**Mr Oser**: Colonel, did you feel that you had to take orders from the Army General that was there directing the autopsy?

**Col. Finck**: No, because there were others, there were Admirals.

**Mr Oser**: There were Admirals?

**Col. Finck**: Oh, yes, there were Admirals, and when you are a Lieutenant Colonel in the Army you just follow orders, and at the end of the autopsy we were specifically told — as I recall it, it was by Admiral Kenney, the Surgeon General of the Navy — this is subject to verification — we were told not to discuss the case.

**Mr Oser**: You were told not to discuss the case?

**Col. Finck**: — to discuss the case without coordination with the Attorney General. (State of Louisiana vs. Clay L. Shaw, Criminal District Court, Parish of Orleans, State of Louisiana, 198-059 1426(30) section C, transcript, pp.51f)

**Mr Oser**: Doctor, speaking of the wound to the throat area of the President as you described it, after this bullet passed through the President's throat in the manner in which you described it, would the President have been able to talk?

**Col. Finck**: I don't know.

**Mr Oser**: Do you have an opinion?

**Col. Finck**: There are many factors influencing the ability to talk or not to talk after a shot.
Mr Oser: Did you have an occasion to dissect the track of that particular bullet in the victim as it lay on the autopsy table?

Col. Finck: I did not dissect the track in the neck.

Mr Oser: Why?

Col. Finck: This leads us into the disclosure of medical records.

Mr Oser: Your Honor, I would like an answer from the Colonel and I would ask The Court so to direct.

Judge: That is correct, you should answer, Doctor.

Col. Finck: We didn't remove the organs of the neck.

Mr Oser: Why not, Doctor?

Col. Finck: For the reason that we were told to examine the head wounds and that the —

Mr Oser: Are you saying someone told you not to dissect the track?

Judge: Let him finish his answer.

Col. Finck: I was told that the family wanted an examination of the head, as I recall, the head and the chest, but the prosectors in this autopsy didn't remove the organs of the neck, to my recollection.

Mr Oser: You have said that they did not. I want to know why didn't you as an autopsy pathologist attempt to ascertain the track through the body which you had on the autopsy table in trying to ascertain the cause or causes of death? Why?

Col. Finck: I had the cause of death.

Mr Oser: Why did you not trace the track of the wound?

Col. Finck: As I recall I didn't remove these organs from the neck.

Mr Oser: I didn’t hear you.

Col. Finck: I examined the wounds but I didn't remove the organs of the neck.

Mr Oser: You said you didn't do this; I am asking you why didn't [you] do this as a pathologist?

Col. Finck: From what I recall I looked at the trachea, there was a tracheotomy wound the best I can remember, but I didn't dissect or remove these organs.

Mr Oser: Your Honor, I would ask Your Honor to direct the witness to answer my question. I will ask you the question one more time: Why did you not dissect the track of the bullet wound that you have described today and you saw at the time of the autopsy at the time you examined the body? Why? I ask you to answer that question.

Col. Finck: As I recall I was told not to, but I don't remember by whom.

Mr Oser: You were told not to but you don't remember by whom?

Col. Finck: Right.

Mr Oser: Could it have been one of the Admirals or one of the Generals in the room?

Col. Finck: I don't recall.

Mr Oser: Do you have any particular reason why you cannot recall at this time?

Col. Finck: Because we were told to examine the head and the chest cavity, and that doesn't include the removal of the organs of the neck.

Mr Oser: You are one of the three autopsy specialists and pathologists at the time, and you saw what you described as an entrance wound in the neck area of the President of the United States who had just been assassinated, and you were only interested in the other wound but not interested in the track through his neck, is that what you are telling me?

Col. Finck: I was interested in the track and I had observed the conditions of bruising between the point of entry in the back of the neck and the point of exit at the front of the neck, which is entirely compatible with the bullet path.

Mr Oser: But you were told not to go into the area of the neck, is that your testimony?

