

motion. Dispatched by Chief Justice Earl Warren's investigating commission, two dozen FBI and Secret Service agents commandeered the stage of history one morning last week and re-enacted, again and again for five hours, the assassination of John F. Kennedy.

This time the principals were actors rehearsing a tragedy that had already happened. But the dull, metallic sound of the hammer in an empty breech was echo enough of the shots that changed the world last Nov. 22. "It made me think back," said Fort Worth TV cameraman Dan Owens, who saw both the assassination and the re-enactment, "and after a while it got under my skin. I didn't want to see any more of it."

Shadow Play: The replay—the third and most extensive to date—was as eerily close to the event as commission counsel J. Lee Rankin and his players could make it. They cast FBI agents Bill Anderton as the late President and Doyle Williams as wounded Texas Gov. John Connally—both rough fits in size and looks. Anderton sat on a pillow in the back seat of an imported Secret Service Cadillac, which is slung lower than Mr. Kennedy's bubble-top Lincoln. Williams wore Connally's own coat, a bullet hole in the back circled in chalk. Another agent was posted on the sixth floor with suspected assassin Lee Harvey Oswald's mail-order rifle, a camera fitted to its telescopic sight. Others lined the roadway, shooting pictures, measuring times and distances, gauging angles with surveyors' transits, stage-managing the whole grim shadow play—frame by frame—from the remarkable amateur movie that captured the event.

They started as the last coastal clouds studded away at 6 a.m. and wound up in the sun-washed heat of midday. Time and again, the car rounded the curve past a crowd of 500 silent spectators, stopping, starting, stopping in a series of tableaux that seemed to stop time itself.

Click! went the hammer.

The car stopped. The man in the back seat froze, hands at his throat, elbows high—the posture of the President when the first bullet struck his back. And then the car moved on.

The slam of the bolt was loud in the silence of Sunday morning. Then, click!

The man in the governor's seat went rigid midway through a turn. Agents chalked and marked and measured.

Click!

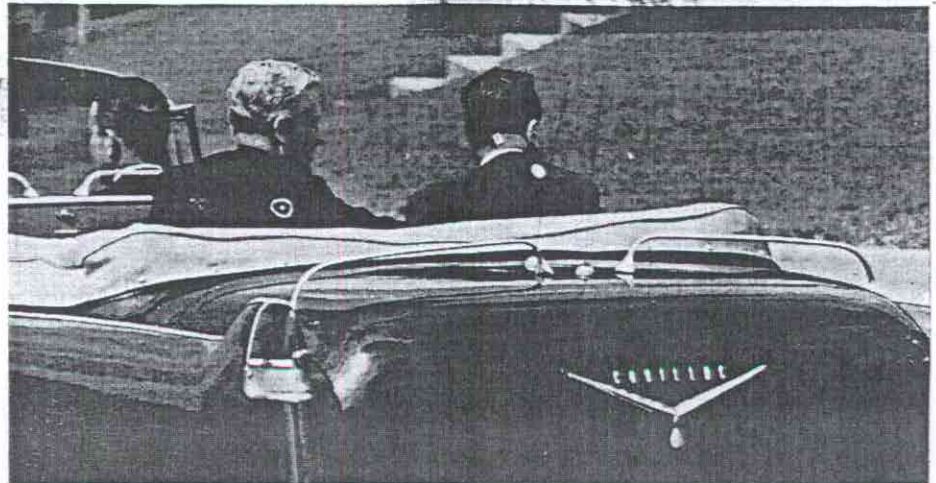
Again time stood still, locking the man in the back seat in the moment of death. There was no movement except for the agent who stepped wordlessly to the stand-in President and stuck a tape marker at the point of impact, on the back of the neck, at the base of the skull.

The macabre re-enactment was vital to the official view that Oswald—and Oswald alone—killed the President. Some contend that at least one shot came from an overpass or a grassy knoll dead ahead of the Presidential motorcade—not from the warehouse window to the rear. This time, agents with movie cameras were posted to check whether such an angle of fire was possible—and to document their doubts on film. Their verdict was secret pending the release of the Warren report. But they went away apparently satisfied they had proved their point. Later, Dallas TV commentator Eddie Barker reported that the commission will say that it was the killer's second shot—not the third, as many think—that killed the President.

Nightmare Revisited

He watched the open car swing down Elm Street past the Texas School Book Depository, its steel and glass and chrome glinting in the cruel brilliance of the Dallas sun. From his shadowed roost on the sixth floor, he squinted into his telescopic sight, framing the strong young man in the back seat. His finger tightened on the trigger of the 6.5 mm. Mannlicher-Carcano rifle. He squeezed ... Click!

It was a nightmare called back out of the receding past, replayed in stop



Assassination replay. Chalk marks for wounds—tape for the fatal shot