

Assassination scene: Dealey Plaza in downtown Dallas and the route taken by the Presidential motorcade

'My God, They Are Going to Kill Us All'

Three shots in Dallas had already triggered billions of words. But this week the world had its first fully detailed, authentic record of just what happened on November 22, within the capacity of human beings to recall, sort, and assemble the fragments of a shattering experience. In putting together a mosaic of the assassination and its aftermath, the Warren commission reinforced human memory wherever possible with the mortar of scientific proof. In the commission's narrative the President's silvery jet drops down on Dallas's Love Field amid clearing skies at 11:40 a.m. on Nov. 22, 1963. The awaiting Presidential limousine is open. Appointments Secretary Kenneth O'Donnell's orders, relayed through the Secret Service, have been explicit: "If the weather is clear and it is not raining, have that bubbletop off." (In any case, the bubbletop is neither bullet-proof nor bullet-resistant.) After ten minutes of greeting spectators along a chain-link fence, President and Mrs. Kennedy climb into the special 1961 Lincoln for the 45-minute motorcade that will wind through Dallas on the

way to the Trade Mart. Twice the President stops the limousine to shake hands with well-wishers before reaching the fatal point: Dealey Plaza.

To gain access to the Stemmons Freeway for the last lap to the handsome new Trade Mart, the motorcade has to make a right turn as it nears Dealey Plaza, travel for a block along Houston Street directly toward the seven-story, orange brick Texas School Book Depository, then make a sharp turn to the left onto Elm Street. The report notes that there is no other safe way to exit from the tangle of converging streets at the far end of the open plaza and up onto the freeway. According to the commission's calculations, computed from motion pictures taken by amateur photographer Abraham Zapruder, the President's limousine is traveling at 11.2 miles per hour as it completes its left turn and starts down Elm Street.

Shots Explode: Mrs. Kennedy rides to the left of the President in the back seat. Directly in front of him in the jump seat is Texas Gov. John Connally with Mrs. Connally in the left jumpseat. Two Secret Service agents, William R.

Greer, the driver, and Roy H. Kellerman, are in the front seat. As the limousine passes the School Book Depository, the President waves to the crowd.

Suddenly the shots explode. Based on the testimony of four witnesses, the commission sets the time at 12:30 p.m. CST. The report graphically recounts the moments of the assassination:

"Mrs. John F. Kennedy, on the left of the rear seat of the limousine, looked toward her left and waved to the crowds along the route. Soon after the motorcade turned onto Elm Street, she heard a sound similar to a motorcycle noise and a cry from Governor Connally, which caused her to look to her right. On turning she saw a quizzical look on her husband's face as he raised his left hand to his throat. Mrs. Kennedy then heard a second shot and saw the President's skull torn open under the impact of the bullet. As she cradled her mortally wounded husband, Mrs. Kennedy cried, 'Oh, my God, they have shot my husband. I love you, Jack.'

"Governor Connally testified that he recognized the first noise as a rifle shot and the thought immediately crossed his mind that it was an assassination attempt. From his position in the right jump seat immediately in front of the President, he instinctively turned to his

91/38 Mannlicher-Carcano rifle, serial number C2766. Attached to the weapon was an inexpensive four-power telescopic sight, stamped "Optics Ordnance Inc./Hollywood California" and "Made in Japan."

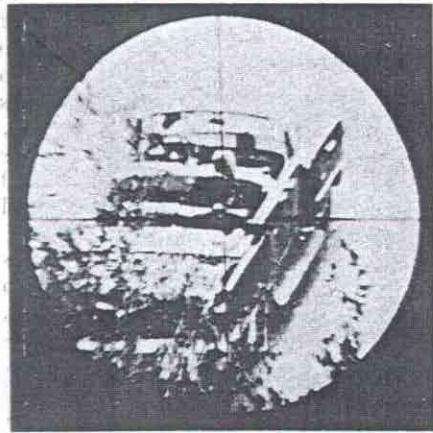
Ballistic Report: Besides the two bullet fragments (and "three small lead particles") discovered in the Presidential limousine, according to the report, "a nearly whole bullet was found on Governor Connally's stretcher at Parkland Hospital after the assassination." The commission heard testimony from two ballistics experts that "positively identified the nearly whole bullet from the stretcher and the two larger bullet fragments found in the Presidential limousine as having been fired in the C2766 Mannlicher-Carcano rifle found

near the building," and "the bullet struck Kennedy's neck slightly to the right of the spine as "... a wound of entrance." The examination further concluded that the bullet had passed entirely through the President's neck, ripping his windpipe as it exited without striking a bone. The commission notes that the Bethesda examiners "rejected a theory that the bullet lodged in the large muscles in the back of the neck and fell out through the point of entry when external heart massage was applied."

