

It's Time for Blakey's Beat the Clock*

by Philip H. Melanson

It was a bad day at HSCA. Chief Counsel G. Robert Blakey stared at the acoustical data, eyes widening in horror: A fourth shot from the grassy knoll! An interval of only 1.66 seconds between the first and second shots! (Too brief for Oswald to have fired both shots, given the FBI's 1964 finding that the fastest time, using the scope sight, was 2.2 seconds).

Blakey shook his head in dismay. Phantom gunmen seemed to be proliferating like rabbits. This was doubly offensive. Not only did it raise questions concerning whether Oswald had fired the magic bullet (alleged by HSCA to be shot number two), but the data seemed intent on working its way toward violating the universal laws of criminal behavior. Blakey had already pronounced that the effective upper limit of participants in a conspiracy was five to six persons, and several people had to be accounted for at Mafia central rather than at Dealy Plaza.

With so much at stake, something had to be done. Accompanied by his trusty sidekick Assistant Chief Counsel Gary

* This is a reconstruction of an HSCA reconstruction. Like the HSCA reconstruction, it is pure fantasy. Although a videotape of the HSCA reconstruction is alleged to exist among Committee records, Professor Blakey has said: "Let's roll the video tape ... in the year 2038." (See HSCA Report, Bantam edition p. 89, pp. 638-43).

Cornwell, the mild-mannered Blakey swung into action. Shedding his suit coat and rolling up his sleeves, he grabbed the rifle. A Ramboesque grimace crossed his visage. He would forget the scope and use only the iron sights: that should beat the clock.

Blam! "Crank this sucker!" Blakey exhorted himself, slamming the bolt into place. Blam!

One point seventy-five seconds. Not good enough. The phantom gunman in the depository reared his ugly head.

But Blakey had just begun. He was, as the Blues Brothers would say, **on a mission for God**--official history and universal laws of criminal behavior were riding on his ability to beat the clock.

Several tries later, Blakey's body seemed to mesh into a fluid motion with the ancient Italian carbine. As with Larry Bird's three-point shots, the weapon had become a veritable extension of Blakey's arms and hands.

Blam! Reload. Blam!--1.65 seconds! It was close, darn close. But you only need one good time to beat the clock, and Blakey had gotten it.

He and Cornwell slapped an enthusiastic but dignified high-five. The phantom had been exorcised.

The nitpicking Cong. Christopher J. Dodd was not satisfied with Blakey's herculian efforts. He kept pressing for more tests, doubtful that Oswald could have fired both shots. Finally, four of Washington D.C.'s finest, expert marksman all, were summoned to do battle with the phantom.

Each one failed. None could crank off two shots in the required 1.66 seconds.

Blakey's ire was now palpable. "Whimps!" he yelled at the quartet of losers, scowling scornfully. Beat the Clock was no game for the fainthearted, no matter what their advertised expertise.

Suddenly, the Chief Counsel was seized by an idea so imaginative that it exceeded even his own expectations of his genius: **the magic bullet deserved a magic shot!** The inspirational logic of Walter Cronkite raced through his mind: "under normal circumstances, Oswald would not have time, but this was not a normal circumstance, it was a Presidential assassination."

"Eschew traditional marksmanship!" Blakey blurted. He would not use any sights at all. He would point aim and blast, like Hopalong Cassidy and Roy Rogers used to do when shooting the weapons out of the hands of the bad guys.

Blakey fired, reloaded, and fired with fanatical zeal befitting a derranged assassin.

Score! The clock was beaten again--1.65 seconds.

Blakey and Cornwell hugged and exchanged hard-slapping high-fives.

Now it could be written.

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For the first time, thanks to Chief Counsel Blakey's success at Beat the Clock, it becomes possible to accurately reconstruct Oswald's planning and execution of the crime of the century.

Oswald sits calmly in the sniper's nest, psyching himself up for the kill. He will carefully aim the first shot, but what then? . . . He ponders.

"Eschew traditional marksmanship," he mutters sullenly.

He has decided: as soon as he squeezes the trigger for the first shot, he will immediately crank up the second shot and fire again, without using any sights at all. The unpredictability, the sheer madness of the plan is inherently appealing to Oswald's demented psyche. He smirks as the motorcade approaches.

But the plan will not be easy to execute. It requires tremendous discipline and forethought. He must program his mind and body or the plan will fail (a vision of a ticking stopwatch passes fleetingly through his scrambled brain). He conditions himself: squeeze, reload, squeeze. No time to pause, to see if the first shot hit; no time to think "Darn! I missed," or "What a shot!" No time after the first shot to decide to eschew traditional marksmanship. It must all be decided beforehand.

If there is but one fifth of a second lost in hesitation, in watching or thinking or reacting, then the clock cannot be beaten.

Oswald's plan works perfectly: He fires, reloads, fires. Now he pauses for what is a marksman's eternity. He assesses the damage. As the bodies react and tumble under the multi-faceted onslaught of the magic bullet, he can see that the second shot was on target.

But this presents a dilemma. Should he use a sight to set up the third shot? or should he go with what he knows is successful?--point aiming without using any sights.

Oswald decides to stick with what works. "Eschew traditional marksmanship," his crazed psyche whispers. He reloads and fires, point aiming. 6.7 seconds after his second shot, his third shot explodes the target.

But he is not finished. It's time to play another round of Beat the Clock. Oswald must squeeze out of the sniper's nest, carefully hide the rifle among book boxes, race down four flights to the second floor, stuff coins into the soda machine and retrieve a bottle--all in 1 min. 15 sec. to 1 min. 30 sec. before he confronts Roy Truley and Officer Marion L. Baker.

It's a tough game, Beat the Clock.