

Sylvia Meagher by Sylvia Meagher

STAR

Fort Worth, Texas

Nov 19 1967

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**Book Best
From Critics**

"Intensive study of the evidence against the alleged lone assassin has convinced me, as intuition alone could not, that the truth about Dallas remains unknown and that Lee Harvey Oswald may well have been innocent."

Thus author Sylvia Meagher states her premise in the foreword to the most comprehensive and disturbing study thus far of the Kennedy assassination, "Accessories After the Fact: The Warren Commission, the Authorities and the Report" (Bobbs-Merrill, \$8.50), scheduled for publication Nov. 30 but already on sale in Fort Worth.

The Dec. 2 issue of Saturday Evening Post has just made national headlines with an article neatly summed up in its own headline: "The Cross Fire That Killed President Kennedy: A New Study Based on New Evidence and New Concepts Argues That at Least Three Assassins Were Firing That Tragic Day in Dealey Plaza." The article is from a forthcoming book, "Six Seconds in Dallas," by Josiah Thompson, to be published by Bernard Geis Associates.

In another book, "Lee: A Portrait of Lee Harvey Oswald by His Brother, Robert Oswald" (Coward - McCann, \$5.95), scheduled for publication Wednesday (Nov. 22), the brother of the accused assassin sums up his reflections on the assassination (as written by Myrick and Barbara Land):

"Despite the lingering doubt caused by the fact that Lee did not say directly to me that he fired those shots, I have been forced to conclude that Lee did wound Governor Connally and kill President Kennedy, and that he acted alone, although others may have encouraged or influenced him."

Midlothian editor Penn Jones Jr. has published the second volume of "Forgive My Grief" (Midlothian Mirror, \$3), chronicling more deaths of persons associated with events of the assassination (the count is now 24), and discussing "The Miami Tape," evidence that two weeks before the assassination, a man described to police in Miami how the act would be committed.

New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison in the last few months has been tried before the bar of commercial television and the national press and his case of a conspiracy found wanting. But he has yet to lose a round where it counts — in the courtroom.

In Texas, Governor Connally, who once attacked the critics of the Warren Commission as "scavengers," has announced that he, too, is writing an article and will publish a book soon on the assassination.

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OBVIOUSLY THE ISSUES of what occurred that day

in Dallas are more confused today than they were four years ago.

For anyone attempting to fathom what all the discussion is about, Sylvia Meagher's "Accessories After the Fact" is a must.

The book is the most sober study of the Warren Commission since Edward Jay Epstein's "Inquest" — a scholarly master's thesis limited in scope to the actual functioning of the commission itself. Mrs. Meagher's volume is far more detailed — no surprise to those aware of her previous contributions.

Not long after publication of the 26 volumes of commission testimony and evidence, the "critics" began noticing a lack of correlation between the evidence in the 26 volumes and the conclusions reached in the earlier-published "Warren Report." But the 26 volumes are a ponderous mass of material, published without any semblance of an index.

Mrs. Meagher, an administrator and a writer of analytical reports in the field of international public health, assembled an index to facilitate her own study of the 26 volumes. Her "Subject Index to the Report and Hearings and Exhibits," considered by some the most awesome accomplishment of the investigation, was published for the benefit and free use of other critics.

Her 477-page "Accessories After the Fact" also is a staggering accomplishment. When CBS's four-hour television study of the assassination and subsequent wire service studies were viewed as superficial by commission critics, the reaction was met with some surprise. How could studies so complex be superficial? Mrs. Meagher's volume provides the answer.

Yet despite the wealth of detail the book is not ponderous. Moving rapidly through pertinent, questionable issues, she cites hundreds of cases where the commission manipulated, ignored, or failed to pursue evidence (and each item is carefully indexed).

There is, for instance, evidence in the 26 volumes that seriously questions the one-volume report's placement of Oswald on the sixth floor of the Book Depository 35 minutes before the assassination.

"Oswald's presence on the sixth floor has not been established, and evidence indicates that he was actually on the first floor during the crucial period of time," Mrs. Meagher writes. She explains that two witnesses testified that they saw Oswald on the first floor; one witness testified he saw Oswald on the sixth floor. The two were ignored in the one-volume report, and Oswald's movements "clocked" by the one witness. Also, Bonnie Ray Williams, eating his famous chicken lunch on the sixth floor, did not see Oswald nor the one witness.

Mrs. Meagher discusses many now-familiar areas with a new thoroughness — the numerous and unpursued contradictions in the testimony of Marina Oswald, the conflicting testimony over the movements of Jack Ruby, the autopsy argument, etc.