Independent pathologists testifying before the commission confirmed the autopsy report's conclusion on the basis of recognized wound characteristics. But because of the importance of the point in establishing the direction of the shots, the commission authorized a series of ballistics experiments simulating the ac-

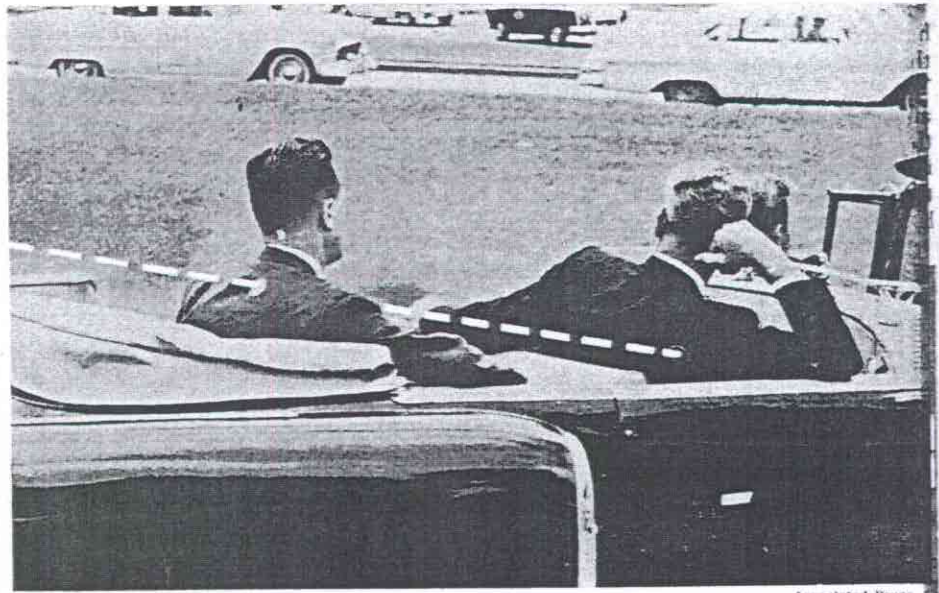
structures with the assassination weapon at a distance of 210 feet. This series of experiments, the commission reports, "indicated that it was most probable that the same bullet passed through the President's neck and then proceeded to inflict all the wounds on the governor."

Movies: The commission still had to initiate its most engrossing bit of scientific detective work. With the cumulative evidence of experts and witnesses all indicating that the shots were fired from above and behind the motorcade, the inquiry sought to "insure that all data were consistent with the shots having been fired from the sixth-floor window." Using motion pictures taken by three spectators to guide the positioning of the automobile, the FBI and the Secret Service on May 24, 1964 "con-



Warren Commission

The assassin's close-up view of the President 176.9 feet away as he squeezed the rifle's trigger for the first shot



Associated Press

Probable conclusion: The same bullet passed through both men

in the depository to the exclusion of all other weapons." But it could go no further. Expert testimony proved unable to determine whether the two fragments were from the same bullet or from two different bullets.

Having traced the source of the shots to the southeast corner window "under the ledge" and conclusively matched the fragments with the Italian-made rifle found on the sixth floor, the commission exhaustively explored the anatomy of the wounds in an attempt to establish the points of entry and exit.

