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Books

The Case of the Grassy Knoll

By J. B. Mullaney

The "lively small industry," as the New York Times characterized debate on the accuracy and adequacy of the Warren Commission Report on the assassination of John F. Kennedy, is growing livelier and larger as the years pass.

Debate as yet it scarcely has become. Defense of the report has been scantily represented. The commission itself has not dignified attacks by response. But critics and their magazine - book publishers have been excessively industrious.

One-sided debate is not illuminating, which in this case is a national misfortune. The platform has been left open for critics to be persuasive even at their worst, and the worst is shrill and shoddy.

TWO NEW additions to the library of criticism are neither shrill nor shoddy, probably the most sober and thoughtful to appear thus far.

They are *Accessories After the Fact*, by Sylvia Meagher (Bobbs Merrill; \$8.50) and *Six Seconds in Dallas*, by Joseph Thompson (Geis; \$8.95).

Mrs. Meagher is the compiler of the Subject Index of the 26-volume, 20,000-page, 10-million word report of the hearings and exhibits of the Warren Commission. She is credited with being more thoroughly informed on the contents of the report than any other single person. Her analysis and comments warrant the claim.

Thompson, a young philosophy professor, attempts a scientific reconstruction of the events of Nov. 22, 1963, largely based on an intensive

study of the Zapruder film of the assassination and the questions it raised to him.

Both authors dispute the single-bullet, single-assassin theory accepted by the Warren Commission. Both are convinced that bullets came not only from the Book Depository ambush of Lee Oswald (or someone else) but from the grassy knoll ahead and to the right of the presidential caravan. Thompson adds a third rifleman in another building.

ARE THEY convincing?

Not to the point where one is led to totally disregard the

commission's findings and accept theirs. Neither author makes a claim of disproof that Oswald was involved in the assassination. They believe the president was the victim of an unidentified conspiracy in which Oswald may or may not have been involved.

They are in instances guilty of the sin with which Mrs. Meagher charges the commission: "The Commission has used a premise to justify a conclusion and then used the conclusion to justify a premise."

Mrs. Meagher disposes of some evidence and some opinions of the commission which do not fit her theory as an "affront to logic." On the other hand, when her

pattern is not filled out by evidence, she sees it as a "reasonable assumption" that such-and-such took place. Apparently she did no independent field investigation into the circumstances of the day.

Thompson did considerable personal investigation. But how much of his "new evidence" is new or old, valuable or valueless, fact or theory can be determined only when there is response from the commission.

THE OBJECTIVITY of both books is clouded by the conviction of the authors that the commission consciously directed its inquiry at Oswald and Oswald alone. Mrs. Meagher charges the commission with dishonesty and calculated deception. Thompson, almost as blunt, argues that vital evidence was ignored, disregarded or misrepresented by the commission.

Mrs. Meagher's charge is a damning indictment of the distinguished men who served on the commission. Since it is unsupported save by her own suspicion, it might better have been left unwritten. She raises enough questions about the conduct of the inquiry to demolish its

findings as hurried, sloppy and incomplete.

Prof. Thompson's reconstruction, while it does not "demolish" the report as one of his editors proclaims, nevertheless lends support to those who protest the seal which has been placed around the autopsy reports and pictures.

WITHOUT accepting the plot theory developed in the research and imagination of the authors, one is led to agree with conclusions of Max Lerner:

"The Warren Commission, whatever its detailed mistakes, made one massive blunder — that of closing its inquiry. It should have rendered an interim "Not Proven" report, and kept the inquiry open-ended until the pieces fitted into a better pattern than they did then or do now."