

“Everyone Keep Off the Grassy Knoll”

-----Bill posted by the Warren Commission



For patrons of *JFK Lancer* it will hardly come as breaking news that the Warren Commission and the FBI suppressed, ignored, or misrepresented witness statements that contradicted the government’s “official truth” of Dallas. Even a partial list of these witnesses is impressively and distressingly long: Jack Dougherty, Carolyn Arnold, Vicky Adams, Sandra Styles, Pierce Allman, Dallas deputies Eugene Boone and Seymour Weitzman, James “Ike” Altgens, Eugene Aldredge, Dallas Sheriff Allan Sweatt, Secret Service Agent Lane Bertram, FBI Agents James W. Sibert and Francis X. O’Neill, Lonnie Hudkins, Harold Feldman, Abraham Zapruder, Audrey Bell, Darrell Tomlinson, Jane C. Wester, R. J Jimison, Dr. George G. Burkley, Dr. Charles J. Carrico, and last, but certainly not least, Texas Governor John B. Connally.

Connally’s name probably resonates stronger than the rest in that he was a nationally prominent political figure and a casualty of the shooting on that surreal Friday on November 22, 1963. Because of his, if you will, celebrity status the governor did command national media attention. Until his dying day, Connally adamantly insisted that he was struck by a separate bullet from the one that first hit President Kennedy. As he explained during an interview in *Life* magazine, “They talk about the one bullet or two bullet theory but as far as I am concerned there is no theory. There is my absolute knowledge . . .that one bullet caused the President’s first wound and that an entirely separate shot struck me. It is a certainty, I will never change my mind.”¹

While all those listed above could be ignored or have their testimony discounted, the Commission had to grapple with Connally's rejection of its "single-bullet" theory. As is common knowledge, the Commission's no-conspiracy conclusion was inextricably tied to this one-bullet hypothesis. This distressing realization was squarely brought home to the Commission when one of its own members, Senator Richard B. Russell, forced a special executive session on September 18, 1963, to explain to his colleagues why he could not sign a report that asserted that JFK and Connally were hit with the same bullet. The senior senator from Georgia, one of the most conservative and respected members of the U.S. Senate, was the Warren Commission's first dissenter.

Russell was uncomfortable with the FBI's rush to judgment in getting out its report on the assassination. He agreed with Warren's public characterization of the report (Commission Document Number One) as "skeletal." He also suspected that the FBI and the CIA were not completely forthcoming with the Commission on everything they knew about the assassination. The greatest influence on Russell's dissent was Connally's cast-iron insistence before the Commission that a separate bullet hit him. This struck a strong cord with Russell and his fellow Commissioner, Senator John S. Sherman. The September 18 go-around with his Commission colleagues was, in Russell's words, a lengthy and heated session that just "whupped me down." Ultimately, he settled for some compromise language suggested by John J. McCloy in the final report, expecting that the record of the reasons behind his dissent would be part of the official record of the Commission's deliberations.² What Russell never anticipated, and did not learn about until years later, was that Commission General Counsel J. Lee Rankin, probably in complicity with chairman Warren, secretly suppressed the actual record of that contentious session and substituted it with his own innocuous version, leaving the impression that the

Commission was unanimous on the “single-bullet” theory. Inarguably, this was one of the most disgraceful episodes in the entire history of the JFK assassination investigation.³

The story of the bamboozlement (no other word will do) of the most powerful and respected member of the Upper House, who carried the unofficial title of “Dean of the Senate,” is intended to serve as an introduction or orientation to what follows.

✓ The most universally ignored witnesses to the Kennedy assassination was the contingent of motorcycle officers detailed to escort JFK and the presidential party along the ten-mile route from Love Field to the Dallas Trade Mart. The FBI interviewed only one of the “bike-jockeys” who were assigned to the motorcade that day. That was Marrion L. Baker and only because he saw Oswald in the Book Depository immediately after the assassination. During the course of its investigation the Commission interviewed five more of motorcycle officers. But aside from Baker, the FBI, the Commission’s investigative arm, ignored all the rest of the motorcycle contingent in the greatest and most solemn investigation the agency was ever called upon to undertake! Inspector James R. Malley, the executive officer Director Hoover dispatched to Dallas to supervise the investigation, was called upon years later to explain this apparent oversight. According to Malley, they never registered with him as likely witnesses “who could furnish pertinent information.” Malley added by way of self-exoneration, “if they had pertinent information, they should have come forward.”⁴ It baffles the imagination as to why it never occurred to Malley, himself a veteran federal law officer, that trained and experienced policemen might be more reliable observers than the average citizen bystander, having the responsibility for anticipating and being alert to any untoward incidents.