Autopsy: It began with the detailed autopsy report prepared by three pathologists at Bethesda Naval Hospital on the night of November 22. The autopsy concluded that "the smaller hole in the rear of the President's skull was a point of entry and the larger opening on the right side of his head was the wound of exit." Similarly, the autopsy characterized the clean-edged bullet hole at the base of the back of President

tual wounds at the Army's Edgewood Arsenal in Maryland. The Edgewood scientists reconstructed "inert skulls filled with a 20 per cent gelatin substance" then covered with an additional gelatin and draped with simulated hair. And they constructed three simulated necks, one from a 20 per cent gelatin composition and two from animal meats and covered them in clipped animal skin.

Firing at the simulated skulls from a distance of 90 yards with the C2766 Mannlicher-Carcano rifle, the ballistics experts at Edgewood "blew out the right side of the reconstructed skull in a manner very similar to the head wound of the President." Similarly, the scientists pumped a series of shots into the simulated necks at a range of 180 feet to determine the entry and exit hole characteristics and the velocity of an exiting bullet.

In additional tests, to simulate Governor Connally's wounds, the Edgewood experts shot at animal and various bone

ducting a series of tests to determine as precisely as possible what happened on Nov. 22, 1963."

Two stand-ins, one for the President and another for Governor Connally, were placed in the Secret Service follow-up car (since the Presidential limousine was being remodeled) and the C2766 Mannlicher-Carcano rifle mounted with a camera, was repositioned in the sixth-floor depository window. The controlling evidence in the re-enactment was the movie taken by Abraham Zapruder. The FBI calculated that his camera took 18.3 frames each second. Each of the frames was numbered, and the tragic drama replayed slide by slide as an agent photographed it through the telescopic lenses on the murder weapon. After the car turned the corner, beginning at frame 166 of the Zapruder film, "the President passed beneath the foliage of a large oak tree and the point of impact on the President's back" was obscured. He emerged

to full view at frame 210. After studying the replay, the commission concluded "the evidence indicated that the President was not hit until at least by frame 210 and that he was probably hit by frame 225," when the Zapruder film shows his hands moving to his throat.

The investigators had managed to pinpoint the moment of impact to within less than a second. It was further concluded on the basis of testimony and study that "the relative positions of President Kennedy and Governor Connally at the time when the President was struck in the neck confirm that the same bullet probably passed through both men." The three films clearly show the moment of impact of the subsequent shattering shot to the back of the President's head. It is frame 313 on the Zapruder film, indicating that Kennedy was 265.3 feet from the assassin's rifle.

Third Shot? But scientific ingenuity has its limits. Having concluded that three shots were fired and that one shot "passed through the President's neck and then most probably passed through the governor's body," the commission frankly concedes it was unable to determine which shot missed—or whatever happened to the third shot. There is

some evidence that "the third shot may have entirely missed and hit the turf or street by the Triple Underpass." One witness, James T. Tague, standing near the underpass, was "hit on the cheek by an object during the shooting," indicating a possible ricochet off the concrete. But the report is unable to resolve the point.

From the accumulated mass of evidence, the commission draws a spare but overwhelmingly convincing conclusion about the nature of the shooting. The report simply notes: "... the commission has concluded that the shots which killed President Kennedy and wounded Governor Connally were fired from the sixth-floor window at the southeast corner of the Texas School Book Depository building. Two bullets probably caused all the wounds suffered by President Kennedy and Governor Connally. Since the preponderance of the evidence indicated that three shots were fired, the commission concluded that one shot probably missed the Presidential limousine and its occupants." Experts calculated the three shots were fired in a time span ranging from approximately 4.8 seconds to 7.9 seconds.

