

Suspense Film Dramatizes Kennedy Assassination

By NORA SAYRE

If disbelief is one of our healthiest national reflexes, at least it has been well exercised in the years between the Warren Report and the latest protestations about the nonbeing of those Presidential tapes. The only danger is that fact itself can be a victim of disbelief: Ugly news that happens to be true becomes easier to ignore, and good news gets rejected with a cackle.

"Executive Action," which opened yesterday at the Coronet, offers a tactful, low-key blend of fact and invention. The film makers do not insist that they have solved John Kennedy's murder; instead, they simply evoke what might have happened, according to various researchers, including Mark Lane.

The result is a cool, skillful, occasionally confusing argument for conspiracy. Wealthy rightwingers (Burt Lancaster and Robert Ryan) wanted Kennedy removed because he was going to sign the test-ban treaty, "lead the black revolution" and prob-

The Cast

EXECUTIVE ACTION, directed by David Miller; screenplay by Dalton Trumbo; story by Donald Freed and Mark Lane; director of photography, Robert Sleadman; film editor, George Grenville and Irving Lerner; music, Randy Edelman; producer, Edward Lewis; released by National General Pictures. At the Coronet Theater, Third Avenue at 59th Street. Running time 91 minutes. This film is classified PG.

Farrington	Burt Lancaster
Foster	Robert Ryan
Ferguson	Will Geer
Paulitz	Gilbert Green
Halliday	John Anderson
Gunman	Paul Carr
Tim	Colby Chester

ably pull out of Vietnam. The last two points may give you the hiccups, but that is what these characters say.

Like calm businessmen, they organize the event. While three talented marksmen rehearse by shooting at dummies in a car driven through the desert, the conspirators search for a nut to use as a patsy.

Throughout the stress is on technology — even Oswald's name comes out of a computer. The movie follows the "second Oswald" theory, and this part of the plot is deftly constructed, as is the disap-

pearance of the three marksmen, also the calculations to "have the F.B.I. watching the C.I.A." and vice versa, while relying on the inefficiency of the Secret Service.

The conspirators are cleverly cloaked in the style of Camelot itself. Lancaster and Ryan appear as pensive, practical semi-academics, rationally planning an act as bloody as a small foreign invasion. (They admit that they sometimes "sound like gods," since they are also planning the world's future — "Well, somebody's got to do it.") Both have the confidence and the casual class that we recall in many Kennedy appointees. Lancaster, looking miraculously young, overdoes the "sincerity" at moments — an old habit of his. And there are too many shots of the conspirators smiling ironically at once another. But Ryan is wonderfully benign and wry, wisely underplaying where others might have gone all out for evil.

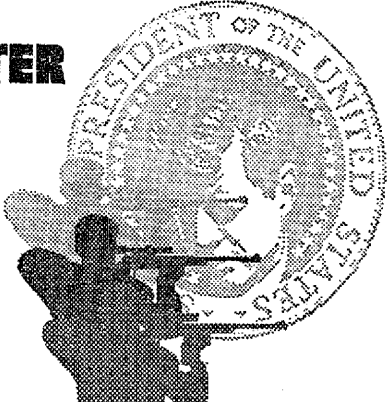
However, it is far more painful to think of Ryan's death — a few weeks after this movie was finished —

than Kennedy's. And that is the problem lurking in this movie. Television footage is used to paw at the public's sentiments; we see Kennedy smiling and golfing and kissing his children, as well as making speeches. But "Executive Action" is emotionally disconnected from history to the degree that those with an affection for suspense can enjoy the build-up of the plotting — even though we know how the assassination turned out.


Despite the flags crawling down flagpoles and the drumbeats, a national trauma has become a competent thriller. And it is just as well. Reliving the shock of that killing would hardly benefit any kind of audience now.

So whether you chime with this interpretation, or, like a few I know, decide to embrace all the conspiracy theories of the assassination, the movie is useful in rousing the questions once again. The film's sternest and strongest point is that only a crazed person acting on his own would have been acceptable to the American public — which, at that time, certainly did not want to believe in a conspiracy.

BURT LANCASTER
ROBERT RYAN
WILL GEER



An Edward Lewis Production
EXECUTIVE ACTION
Probably the most controversial film of our time!

PG COLOR • A National General Release 

THE Coronet A WALTER READE THEATRE
59th St. at 3rd Ave. • EL 5-1663
12:00, 2:00, 4:00, 6:00, 8:00, 10:00