



Newsweek—Bernard Goltfryd

Rankin: Detective story

THE ASSASSINATION:

Report From the FBI

The detective story of the century comes in five volumes—two of typewritten text covering 127 pages and three of letters, documents, photos, and other exhibits. The covers are flexible blue plastic, with white spiral bindings. Embossed in silver on each cover is the grand seal of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Over the seal on the first volume, in silver capital letters, is the title "INVESTIGATION OF THE ASSASSINATION OF PRESIDENT JOHN F. KENNEDY." The second reads: "INVESTIGATION OF THE KILLING OF LEE HARVEY OSWALD." As a detective story, the still-secret report—ordered by President Johnson and delivered last week to his select investigating commission—is singularly lacking in mystery. Without judging Oswald, the 88-page first volume recites more the overwhelming and all-but-well-aided evidence that he was Kennedy's assassin. Volume Two—130 pages—retells an event that millions of Americans saw on television: Oswald's killing two days later at the hands of a strip-joint owner Jack Ruby. All said one of the select few U.S. officials who have read it, the report contains "few surprises."

Lost Words: Yet it did contain some disappointments for Justice Department officials who screened it before passing it to the commission—not in what it said but in what it leaves unsaid. It was very readable—remarkably well-written, one insider said, solid on physical evidence and on Oswald's erratic behavior. But what about all the rumors about the assassination was a conspiracy? What about the senior Justice hands—and for top FBI officials as well—the report leaves

NATIONAL AFFAIRS:

too many questions unasked or unanswered beyond the recurring phrase, "There is no evidence."

In light of widespread speculation that Oswald wasn't alone, those were precisely the questions that needed to be raised and convincingly explored. Washington is keenly aware of the public's need to know. Some officials hope to get out a preliminary statement before Chief Justice Earl Warren's Presidential commission renders its judgment, perhaps two months from now. "But if that FBI report came out now, as it is," one Administration official told NEWSWEEK's Jay Iselin, "the press would raise the roof at the things left unanswered."

Dossier: Volume One starts with a detailed account of the assassination and the capture of Oswald within the week in a Dallas movie theater. Then it takes up the key circumstantial evidence against him: the smudged fingerprints and the shreds of clothing on the murder rifle, the ballistics tests, the palm prints in the sniper's nest in a Dallas schoolbook storehouse, the handwriting on the rifle purchase order. It does not, as some accounts said, declare him guilty beyond a reasonable doubt; such judgments are not the FBI's style. But so compelling is the evidence that one skilled lawyer who read the report concluded: "If I'd had to defend him, I could only have pleaded insanity."

On one point of doubt—the number of shots fired—the FBI offered its own flat answer: not four or five, as some newspaper accounts said, but three. Further, the report discounts the diagnosis that the wound below Mr. Kennedy's Adam's apple was an entry wound—an unlikely and perhaps impossible shot from the assassin's sixth-floor roost. The FBI insists that the President was hit twice—first in the back of the right shoulder near the nape of the neck, then in the back of the head near the top—and both times from behind. The report of a throat wound? Perhaps it was an exit wound; perhaps the final answer would remain less than 100 per cent certain because Mr. Kennedy's throat had been opened in a tracheotomy. And the stories of a windshield bullet hole in the Kennedy limousine? The FBI didn't mention it, but other sources said it was fractured—not punctured—from inside, probably by a ricocheting fragment.

Each of those points tended to support the official view that the assassination of President Kennedy was the work of one man. And so did the FBI's collection of biographical fragments, dating to a boyhood psychiatric report diagnosing Oswald as a potentially dangerous schizoid personality. The biography takes up Oswald's Marine career, his defection to the Soviet Union, his leftist eccentricities, his sullen, loner temperament. It places his income at \$3,500 in fourteen

for fifteen months before the murder and details how he got by on so little. It says he probably was the sniper who took a potshot at retired Maj. Gen. Edwin A. Walker in Dallas last April 10. "He comes out," one reader said, "as a very mixed-up soul, resentful of authority, really weird—but not a likely person to be suspected as a potential assassin." Were Oswald's resentments fixed on the President? In Dallas, Michael Paine, who took in the jobless Oswald and his family in September, told NEWSWEEK: "[Oswald] talked about Kennedy every now and then, and Kennedy was the only politician he talked the least [bit] favorably about." But what about the Presidency as a seat of power? By Oswald's "Marxist" lights, a former Marine buddy told the FBI, Mr. Kennedy's predecessor, Dwight Eisenhower, was a capitalist plotter against the exploited masses. "I'd like to kill Eisenhower," the report quotes Oswald as having told his fellow Marine in anger.