By the Warren commission's calcu-

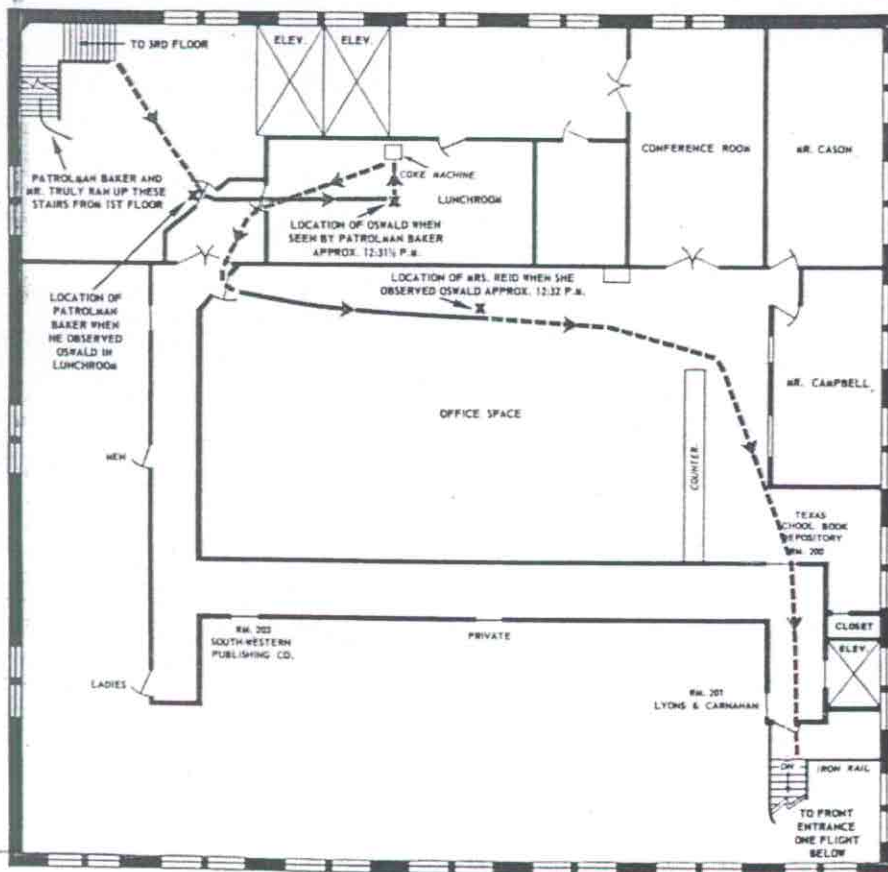
lation, the actual time between the first shot through the President's neck and the fatal, shattering blow to the head was 5.6 seconds at most. Within seconds of the shooting, Roy Kellerman, riding in the front of the Presidential limousine, looked at his watch and said "12:30" to the driver, Special Agent Greer. At the same moment, Dallas Chief of Police Jesse Curry at the head of the motorcade radioed his first orders, "Go to the hospital—Parkland Hospital. Have them stand by." The base station replied, "They have been notified." Traveling at speeds up to 70 to 80 miles per hour down Stemmons Freeway and Harry Hines Boulevard, the Presidential limousine arrived at the emergency entrance of Parkland Hospital at about 12:35 p.m.

The commission reconstructs the moment of arrival at the hospital: "Special Agent Hill removed his suit jacket and covered the President's head and upper chest to prevent the taking of photographs. Governor Connally, who had lost consciousness on the ride to the hospital, regained consciousness when the limousine stopped abruptly at the emergency entrance. Despite his serious wounds, Governor Connally tried to get out of the way so that medical help could reach the President. Although he was reclining in his wife's arms, he lurched forward in an effort to stand upright and get out of the car, but he collapsed again. Then he experienced the first sensation of pain, which became excruciating.

Trauma Room 1: The governor was lifted onto a stretcher and carried into trauma room 2. For a moment, Mrs. Kennedy refused to release the President, whom she held in her lap, but then Kellerman, Greer, and Lawson lifted the President onto a stretcher and pushed it into trauma room 1."

The first physician to see the President was Dr. Charles J. Carrico, a resident in general surgery. The stricken President was on his back being wheeled into the emergency area. According to the report, Carrico "noted that the President was blue-white or ashen in color; had slow, spasmodic, agonal respiration without any coordination; made no voluntary movements; had his eyes open with the pupils dilated without any reaction to light; evidenced no palpable pulse; and had a few chest sounds that were thought to be heart beats ... Dr. Carrico concluded that President Kennedy was still alive." Carrico noted two wounds: "a small bullet wound in the front lower neck, and an extensive wound in the President's head where a sizable portion of skull was missing. He observed shredded brain tissue and 'considerable slow oozing' from the latter wound ..."