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One of the 17 ignored “bike-jockeys” was Douglas L. Jackson, an eighteen-year veteran, who was located “adjacent to the right rear bumper” of the presidential limousine, the closest to

Kennedy of all the police escort when the shooting started. Expecting that he would be called as a witness, Jackson made notes of what he observed while the images were still fresh in his mind. Jackson thought the first shot was a car backfiring. He immediately turned to the Lincoln Continental “in time for the *next explosion* (italics mine) and saw Mr. Connally jerk back to his right and it seemed he looked right at me.” According to his account, Jackson then looked up at the Triple Underpass and then back toward the president and saw Kennedy “hit in the head . . . he appeared to have been hit *just above the right ear* (italics mine). The top of his head flew off away from me.” Jackson followed the massive blue-black limo as it picked up speed heading north on Stemmons Freeway toward Parkland Memorial Hospital. As Jackson followed in the wake of the Lincoln he saw Secret Service agent Clint Hill draped over Mrs. Kennedy to keep her from slipping off the rear of the speeding car. She had climbed onto the slippery trunk (it had rained that morning) to try and retrieve the top of her husband’s head as it flew away. As the limousine sped toward the hospital Hill, still clutching the First Lady, looked back toward Jackson and “shook his head from side to side and held his hand thumb down.”⁵

It was not until 1975 before the FBI went through the motions of interviewing Jackson and reviewing his notes. According to Henry Wade, Dallas County District Attorney, Jackson told his office that the FBI talked to him, read his notes, but did not ask for a copy. Despite the FBI’s publicly iterated pledge that the Kennedy case would remain open, the internal Bureau files on the JFK assassination were designated “closed.”⁶ Hoover closed the files on the case as soon as the Warren Commission presented its findings to the American people in September 1964. On two counts, what Jackson recorded in his notes completely destroys the official version of the assassination. If Jackson saw the governor hit after Kennedy by a separate bullet, the second shot, as Connally insisted was the case, then the “single-bullet” theory was discredited

and there had to be at least a second gunman in Dealey Plaza. Secondly, a bullet striking JFK “above the right ear,” as Jackson observed, would more likely have originated from the front and right side of the limousine, in the area of what the so-called “Grassy Knoll” area. In one other regard, Jackson should have been a Commission witness because he assisted the moribund president from the limousine when it reached Parkland Memorial Hospital and had a close up view of JFK’s head wounds. As he noted on page 3 of his statement, “I could see the top of his head was gone, his left eye was bulged out of the socket.” Had there been a legitimate no-hold-barred investigation, an informed interrogator could have asked Jackson if he noticed whether Kennedy had a wound in the back of his head. Jackson might have had some useful information about the back of JFK’s head that would have helped to confirm whether or not a shot came from the rear and above motorcade as the Commission concluded.

*Call here
Citizens
Report A
Shot from
Grassy Knoll*

District Attorney Wade, who suspected that the Kennedy assassination was the work of more than a “lone nut,” recognized the inherent value of Jackson’s notes and discreetly acted to see that they would get into the public domain by sending a copy to assassination researcher Harold Weisberg. Jackson’s observations take on even greater probative value when evaluated in conjunction with the testimony of other witnesses who were close to Kennedy when the shots rang out.

For example, Associated Press photographer James “Ike” Altgens captured the presidential limousine on film just after the first shots were fired and seconds before Kennedy’s head exploded in a nimbus of blood, tissue, and bone. Altgens’ picture was historic, the most important still shot of the assassination taken that day. At that horrific moment Altgens was about fifteen feet away from the limousine, closer to the president than any other bystander. Altgens was close enough to hear Mrs. Kennedy cry out “Oh, no!” as the president slumped over

in her lap and Secret Service agent Roy S. Kellerman's frantic alert to the lead car in the motorcade: "We've been hit, get us to the nearest hospital." When the Commission finally interviewed him on July 22, exactly eight months after the assassination, he described the horror of that moment to Commission staff lawyer Wesley Liebeler, "There was flesh particles that flew out of the side of his head in my direction . . . so much that it indicated to me that the shot came out of the left side of his head." The forty-five-year-old professional AP photographer was even more graphic in his description to the FBI. He told his FBI interviewers, ". . . pieces of flesh, blood, and bones appeared to fly from the right side of the President's head and pass in front of Mrs. Kennedy to the left of the Presidential limousine."⁷ Altgens' description is consistent with Jackson's own observation that Kennedy was hit "above the right ear."

