

Eyewitness to Assassination Says He Feared His Life Wasn't Safe

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An eyewitness to the assassination of President Kennedy told the Warren Commission he at first declined to identify Lee Harvey Oswald in a police line-up because he feared for his safety. Howard L. Brennan of 6814 Woodard was quoted in the commission's report that he felt the assassination was "a communist activity."

Mr. Brennan, a steamfitter by trade, was across from the Texas School Book Depository when the fatal shots were fired. He saw a man fire the last shot from the sixth-floor corner window and immediately gave Dallas police a description.

Later in a line-up at police headquarters, Mr. Brennan identified Oswald as the person "who bore the closest resemblance to the man in the window but he said he was unable to make a positive identification," the report stated.

CHANGES STORY

Later, however, Mr. Brennan told the Warren Commission he could have made a positive identification in the line-up Nov. 22.

"I felt like there hadn't been more than one eyewitness, and if it got to be a known fact that I was an eyewitness, my family or I, either one, might not be safe," Mr. Brennan is quoted in the report.

Mr. Brennan's identity as a witness to the assassination was not known until publication of the report.

Mr. Brennan was not available for comment over the weekend. Neighbors said he and his wife had left home at mid-afternoon Friday. It was later learned they were flown to New York City where he told his story on network television.

SAW MAN AT WINDOW

According to the Warren Commission report, Mr. Brennan watched President Kennedy's motorcade from a concrete retaining wall at the southwest corner of Elm and Houston Streets. While waiting for the President's car to arrive, Mr. Brennan noticed a man at the southeast corner window of the sixth floor and observed him leave the window "a couple of times," the report stated.

After President Kennedy's car had turned the corner and moved down the incline toward the Triple Underpass, Mr. Brennan heard something like the backfire of a motorcycle, he testified.

"Well, then something, just right after this explosion, made me think that it was a firecracker being thrown from the Texas Book Store," Mr. Brennan told the commission. "And I glanced up. And this man that I saw previous was aiming for his last shot."

MAN TOOK AIM

The witness said he saw the man take positive aim before firing. Then, he said, "he drew the gun back from the window . . . and maybe paused for another second as though to assure himself (sic) that he hit his mark,

and then he disappeared."

Mr. Brennan quickly reported his observations to police officers, giving them a description of the man in the window.

"This description most probably led to the radio alert sent to police cars at approximately 12:45 p.m.," the commission said.

Police throughout the city were advised to watch for a white man, slender, weighing about 165 pounds, about 5 feet 10 inches tall and in his early 30s.

OSWALD'S DESCRIPTION

Oswald was 5 feet 9 inches tall, slender and 24 years old. When arrested he gave his weight as 140 pounds, but the autopsy report indicated an estimated weight of 150 pounds.

Mr. Brennan told the Warren Commission that prior to the police line-up he had seen Oswald's picture on television. He testified that whether this affected his identification "is something I do not know."

In an interview with FBI agents Dec. 17, 1963, Mr. Brennan stated he was sure that the person firing the rifle was Oswald.

In another interview with the FBI on Jan. 7, 1964, the witness "appeared to revert to his earlier inability to make a positive identification," the report stated.

But in his testimony before the commission, Mr. Brennan stated that his remarks of Jan. 7 were intended by him merely as an accurate report of what he said on Nov. 22, according to the report.

When asked specifically whether he could identify the man he saw in the sixth-floor window as the same man he saw in the police station, Mr. Brennan stated:

"I could at that time—I could, with all sincerity, identify him as being the same man."