As Carrico was beginning to direct his



ELM STREET
 HOUSTON STREET
 ——— KNOWN ROUTE OF OSWALD
 - - - - ASSUMED ROUTE OF OSWALD
 COMMISSION EXHIBIT No. 1118
 SCALE IN FEET
 0 5 10 15 20

Texas School Book Depository: Oswald's route on second floor

attention to the matter of first concern—improving the President's breathing—Dr. Malcolm O. Perry arrived to direct the treatment in a vain attempt at resuscitation. Perry performed the tracheotomy, requiring three to five minutes, at the point of the neck wound, while "Drs. Carrico and Ronald Jones made cut-downs on the President's right leg and left arm, respectively, to infuse blood and fluids into the circulatory system." The desperate efforts were unavailing.

Death Pronouncement: "In the absence of any neurological, muscular, or heart response," the commission reports, "the doctors concluded that the efforts to revive the President were hopeless . . . At approximately 1 p.m., after last rites were administered to the President by Father Oscar L. Huber, Dr. [William K.] Clark pronounced the President dead. He made the official determination because the ultimate cause of death, the severe head injury, was within his sphere of specialization. The time was fixed at 1 p.m., as an approximation, since it was impossible to determine the precise moment when life left the President. President Kennedy could have survived the neck injury, but the head wound was fatal."

Throughout the efforts to control the massive bleeding and reconstruct an airway to the lungs, the stricken President remained on his back. The commission closely questioned Dr. Carrico about the failure to turn the President over:

"Q. Was any effort made to inspect [his] . . . back after he had expired?"

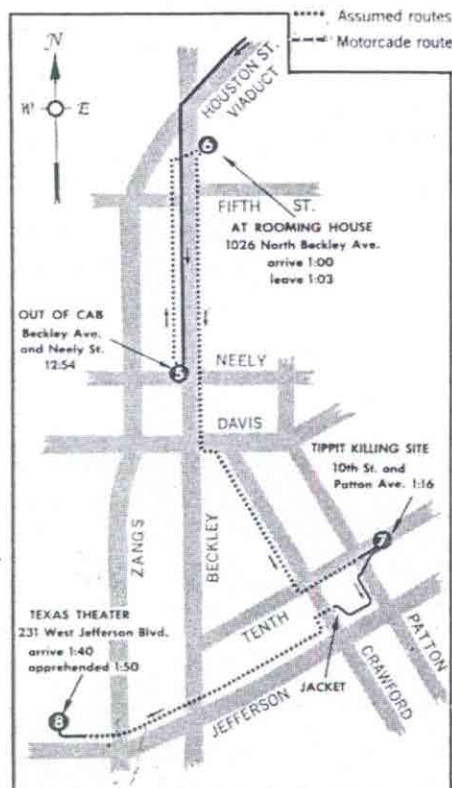
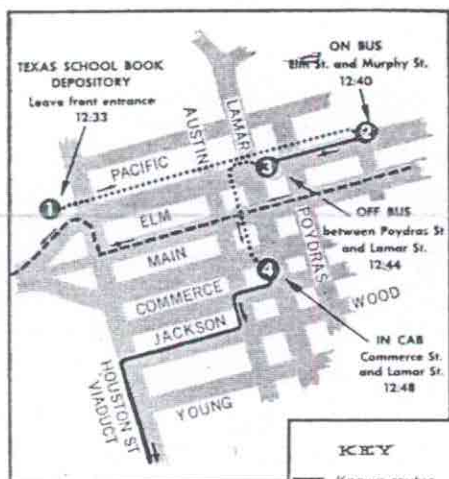
"A. No, sir."

"Q. And why was no effort made at that time to inspect his back?"

"A. I suppose nobody really had the heart to do it."

After President Kennedy was pronounced dead, O'Donnell tried to persuade Mrs. Kennedy to leave the area. She refused. As the President's body was being prepared for removal, the report notes, "two Dallas officials informed members of the President's staff that the body could not be removed from the city until an autopsy was performed." Over their protests, the casket was wheeled out of the hospital at shortly after 2 p.m. At 5:58 p.m. EST Air Force One, bearing a new President of the United States and the dead President's body, landed at Andrews Air Force Base, where John F. Kennedy had begun his trip just 31 hours before.