She questions the facility with which Oswald — and later Marina — obtained passports and official travel clearance, even after Oswald was, at least to outward appearances, a one-time defector.

Crediting Penn Jones Jr. and his research, Mrs. Meagher studies 18 of the deaths of persons connected with the commission study. Both Mrs. Meagher and Jones quote the findings of an actuary who computed odds on the deaths (when the count stood at 15) as being 100,000

trillion to one.

For those who place faith in the august standing of commission members, Mrs. Meagher cites attendance records: one member (Senator Russell) heard only six of the 94 witnesses called before the commission. (The other members: 70, 60, 50, 35 and 20).

For those who defend the report by citing Robert Kennedy's acceptance, Mrs. Meagher suggests that "instead of evaluating the evidence in terms of Robert Kennedy's acquiescence, his acquiescence should be evaluated in the light of the evidence."

To those who assert that the critics have not produced a new assassin or any significant new evidence, Mrs. Meagher points out that it is not "the critic's responsibility to name the person or persons who committed the assassination . . . It is, on the other hand, clearly the responsibility of the authors and advocates of the report to explain and justify its explicit documented defects. If they cannot or will not, then let the government which has given us



LEE'S BROTHER — Robert Oswald, brother of Lee Harvey Oswald, is author of a new book on the life of Lee Harvey Oswald, published by Coward-McCann.

such a profoundly defective document — at a cost to the people of well over a million dollars — scrap the report and commission one that will sustain its assertions and conclusions and will survive the test of close scrutiny."

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ROBERT OSWALD'S STUDY of his brother's life and his own experiences in the wake of the double assassination conveys an aura of honesty that is appealing. However, the book has flaws that go heavily against the grain.

Someone once remarked that a mother, stripped of all her redeeming qualities, would make a perfect villain. In Robert's book, Marguerite Oswald, not Lee, is the villain. His treatment of Lee is sympathetic, and he succeeds in presenting a human, if troubled, side of Lee's personality. Marguerite Oswald is never discussed in sympathetic terms.

Robert credits his mother with instilling in Lee a feeling that the world should recognize him as "somebody special and important"—a view he believes she had of

herself.

But where such maternally - inspired self - confidence has led some men to lifetimes of accomplishment, Lee's led him to kill the president, Robert believes, as "his final protest to a world that had ignored him, sometimes mocked him, always failed to acknowledge his superiority."

The book is a chronicle of continuous friction between Robert and his mother. At the last family reunion, with the three sons, Robert, Lee Harvey and John Edward Pic, and their wives assembled at Robert's house in Fort Worth on Nov. 22, 1962, the mother was not invited. Robert did not see Lee again until a year and a day later.

Robert's recollections of the events from Nov. 22, 1963, are interesting and there is enough new material to keep readers reading.

His futile efforts to find a minister to conduct Lee Harvey's funeral services are a sad indictment ("Your brother was a sinner," one minister said).

In the shock of that still - fantastic weekend, many people acted irrationally, or uncharacteristically, but Robert's rejection by so many ministers in the Dallas-Fort Worth area is inconceivable. (And the minister who said he would come did not; services were conducted by the Rev. Louis Saunders of the Fort Worth Council of Churches, who had driven out to see if he could be of any help to the family).

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ALTHOUGH ROBERT accepts the findings of the Warren Commission, it is with some "strong reservations."

As an ex-Marine and an avid hunter, Robert focuses most of his questions on the shooting itself.

Robert believes that if Lee Harvey fired the shots, he must have practiced with his new rifle, especially since he was unaccustomed to a telescopic sight, and not much of a marksman. The right - hand bolt action does not concern Robert (he insists that Lee Harvey was right-handed; Marguerite Oswald is equally certain he was left - handed), but he does believe that the commission should have used riflemen of average — or even below - average — skill, rather than experts, in attempting to duplicate the firing.

Robert rejects the "single - bullet theory," as does another avid hunter, Governor Connally, who also says he accepts the basic findings of the commission, while questioning its basic premise.

Connally believes that he was struck by the second bullet — as did the commission early in the investigation. But frame - by - frame analysis of the Zapruder film showed that the time margin between Kennedy's first reaction and Connally's was too brief for the operation of a bolt - action rifle.

"To say that they were hit by separate bullets," a commission lawyer explained, "is synonymous with saying that there were two assassins."

Thus the "single bullet theory" was evolved — and the testimony of Governor Connally and his wife on the sequence of shots discounted.

If Governor Connally can verify his own testimony in his forthcoming article or book, he may yet become the commission's most effective critic.