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PLAYBOY: Even if Oswald had poor equipment to shoot with, didn't the Commission conclude he was an excellent shot?
LANE: That conclusion is on a level with the rest of their findings. The fact is that Oswald was a relatively poor shot. If you look at Oswald's last rifle score in the Marine Corps—also the last time there's proof he ever fired a rifle—you'll find he scored only one point above the lowest Marine qualification. One of his buddies in the Marines, Nelson Delgado, told me that Oswald was such a poor shot he was the laughingstock of the squad, because when Oswald fired, "Maggie's drawers" often popped up. Maggie's drawers is a red flag waved whenever a bullet completely misses the target. And Delgado adds, incidentally, that when he told this to FBI agents, they argued with him for three hours, trying to browbeat him into changing his testimony, to state that Oswald was a good shot. Lawyers call this an attempt at subornation of perjury. The Commission also indicated that had atmospheric conditions at the time of the test could have accounted for Oswald's bad showing; in the Report you'll find the explanation that "It might well have been a bad day for firing the rifle—windy, rainy, dark." Well, I've been a lawyer long enough to know that whenever weather is a factor in a legal proceeding, all you have to do is subpoena the records of the U.S. Weather Bureau for the day in question. So I called the Weather Bureau and they said that the weather in the Los Angeles area for the day of Oswald's Marine Corps rifle test was not "windy, rainy, dark." It was sunny, bright and cloudless, with a temperature ranging between 72 and 79 degrees. Before indulging in speculation, the Warren Commission should have contacted the Weather Bureau. Perhaps they did—and ignored the information when it proved inconvenient for their thesis that their marksman, Oswald, had done poorly on his rifle test only because of poor weather conditions. While this is a relatively minor point, it indicates how the Commission operated.

PLAYBOY: But after having Oswald's weapon tested, the Commission concluded that he had "the capability to fire three shots, with two hits, within 4.8 and 5.6 seconds."

LANE: Yes, they did say that. To test Oswald's expertise, the Commission asked three Masters of the National Rifle Association—three of the best riflemen the Commission could find—to duplicate Oswald's feat. Let's see what happened. First of all, the three experts found they could not even aim the rifle correctly, because the telescopic sight was improperly aligned; it also wobbled, because it was poorly attached.

PLAYBOY: Couldn't the sight have been loosened or damaged after the assassination?

LANE: Perhaps. At any rate, the Commission was gracious enough to permit a gunsmith to reset the scope by welding two or three metal shims to the rifle before the N.R.A. riflemen undertook the test. Also, Oswald had allegedly fired from 50 feet above the ground—but the Commission's experts were allowed to fire from a perch 30 feet above the ground. Oswald allegedly fired at a moving target—but the experts were told to fire at stationary targets. When Oswald allegedly fired from the sixth floor window of the Book Depository, he could see only the head and shoulders of the President—but the experts were provided with large body silhouettes for targets. According to the Commission, the most difficult shot for Oswald was the first one, because the President was seen reacting to the wound only eight tenths of a second after he would have become visible to Oswald, the car having just passed from behind a large tree. So that's the shot that required the greatest skill—but the expert marksmen were told to take all the time they wanted for the first shot. Well, these three master riflemen shot a total of 18 rounds, and firing from half the height, at large, stationary targets with a resighted rifle, spending many seconds lining up on the target for the first shot, not one of them was able to hit the head or neck area of the target with any of the 18 bullets. What conclusion did the Warren Commission draw from all of this? That Oswald could easily have done what three of the top marksmen in the country, under infinitely better circumstances, could not do.

PLAYBOY: Still, weren't Oswald's fingerprints and palmprints found on the Mannlicher-Carcano?

LANE: Oswald's fingerprints were not found on the Mannlicher-Carcano, but one of the cornerstones of the early case against him was a charge by the Dallas police that Oswald's palmprint was found on the rifle. After this charge was made, the supervisor of the FBI latent fingerprint section, Sebastian F. Latona, examined the weapon carefully, using the most modern techniques available, highlighting it, side-lighting it, etc. He said he could find no trace of Oswald's palmprint anywhere on the rifle, and that even if Oswald had used the rifle, it would be difficult to determine if prints were there, since it was constructed of such poor wood and metal that they might not register. The Dallas police then explained that Oswald's palmprint had previously been on the rifle, but was "lost" in the process of "lifting" it from the rifle. That is, the lifted print remained in the Dallas police station while the rifle was sent to Washington.

PLAYBOY: Is the "lifted" print now?
LANE: I imagine it's still in Dallas. At one time it was shown to Latona, who testified that he saw it—but not on the rifle, of course. Yet the Warren Commission ignored Latona's expert testimony about the rifle not showing any traces of a print, and accepted the word of the Dallas police, declaring unequivocally that Oswald's palmprint had been on the rifle. But even if the rifle did belong to Oswald, there was no reason why either his palmprint or fingerprints, or both, shouldn't be on it. The question is: Was that rifle used to fire at President Kennedy, and was Oswald the man who fired it? Merely establishing ownership of a weapon does not constitute proof of guilt, particularly since one interpretation of the body of evidence would indicate that there was an attempt to frame Oswald well in advance of November 22. And there is good evidence that, not only was Oswald's Mannlicher-Carcano not the murder weapon but that a totally different rifle was discovered in the Book Depository. The weapon originally found on the sixth floor was firmly and repeatedly identified at first as a 7.65 German Mauser, and not a 6.5 Italian Carcano.

PLAYBOY: The Commission explained that the rifle "was initially identified as a Mauser 7.65 . . . because a deputy constable who was one of the first to see it thought it looked like a Mauser. He neither handled the weapon nor saw it at close range."

LANE: The Commission didn't explain it; they explained it away. The deputy constable they refer to is Deputy Constable Seymour Weitzman, the first officer to see the weapon on November 22. The Commission says he neither handled the weapon nor saw it at close range, but in the appendix to my book you'll find an affidavit signed by Weitzman on November 23 giving a detailed description of the weapon as a "7.65 Mauser bolt action equipped with a 4/18 scope, a thick leather brownish-black sling on it." Weitzman also described the rifle as "gun metal color . . . blue metal . . ." and said that "the rear portion of the bolt was visibly worn . . ." Does this sound like the description of a man who had "neither handled the weapon nor seen it at close range"? In the event you assume that Deputy Constable Weitzman was not too bright, that perhaps he wasn't up on rifles or made a mistake, let me point out that Weitzman was a graduate engineer who before becoming a Dallas police officer had owned a sporting-goods shop where he sold rifles. And Weitzman isn't the only one who identified the weapon as a German Mauser. Two other Dallas police officers were present when the gun was found, and they both described it as a 7.65 Mauser.

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