Because her husband had served in the Navy, Mrs. Kennedy chose the Bethesda Naval Medical Center over the Army's Walter Reed Hospital for the autopsy. The hospital received the body for autopsy at about 7:35 p.m. Mrs. Kennedy waited on the seventeenth floor, together with the Attorney General and members of her family.



Oswald's route in Dallas after JFK's assassination

During the autopsy, "Federal agents brought the surgeons three pieces of bone recovered from Elm Street and the Presidential automobile. When put together, these fragments accounted for approximately three-quarters of the missing portion of the skull." (The exit wound measured approximately 5 inches in its greatest diameter.) The autopsy, which the commission report includes as an appendix, concludes that "the deceased died as a result of two perforating gunshot wounds inflicted by high-velocity projectiles fired by a person or persons unknown. The projectiles were fired from a point behind and somewhat above the level of the deceased." The autopsy was concluded at approximately 11 p.m. and the body of

the 35th President of the United States was prepared for burial.

Pigeons Scattering: The medical examiners a thousand miles away at Bethesda had no way of knowing that the net had already closed on the likely assassin. "When the shots were fired," the commission's narrative recounts, "a Dallas motorcycle patrolman, Marrion L. Baker, was riding in the motorcade at a point several cars behind the President. He had turned right from Main Street onto Houston Street and was about 200 feet south of Elm Street when he heard a shot. Baker, having recently returned from a week of deer hunting, was certain the shot came from a high-powered rifle. He looked up and saw pigeons scattering in the air from their perches on the Texas School Book Depository Building. He raced his motorcycle to the building, dismounted, scanned the area to the west, and pushed his way through the spectators toward the entrance. There he encountered Roy Truly, the building superintendent, who offered Baker his help. They entered the building, and ran toward the two elevators in the rear. Finding that both elevators were on an upper floor, they dashed up the stairs. Not more than two minutes had elapsed since the shooting.

"When they reached the second-floor landing on their way up to the top of the building, patrolman Baker thought he caught a glimpse of someone through the small glass window in the door separating the hall area near the stairs from the small vestibule leading into the lunchroom. Gun in hand, he rushed to the door and saw a man about 20 feet away walking toward the other end of the lunchroom. The man was empty-handed. At Baker's command, the man turned and approached him. Truly, who had started up the stairs to the third floor ahead of Baker, returned to see what had delayed the patrolman. Baker asked Truly whether he knew the man in the lunchroom. Truly replied that the man worked in the building, whereupon Baker turned from the man and proceeded, with Truly, up the stairs. The man they encountered had started working in the Texas School Book Depository Building on Oct. 16, 1963. His fellow workers described him as very quiet—a 'loner.' His name was Lee Harvey Oswald."

From that moment, the commission scrupulously reconstructed Oswald's every movement—always checking against a stopwatch.

Within a minute after the two men left the lunchroom, Mrs. R.A. Reid, the clerical supervisor of the School Book Depository, testified that she saw Oswald walk toward the door leading to the front stairway with a full Coca-Cola bottle in his hand. By the commission's calculation, Mrs. Reid met Oswald at

about 12:32 p.m. It concludes that he could have gone down the stairs and out the front door by 12:33 p.m.—three minutes after the shooting. At that time, the building had not yet been sealed off by the police.

The commission minutely retraces the alleged assassin's path to his rooming house. It establishes that he probably first walked east for about seven blocks on Elm Street, then caught a bus heading back toward the School Book Depository. By its re-creation, the commission estimates that he boarded the bus at about 12:40, left it at 12:44 p.m.

'Like a Maniac': Aboard the bus, he was recognized by Mary Bledsoe, an elderly lady who had briefly rented Oswald a room. She told the inquiry: "Oswald got on. He looks like a maniac. His sleeve was out here . . . His shirt was undone." She recollected she had seen a hole in the right elbow of his shirt.



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The Murderer murdered: Jack Ruby guns down Lee Harvey Oswald

When Oswald was arrested in the Texas Theater, his brown sport shirt had a hole in the right sleeve at the elbow. Thereafter, the commission systematically reconstructs Oswald's route by foot and by cab and to his rooming house at 1026 North Beckley, where he lived under the alias of O.H. Lee. The commission places his time of arrival at approximately 1 p.m.