Troubling to Justice men were the gaps in dispelling conspiracy talk.

Q and A: Was a second rifleman in the window at the Texas School Book Depository? The report doesn't take up the question. Was there anything to the rumor Oswald brought back \$5,000 from Mexico seven weeks before the assassination? The FBI denied it but failed to spell out its reasons. Had Oswald been at a suburban rifle range with another man—as witnesses in Dallas said—

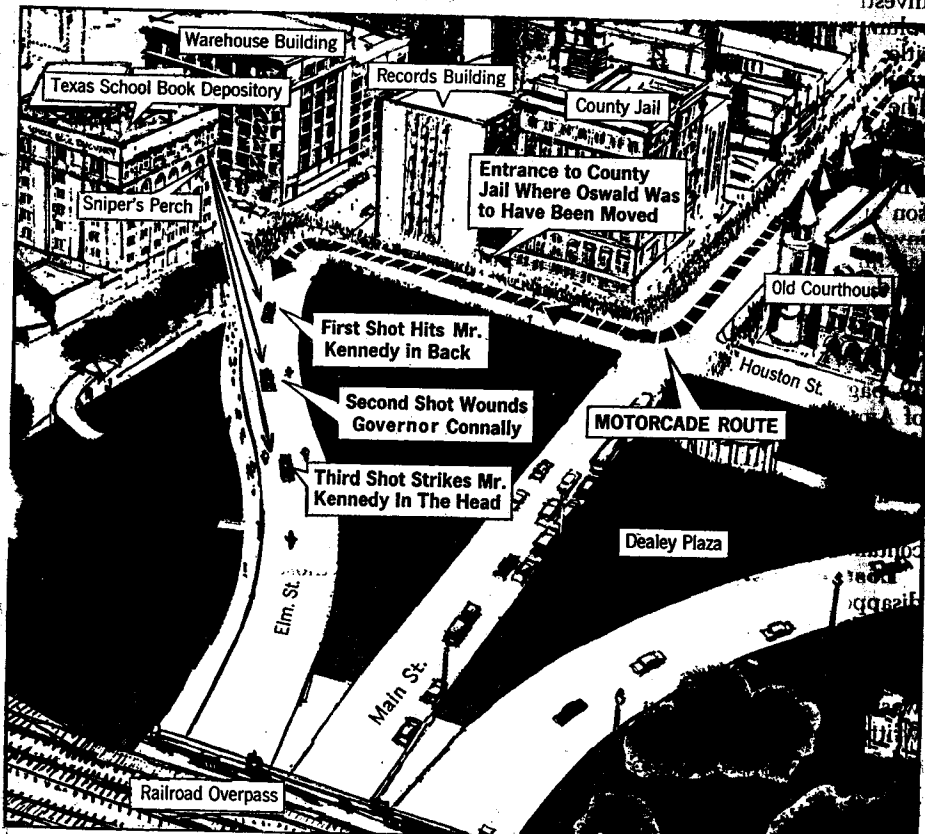
to take target practice the two weeks before the killing? The FBI said privately that it had no proof; it didn't mention the matter in its report.

How did Ruby get into the Dallas jail basement to kill Oswald? Volume Two tells in exhaustive detail how he slipped past a guard at the west entrance—but doesn't name the guard.

And what about the commonest speculation that Oswald and Ruby were somehow linked? No evidence says the FBI report, dropping the matter. "That's not enough," one Administration insider said. "We've got to lay out exactly what's been done to track down every single lead." FBI officials added.

Beyond that, the burden of completing the mosaic fell to the Warren Commission. While members started studying the report individually, Congress pushed through a bill empowering the panel to issue subpoenas and induce balky witnesses to testify by granting them immunity from prosecution. And, as general counsel, the commission hired J. Lee Rankin, 56, a New York Republican lawyer and U.S. Solicitor General under Eisenhower. Insiders said he was picked by Warren, who had watched him work before the Supreme Court.

Rankin and a staff of lawyers—some hired from outside and some borrowed from the government—will screen the FBI data, mark the gaps, and ask the bureau to fill them in. Plainly, the five volumes were only a beginning.



Scene of the crime: JFK's rendezvous with death in Dallas

Adapted from a sketch by John Downs—Chicago Daily News