Altgens told Liebeler that he thought the shots came from the Book Depository. By July 1964, of course, there had been ample time for the government's version of the shooting to have embedded itself into the national consciousness and there seemed no reason to contest that all the shots originated from the "sniper's nest" on the sixth floor of the southeast corner of the Texas School Book Depository. That is, to the rear and above the motorcade. But unless the natural laws of physics were suspended in Dealey Plaza that day, Altgens was describing a shot from the so-called "Grassy Knoll" area. It would be expected that the inertial force of a shot from the rear of the motorcade would have propelled particles of flesh and bone in the same path, that is, to the front and not to the left and rear of the limousine. To be clear, Altgens was located slightly to the front of the oncoming Lincoln Continental when JFK's head exploded. However, support for a shot from the front and to the right of the Lincoln came independently from the two Dallas motorcycle cops, Bobby J. Hargis and B.J. Martin, flanking to the left and rear of the presidential limousine. Both men reported to the Commission that they were splattered with blood and brain

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Cops Confessing
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tissue. Martin, an 11-year veteran of the Dallas police force, noted in his Commission testimony that he and Hargis were about six to eight feet behind the Lincoln when Kennedy was fatally struck in the head.⁸

The only reason the FBI interviewed Jackson 12 years after the assassination was because the bureau was experiencing some serious credibility problems. Clarence Kelley, the new FBI director, made this gesture because the agency was caught up in a damage control operation in response to the public airing of the controversy surrounding the destruction of Oswald's note to agent James P. Hosty, Jr.⁹ FBIHQ had reason to suspect that elements connected to the Dallas Police Department might choose this time to go public about the motorcycle escort officers, especially Jackson and James Chaney, who the FBI failed to interview after the assassination. The occasion that prompted Kelley and his executive officers to interview Jackson and James Chaney, Jackson's sidekick who was on the right flank of the presidential limousine, was a report from the Dallas field office that ~~former~~ the former police chief, Jesse E. Curry, said he suspected that there were at least two gunmen in Dealey Plaza because one of the "bike-jockeys" (probably Hargis or Martin) riding to the rear of the Lincoln Continental had testified that he had ridden through a spray of blood and tissue, suggesting that a shot came from the right and front of the motorcade.¹⁰ The snubbing of Jackson was suddenly a particularly sensitive point with FBI Washington when the new administration learned that he had made detailed notes of what he observed immediately after he was released from duty that day.¹¹

To avoid adding to the FBI's ongoing public relations woes, Director Kelley ordered that the Dallas office interview both Jackson and Chaney.¹² Whatever Jackson and Chaney had to report was not going to reopen the investigation into the assassination. As mentioned above, Hoover had closed the case. FBI Washington was simply going through the motions to satisfy

the requirement that statements of all four officers escorting the presidential limousine were on record. That Jackson saw Connally hit a ^{by} separate bullet, the second shot, and that the fatal headshot struck JFK “above the right ear” presented no problems for the FBI and cast no doubts on the Warren Commission’s conclusions set out for the ordinary understanding of the American people.

Unlike Jackson, Jim Chaney made no contemporaneous notes but some of what he reported to the *Houston Chronicle* right after the assassination was intriguing. He told the paper that the Lincoln stopped or hesitated momentarily after the first shot. Admittedly not conclusive, but strongly suggestive that the first shot came from the front of the motorcade and William R. Greer, JFK’s driver of choice because he regarded him as the most qualified, instinctively hit the brakes to avoid driving into the direction of an ambush. Had Greer thought the shot came from the rear his natural inclination would have been to hit the gas and accelerate the car away from the location of the sniper or snipers.¹³ Inspector Malley, Hoover’s deputy tasked with supervising the investigation, arrived in Dallas on November 25, the day after the *Chronicle* carried Chaney’s eyewitness report of the shooting. Chaney’s account may have been all Malley needed to decide that the politically safest stratagem was a policy of blanket avoidance of the entire contingent of motorcycle officers. What the FBI might inadvertently learn from these trained observers might subvert the “official truth” of the assassination that was then being assembled in the nation’s capital.

Can I
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on
Chaney?

After its 1975 interviews of Jackson and Chaney the Bureau was satisfied that it had done everything possible in “the interest of thoroughness.” The General Intelligence Division recommended that there was no need to interview any of the remaining motorcycle police escorts. Having on record the testimony of all four “bike-jockeys” who escorted the presidential

limousine---Hargis, Martin, Chaney, and Jackson—FBI Washington closed the books on this aspect of the assassination story. In language that George Orwell would have satirized as vintage “Doublegoodspeak,” the General Intelligence Division concluded, “None of these interviews have cast any doubts on the conclusions of the Warren Commission.”¹⁴

