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The Third Decade, Volume 1, Issue 6

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man at window

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THE THIRD DECADE

the road, I had to shelve my concern with the Kennedy assassination and get on with my work.

I have never seen an official report greeted with such universal praise as that accorded the Warren Commission's findings when they were made public on September 24, 1964. All the major television networks devoted special programs and analyses to the report; the next day the newspapers ran long columns detailing its findings, accompanied by special news analyses and editorials. The verdict was unanimous. The report answered all questions, left no room for doubt. Lee Harvey Oswald, alone and unaided, had assassinated the president of the United States.

The chorus of acclaim impressed me. I watched television program after program. I waded through the massive columns of the New York Times--and even I was finally convinced. My earlier conviction that there must have been a conspiracy obviously had been wrong. The Warren Commission after months of investigation had found no trace of conspiracy, and all of the best news and editorial brains in the nation were hailing its conclusions. I accepted the verdict and turned to other things.

Two months later, left alone one evening with nothing else to do, I decided to take a closer look at the report. I had purchased the Doubleday Edition, with an impressive foreword by the eminent attorney Louis Nizer. The television programs I had seen at the time the report was issued had left two vague, nagging questions in my mind.

The first stemmed from what I had heard in Washington the year before about the suspiciously fast description of the gunman. According to the report, these details had come apparently from Howard L. Brennan, a forty-five-year-old steamfitter, who had been sitting on a concrete retaining wall opposite the Texas School Book Depository at the corner of Elm and Houston Streets, where the presidential motorcade made a slow left-hand turn into Elm. Brennan told police that he had seen a man in the sixth-floor southeast window of the depository before the motorcade arrived and that he had seen him in the act of discharging his final shot.

The initial shot had been fired at 12:30 P.M.; the Dallas police description, according to the Warren Report, had apparently been based on Brennan's almost instantaneous account to police. Brennan had described the gunman as white, slender, about 165 pounds, 5 feet 10 inches tall, in his early thirties. Oswald was white, slender, about 150 pounds, 5 feet 9, twenty-four years old. It was a fantastic match. I wondered whether it was possible.

The sixth-floor window of the sniper's nest had been only partially open; the room behind it was dark, unlighted; cartons had been piled up behind the window as a screen, and one had been placed on the window ledge as a gun rest. Was it possible that, from 120 feet away, gazing up at what must have been a shadowy figure against this dark background, Brennan could have come up with a nearly letter-perfect description of Oswald?

I had doubted Brennan's ability and had tested my doubts. I walked around New York streets, looking up at lighted fifth- and sixth-floor windows in which men were working. Even in these circumstances, only a portion of a man's body would be visible; and I found I couldn't tell how tall the men were or what they looked like. Yet the commission had accepted Brennan's description, despite the physical difficulties involved. Brennan's accuracy was difficult to explain, unless Oswald had been pointed out to Brennan in advance--but that is something we will never know.

Next, I turned my attention to a second question that had been nagging me. Texas Governor John Bowden Connally, Jr., who had been riding on the jump seat

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*Fred J. Cook
Oswald as
Sole
Suspect
Howard
Brennan
Description of
gunman*