Col. Finck: From what I recall, yes, but I don't remember by whom.

(Ibid., pp.14–8)
Appendix M

Richard Sprague: Memo re Dr Burkley

Dr Burkley and the Assassination

One of the central figures in the assassination of President Kennedy was Dr George Burkley, Kennedy’s personal doctor. Burkley was the only medically-qualified witness to possess first-hand knowledge of every aspect of JFK’s wounds and treatment:

- Burkley had been in the motorcade in Dallas;
- he had treated the dying president in the emergency room at Parkland Hospital;
- and he had attended the autopsy at Bethesda, Maryland.

Dr Burkley’s insight into the JFK assassination medical evidence was, however, overlooked by the official investigative agencies. He was not called to testify before the Warren Commission.

George Burkley and the Single-Bullet Theory

Burkley made two contributions to the documentary record, both of which tended to undermine the notion that Lee Harvey Oswald alone had killed Kennedy:

- On the death certificate that Burkley signed, the back wound was located “at about the level of the third thoracic vertebra” (Assassination Records Review Board Medical Document 6, p.2).
- The autopsy descriptive sheet, the pathologists’ official diagram of the wounds to the body, placed the back wound in the same location. Burkley signed the sheet, “Verified” (ARRB MD 1).

The third thoracic vertebra is typically four to six inches, or 10 to 15 centimetres, below the point at which the shoulders meet the neck, and is consistent with the location of the bullet holes in the backs of President Kennedy’s shirt and jacket, both of which are almost six inches below the tops of the collars. A bullet that entered Kennedy’s back at a downward angle at this location could not have gone on to injure Governor Connally. If Burkley’s evidence is correct, the Warren Commission’s single-bullet theory must be false, and the assassination cannot have been the work of just one gunman.

Dr Burkley and the HSCA

In 1977, George Burkley’s lawyer contacted Richard Sprague, Chief Counsel of the newly–established House Select Committee on Assassinations, claiming that Burkley “has information in the Kennedy assassination indicating that others besides Oswald must have participated,” and that Burkley was willing to talk. Sprague wrote a memo for the record, which is reproduced below.

Richard Sprague came under pressure from the media and from political opponents, and was obliged to resign from the HSCA. His place was taken by G. Robert Blakey. Like the Warren Commission, the HSCA did not feel the need to interview Dr Burkley, who merely supplied an uninformative affidavit.

Burkley Repeats his Claims of Conspiracy

Dr Burkley made at least two other references to his apparent belief that the JFK assassination was the result of a conspiracy:

- In an oral history interview with the Kennedy Library, he was asked whether he agreed with the Warren Report’s conclusions about “the number of bullets that entered the president’s body.” He replied, “I would not care to be quoted on that” (Oral History Interview with Admiral George G. Burkley, Kennedy Library, Boston, 17 October 1967, transcript, p.18).
- The author Henry Hurt claims that “in 1982 Dr Burkley told the author in a telephone conversation that he believed that President Kennedy’s assassination was the result of a conspiracy” (Henry Hurt, Reasonable Doubt: An Investigation into the Assassination of John F. Kennedy, Henry Holt, 1985, p.49).
Richard Sprague: Memorandum

From: Richard Sprague
To: File
March 18, 1977

William F. Illig, an attorney from Erie, Pa., contacted me in Philadelphia this date, advising me that he represents Dr. George G. Burkley, Vice Admiral, U.S. Navy retired, who had been the personal physician for presidents Kennedy and Johnson.

Mr. Illig stated that he had a luncheon meeting with his client, Dr. Burkley, this date to take up some tax matters. Dr. Burkley advised him that although he, Burkley, had signed the death certificate of President Kennedy in Dallas, he had never been interviewed and that he has information in the Kennedy assassination indicating that others besides Oswald must have participated.

Illig advised me that his client is a very quiet, unassuming person, not wanting any publicity whatsoever, but he, Illig, was calling me with his client's consent and that his client would talk to me in Washington.