Submitted by Jerry McKnight

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End Notes

1. Connally's quote can be found in the *Washington Post*, 11/21/1966
2. For the compromise language see *Warren Commission Report*, 19, item 3.
3. The story of Russell's dissent can be found in the Richard B. Russell Papers, Special Collections Division, Richard B. Russell Memorial Library, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia and the John Sherman Cooper papers, University of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky. See also LBJ phone call to Russell, 9/18/1963, 7:54 p.m., White House telephone transcripts, Lyndon B. Johnson Library, Austin, Texas, for Russell's conversation with LBJ about that day's stressful executive session.
4. B. H. Cooke to Gallagher, 9/12/1975, FBI HQ JFK Assassination File, 62-109060-7256.
5. See Jackson's statement entitled "I Saw the President Assinated [sic]." A copy can be found in the Subject Index under D.L. Jackson at the Harold Weisberg Archive, Hood College, Frederick, Maryland (hereafter cited as Weisberg Archive), 3. *(Check - Be more exact)*
6. See Henry Wade's cover letter to Harold Weisberg, 6/9/1980, op. cite. In 1980s a Washington attorney, Mark Allen, sued under FOIA for FBI files used by the House Select Committee on Assassinations. One of the documents he received was an FBI damage-control tickler, almost certainly by mistake. See page 4 item 8 under rubric C. Related Bureau Actions and Activities.
7. For Altgens' Commission testimony see 7H518; for his FBI interview see FBI HQ Oswald File, 105-82555-3997, Section 71, 3. To orient Altgens in relation to the presidential limousine at the moment of the fatal headshot see Richard B. Trask, Pictures of the Pain: Photography and the Assassination of President Kennedy (Danvers, Mass.: Yeoman Press, 1994), 315.
8. 6H294(Hargis); 6H289-292(Martin). Abraham Zapruder, the Dallas clothing manufacturer whose historic six feet of film captured the assassination, was one of many onlookers who thought that shots came from the heavily wooded stockade fence at his rear. Zapruder was standing on a small concrete abutment that was part of the pergola with the Grassy Knoll to his back. Zapruder told the Commission that he was pretty sure the fatal headshot came from behind him from the Grassy Knoll. See 7H572. Zapruder, who inarguably was a key eyewitness to the shooting, was not called as a Commission witness until July when the Commission staff lawyers were in the process of writing the first draft of the report. *sure of this date + not Cooper*
9. Several weeks before the assassination Oswald hand delivered a note to FBI headquarters *permitted to be admitted as 3rd Edition - 1 When written*

in Dallas addressed to agent Hosty. Hosty was in charge of Oswald's file and had been trying to interview Marina, who was pregnant with their second child, about Lee's Mexico trip. Incontestably, this so-called Hosty note contained a threat to the FBI (to blow up the FBI offices is a fair reading) if Hosty did not leave his wife alone. This threat of violence in combination with what the FBI had in Oswald's pre-assassination file on his ostensible left-wing political activities---defection to the Soviet Union, Fair Play for Cuba Committee in New Orleans, and visit to the Soviet and Cuban consulates in Mexico City---meant that the FBI should have had Oswald on its Security Index (SI). Had he been on the agency's SI his name would automatically have been turned over to the Secret Service prior to JFK's visit to Texas. This did not happen. Hosty and senior officers of the Dallas field office, in character with the FBI's culture of arrogance and elitism, failed to notify the Secret Service of Oswald's presence in Dallas, and the rest, as they say, was history. Had the Secret Service had Oswald's name he would have been denied access to JFK and would have had an irrefutable alibi. The Dealey Plaza gunman might have still carried out the assassination but the "lone nut" explanation of would not have become the national myth of Dallas.

When FBIHQ found out about the Hosty note over the weekend of the assassination it ordered the Dallas office to destroy the note. The Hosty note and its destruction were kept secret from the Warren Commission. But in the late summer and fall of 1975 the note-destruction cover-up found its way into the national media.

10. SA(masked) to SAC, Dallas, 9/14/1975, FBI HQJFK Assassination File, 62-1-0960-7257. Curry like Wade and other law enforcement authorities in Dallas never bought into the Commission's no-conspiracy conclusions.

11. SAC, Dallas, to Director, 10/7/1975, FBI HQ JFJ Assassination File, 62-109060-7369.

12. Cooke to Gallagher, 9/12/1975, FBI HQ JFK Assassination File, 62-109060-7256.

13. For Chaney's fresh recollections see *Houston Chronicle*, 11/24/1963. One of the Warren Commission's earliest critics, Mark Lane, brought Chaney's remarks to the attention of the Commission in his March 4, 1984. See 2H43-45. See also Chaney's 9/17/1975 FBI interview, FBI HQ JFK Assassination File, 62-109060-7369. It should be noted that the agents who interview Chaney and Jackson in 1975 had their names masked from the FD-302 standard FBI interview forms. A possible explanation is that both Dallas police officers made observations that were inconsistent with the official version of Dallas and these were stricken from their statements but might still remain in the FBI agents' notes. Masking their names secures against anyone who wants to subpoena their notes.

14. Cooke to Gallagher, 9/12/1975, FBI HQ JFK Assassination File, 62-109060-7256, 4.