

Police Had Oswald's Description in 15 Minutes, Thanks to Workman

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WASHINGTON — An often asked question since President John F. Kennedy's assassination is how Dallas authorities were able to broadcast a description of Lee Harvey Oswald even before Oswald became a suspect in the crime.

Most probably, according to the Warren Commission, the answer lies in the remarkable experience of an obscure 45-year-old Dallas steamfitter named Howard Leslie Brennan. Testimony released by the commission Monday tells the Brennan story in detail.

The shots that killed the

President on Nov. 22, 1963, were fired from the Texas School Book Depository at 12:30 p.m., Dallas time. At 12:45 p.m. the dispatcher at Dallas police headquarters broadcast the following alarm:

"Attention all squads, Elm and Houston (Sts.), unknown white male person approximately 30, slender build, height 5 feet 10, 160 pounds, reported to be armed with what is believed to be a .30-caliber rifle. Attention all squads, the suspect is believed to be white male 30, 5 feet 10 inches, slender build, armed with what is thought to be a .30-20 rifle, no further description at this time."

This alarm went out on Dallas police channel No. 1, to which the radios of all squad cars were tuned, including the radio in the car of Patrolman J. D. Tippit. At almost the same moment that the alarm was broadcast Tippit was ordered by radio to proceed to the Oak Cliff section of Dallas as part of a concentration of patrol car activity around the center of the city following the assassination.

It was the broadcast description that he had heard, presumably, that caused Tippit to stop the fugitive Oswald and thereby led to his own death at Oswald's hands

and to Oswald's subsequent capture. But since no one had yet connected Oswald with the assassination, how did it happen that the police were able to broadcast the description that led to his arrest?

The description, the Warren Commission said, most probably came from Brennan and according to Brennan's own testimony, this is what happened:

Stopped For Lunch

At noon that day Brennan, who had been working on a construction job behind the book depository, stopped for lunch and went to a cafeteria a few blocks away. He finished eating at 12:18, which left him a little time before he was due back to his job.

"So," he testified, "I thought I still had a few minutes, that I might see the parade and the President."

A four-minute walk brought him to the corner of Houston and Elm Sts. and for a good view of the approaching motorcade he climbed up on a retaining wall in Deal Plaza directly across the street from the book depository. He whiled

away the time waiting for the President by watching the crowd and the people in windows, including the windows of the book depository.

Man on Sixth Floor

"I observed quite a few people in different windows," he said. "In particular I saw this one man on the sixth floor which (who) left the window to my knowledge a couple of times."

On a photograph Brennan identified the window as the one from which the fatal shots were later fired. What happened next was described in the testimony.

Question: "Just tell us what else you saw that afternoon."

Brennan — "Well, as the parade came by I watched it from a distance of Elm and Main St. as it came on to Houston and turned the corner at Houston and Elm,

going down the incline towards the railroad underpass. And after the President had passed my position, I really couldn't say how many feet or how far, a short distance. I would say, I heard this crack that I positively thought was a backfire.

Q—"You thought it was a backfire?"

Brennan — "Of a motorcycle."

Q—"Then what did you observe or hear?"

Brennan — "Well, then something, just right after this explosion, made me think it was a firecracker being thrown from the Texas book store (depository). And I glanced up. And this man I saw previous was aiming for his last shot . . . the man in the sixth-story window.

Q—"Would you describe just exactly what you saw when you saw him this last time.

Brennan—"Well, as it appeared to me he was standing up and resting against the left window sill, with gun shouldered to his right shoulder, holding the gun with his left hand and taking positive aim and firing his last shot. As I calculate a couple of seconds. He drew the gun back from the window as though he was drawing it back to his side and maybe paused for another second as though to assure

himself that he hit his mark, and then he disappeared . . .

Q—"Could you describe the man you saw in the window on the sixth floor?"

Brennan—"To my best description, a man in his early 30s, fair complexion, slender but neat, neat slender, possibly 5-foot 10.

Q—"About what weight?"

Brennan—"Oh, at—I calculated, I think, from 160 to 170 pounds.

Q—"A white man?"

Brennan—"Yes."

Fearful that a plot was unfolding in which more shots would be fired, Brennan ducked behind the retaining wall. As soon as his fears

were allayed, he looked up and saw police scurrying around the area west of the book depository. He ran across the street to a policeman who was standing at a corner of the building.

Taken to Agent

"I asked him," Brennan testified, "to get me someone in charge, a Secret Service man or an FBI. That it appeared to me that they were searching in the wrong direction for the man that did the shooting."

Brennan pointed up to the window where he had seen the shooting. But the policeman said "just a minute" and had to give some orders to someone at the other end of the building. After this he took Brennan to Secret Service Agent Forrest V. Sorrels, who was sitting

in a parked car nearby, and then across street to the sheriff's office.

Meanwhile Oswald walked out of the book depository unmolested. At about 1:15 p.m. he shot and killed Tippit.

Brennan's view of the crime enabled him to provide the description that was to trap Oswald, but somehow in the confusion his knowledge could not be put to use in time to prevent Oswald's escape from the book depository. **END**