According to the testimony of Earlene Roberts, the housekeeper, he hurried to his room and stayed no longer than three or four minutes before rushing out, zipping up his jacket as he left. He was next seen nine-tenths of a mile away at 10th Street and Patton Avenue.

Tippit Dies: There he shot and killed patrolman J.D. Tippit, described by Chief Curry as being "a very fine, dedicated officer." The commission com-

piled massive eyewitness evidence to this second shooting. According to the report, "Tippit stopped the man and called him to his car. He approached the car and apparently exchanged words with Tippit through the right front or vent window. Tippit got out and started to walk around the front of the car. As Tippit reached the left front wheel the man pulled out a revolver and fired several shots. Four bullets hit Tippit and killed him instantly."

As Oswald started on his last dash, for the Texas Theater, ejecting empty cartridges from his pistol as he dog-trotted through some bushes, one eyewitness heard him mutter either "poor damn cop" or "poor dumb cop." Half an hour later, Oswald was flushed out in the back of the main floor of the theater. As patrolman M.N. McDonald started to search him, Oswald said, "Well, it's all over now." He struck the

policeman between the eyes with his left fist. With his right hand, he drew a gun from his waist. McDonald grabbed the gun and subdued him.

At 1:51 p.m., Police Car 2 radioed it was on its way to headquarters with the suspect. At 2:15 p.m., Capt. Will Fritz returned from the Texas School Book Depository. The homicide chief immediately ordered a detective, Sgt. Gerald L. Hill, who had helped bring Oswald in from the theater, to get a search warrant and pick up a man named Lee Oswald. When Hill asked the reason, Fritz replied, "Well, he was employed down at the Book Depository and he had not been present for a roll call of the employees." Hill promptly responded, "Captain, we will save you a trip . . . there he sits."

While he was in custody, Oswald was

intermittently questioned for a total of about twelve hours. The commission's report notes that "throughout his interrogation he denied he had anything to do with either the assassination of President Kennedy or the murder of patrolman Tippit." He was formally arraigned for murdering Tippit at 7:10 p.m. on Nov. 22. He was formally charged with the assassination of the President at about 1:30 a.m. on Saturday, Nov. 23.

Against All Principles: Interrogation sessions took place in Captain Fritz's small office, often with as many as seven or eight additional people crowded in. Fritz testified that he was constantly being interrupted. He had no tape recorder or stenographer to make a transcript. The commission soberly comments: "The number of people in the interrogation room and the tumultuous atmosphere throughout the third floor made it difficult for the interrogators to gain Oswald's confidence and to encourage him to be truthful. As Chief Curry recognized in his testimony, 'We were violating every principle of interrogation . . . it was just against all principles of good interrogation practice.'

Transfer: On Sunday morning, Oswald was to be transferred to the County Jail about a mile away. The commission reconstructs the sequence of events that led to the final abortion of justice, the shooting of Lee Harvey Oswald at 11:20 a.m. in the basement of the Dallas city jail by Jack Ruby. It reviews the rather thorough arrangements of Captain C.E. Talbert to make the basement area secure. At the moment he was fatally shot, Oswald was literally in the midst of more than 70 policemen.

Tracing Ruby's presence in the Western Union office just minutes before the climactic murder, the commission finds it "certain" that he entered the basement "no more than two to three minutes before the shooting." It speculates that he probably entered the "down" ramp from Main Street at the moment a patrol car emerged to the street. "After considering all the evidence," the report states, "the commission has concluded that Ruby entered the basement unaided, probably via the Main Street ramp, and no more than three minutes before the shooting of Oswald." In its final considered judgment, "there was no evidence that implicated the police or newsmen in Ruby's actions . . ."

At 1:07 p.m. at Parkland Hospital, Lee Harvey Oswald, the alleged assassin, was pronounced dead—the improbable denouement to the implausible assassination of the 46-year-old President of the United States in a Dallas motorcade. Within the competence of man, the commission has painstakingly clarified a chronology otherwise permanently clouded by the bullet from Jack Ruby's Colt .38 revolver.